

Eighteenth-Century Losers: Anxious Performances of Masculinity in Long Eighteenth-Century England

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
December 12, 2011

Keywords: performance studies, masculinity, drama, eighteenth-century

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Abstract

My dissertation investigates how a group of male comedic figures (cuckolds, impotent men, and old bachelors) relate to an ongoing debate in the eighteenth century about the marriage problem. Largely ignored by scholars as too formulaic or farcical for serious critical investigation, I argue that the treatment of these men on the stage and the culture surrounding their real life counterparts (as revealed by a variety of nondramatic cultural texts: non-medical and medical advice literature, accounts of divorce trials, novels, poems, etc.) problematize the assumption that men's experiences of marriage were eased by the advantages they accrued from their place in the patriarchal, religious, social, legal, and economic hierarchies. I use theories from performance studies as well as popular culture studies to analyze the performances of these roles on the stage and in the extratheatrical culture. What this analysis reveals is that these men, both on the stage and real life, experience significant pressures from a culture attempting to negotiate appropriate behavior for men and ways to make marriage work, pressures that cannot necessarily be revealed by more traditional approaches to the marriage problem that generally privilege the female experience of marriage as the subject of investigation. The frustrations of men within the construction of marriage are inextricably bound up with conflicting constructions of male sexuality and expectations for men within marriage. In the end, my dissertation suggests a reevaluation of what has thus far been largely ignored or dismissed in eighteenth century drama as a means for a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological aims and accomplishments of the stage.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank several important groups of people for helping me in completing this dissertation. I would like to thank my committee, and in particular my advisor, Dr. Paula Bakscheider, for their continued support, encouragement, and feedback throughout this process. I would also not have been able to complete this dissertation without the support of the Auburn University English Department. In addition, I would like to thank my family for the encouragement they have given me from all across the country. I would also like to thank Antonia Taylor, Corey Taylor, Samantha Ondyak, Jeremy Trucker, Eva Shoop-Shafor, and Steve Shafor for offering support and encouragement as part of my graduate school family.

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Introduction

On March 21st 1710, Richard Steele wrote in *The Tatler*:

It has often been a solid Grief to me, when I have reflected on this glorious Nation, which is the Scene of publick Happiness and Liberty, that there are still Crowds of private Tyrants, against whom there neither is any Law now in Being, nor can there be invented any by the Wit of Man. These cruel Men are ill-natured Husbands. The Commerce in the Conjugal State is so delicate, that it is impossible to prescribe Rules for the Conduct of it, so as to fit Ten Thousand nameless Pleasures and Disquietudes which arise to People in that Condition. ¹

Steele's sense of disappointment with the state of marriage in what he otherwise construes as a country in which happiness and liberty flourished is not unusual. As marriage was the central organizing principle of society (alongside, of course, the economic and social forces of class hierarchy), we might wonder exactly where that happiness and liberty flourished. For anyone familiar with the treatment of the "marriage problem" in England during the long eighteenth-century, this is an understated and loaded commentary on Steele's part. Feminist treatments of marriage during this time have developed the widely varying iterations of potential private tyranny the social, religious, and economic realities of marriage made possible. In a society where there was little legal oversight over the power men wielded as heads of households (a fact that Steele mourns above), men could use their power to make the lives of their wives, children, and servants miserable. The focus of this dissertation is marriage, and thus a further development

¹ Richard Steele, "Ill-Natured Husbands," *The Tatler*, no. 149 (21 March, 1710), repr. in *Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1982), 148.

of the tyranny of husbands (as opposed to fathers and masters) is perhaps sufficient. Husbands could confine their wives (to a house or even a room in that house), commit marital rape, part women from their children, abuse their wives physically and emotionally (legally, up to the point of mortal danger), and deny their wives the basic amenities of life (food, clothing, etc.). In light of this catalog of potential misery, Steele's choice of the term "ill-natured" is one that hides a multitude of sins. Certainly the case that Steele goes on to develop is mild in comparison:

My Friend was neither in Fortune, Birth, or Education, below the Gentleman whom she married. Her person, her Age, and her Character, are also such as he can make no Exception to. But so it is, that from the Moment the Marriage-Ceremony was over, the Obsequiousness of a Lover was turned into the Haughtiness of a Master. All the kind Endeavors which she uses to please him, are at best but so many Instances of her Duty. This Insolence takes away that secret Satisfaction, which does not only excite to Virtue, but also rewards it. It abates the Fire of a free and generous Love, and imbitters all the Pleasures of a Social Life. (149)

Compared to the horrors that I have suggested could be a realization of Steele's private tyranny, this young lady's situation seems mild. Steele, however, seems to be stressing here that even with the best foundations—spouses who are equals in all important matters (fortune, breeding, education) and a desirable wife (in terms of person, age, and character—a powerful combination at this time, when often fortune was the only measure of desirability) whose inclinations seem to run to being a pleasing and considerate wife—marriage was difficult to carry off successfully.

Steele ultimately goes on to suggest that the shift from obsequious lover to master is founded on the "false notion of the Weakness of ...Female Understanding" (149). The nature of female understanding is a theme that is pervasive in eighteenth-century debates about women

one, for example, that Mary Wollstonecraft revisits at the end of the century in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and I certainly do not want to diminish its importance to the troubled landscape of marriage in the eighteenth century. Steele, however, says something intriguing about the relationship of men to marriage that he never really develops; he seems to understand it as an assumption that goes without saying: “There is nothing so common as for Men to enter into Marriage, without so much as expecting to be happy in it” (149). Given what we know about women’s place in society and marriage, there would be nothing surprising about Steele making this statement about them instead of men. But why, we might (and I will) ask, given the legal, religious, and social advantages men had as they entered into marriage, would they not have the least expectation of being made happy by it?

The only development Steele provides to his tantalizing statement above is that “[Men] seem to propose to themselves a few Holidays in the Beginning of [Marriage]; after which, they are to return at best to the usual Course of their Life; and for ought they know, to constant Misery and Uneasiness” (149). Steele’s additional comments only make the status of the men about whom he writes all the more curious. What causes Steele to suggest that the “usual course” of these men’s lives were more likely than not characterized by “misery and uneasiness”? As readers in the twenty-first century, we are frustratingly missing the context in which these statements are being made, and frankly it seems to challenge the mostly now unspoken belief that men were automatically granted a blessing by the genetic lottery that provided them a y-chromosome. No matter what tangible benefits we can retrospectively associate with being born male in the eighteenth century, there seems to be a prevalent dissatisfaction (which is, perhaps an understatement given Steele’s “misery and uneasiness”) among the sex at that time and within marriage in particular.

Steele's discussion of men suggests that there are anxieties and pressures at work in their culture—especially in the conjugal arena—that he considers widespread enough to leave implicit. I would like to make them explicit. In this dissertation I suggest that there are conflicting pressures that shape male sexual identity and the expectations surrounding men's relationship to marriage. These pressures ultimately work together to create the foundation of Steele's suggestion that men face marriage with dread and a certainty that, however necessary it is for the continuation of society on the macrocosmic and individual family lines on the microcosmic levels, marriage was to be a burden rather than a boon. I intend to examine the anxieties associated with masculinity in eighteenth-century England through roles that have been largely dismissed as too formulaic for attention or as remaining static over time: the cuckold, the impotent man, and the old bachelor. I will argue that they too are integral to creating a definition of masculinity in the eighteenth century. Each role has a rich conversation surrounding it that includes texts from sources throughout the culture and these sources will reveal the manner in which norms of behavior are constructed, maintained, and ultimately changed over time.

The most surprising aspect of this dissertation's title is probably the combination of the terms "loser" and "masculine." Surely, some will think, that there are many losers in eighteenth-century British culture who come to mind before men. Women, who lacked many of the basic legal and social rights that we have come to assume are part and parcel of civilized culture, for example. Women were certainly a category we might safely describe as losers; they, under most circumstances, lacked property rights, could only sue for divorce under the most harrowing of circumstances, were subject to rape laws that cast them not as a victim but damaged property, and had few protections against marital rape and physical and mental abuse. In addition, we can easily identify the poor as a category of losers that transcends gender. The elderly were also a

category of people who, in many cases, suffered anxieties and fates that would suggest a categorization of losers as well.

It may seem odd to focus on men as I do—in particular with privileged white male characters (although, of course, eighteenth century drama relied on these types of characters for the majority of male roles). The minority roles for men—portrayals of the male “other:” white “foreigners” (particularly the French and Irish), racial minorities, and members of the lower classes (particularly servants)—have gained some critical attention throughout the last couple of decades. The men I focus on seem positioned to suffer least from the pressures of the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of eighteenth-century British culture, and thus they are the most likely to be ignored by scholars. Certainly their problems are ones that those suffering poverty or any of the other more extreme forms of oppression might envy (there are, for example, myriad examples of women expressing envy for the freedom and indulgence these very men experience). The men I have chosen to discuss here are losers in a social sense; they are the targets of ridicule and derision and the source of amusement for their peers, betters, and subordinates. Whereas the losers of my dissertation did not suffer the grim fates of some of the groups above, it is certainly noteworthy that their states produced ridicule that transcended class hierarchies and gender boundaries.

I do not, in choosing these men as a subject of inquiry, mean to suggest that the other problems were not significant. But I do intend to argue that these men felt significant pressures from a culture attempting to negotiate appropriate behavior for men and ways to make marriage work. The frustrations of men within the construction of marriage are inextricably bound up with conflicting constructions of male sexuality and expectations for men within marriage. Of course, writing about men in marriage will also inevitably reveal aspects of the perception of the role and

experiences of women within marriage. A surprising result of my analysis is that the conflicts associated with the construction of masculinity are more often than not revealed through female suffering (exacerbating, as it were, their already fraught experience of marriage). One exception to this may be found in the first chapter of this dissertation, which focuses on the figure of the cuckold. Even in this case, however, a deeper understanding of the assumptions underlying the construction of cuckoldry reveals that while the most explicit suffering created by the culture of cuckoldry is associated with men, the implicit suffering of women—unhappiness in marriage, sexual double standards that allow for male adultery, and marital neglect—is associated with the wife’s decision to be unfaithful. The catchphrase of cuckoldry is, after all, that cuckolds make themselves.

The kernel of frustration that must have existed around these losers’ roles comes from the widespread cultural belief that the men had control over their own fates. Each role that I have chosen has at least the illusion of control (and when that control fails—blame) associated with it. Cuckolds were seen as simply being unable to satisfy and control their wives. The impotent, as we will see, were believed to have frittered away their sexual potency with promiscuity and debauchery. Older men certainly could not control the progression of age, but they could control the decisions they made as they aged—to marry or not—and in marrying, the appropriate age of their spouse. Whereas women, the poor, and the elderly had little perceived control over their status in their society, these men (whether realistically or not) were perceived as bringing their misfortune upon themselves.

To those knowledgeable about conventions of long eighteenth-century drama in England, the types of men I have chosen should be familiar from the comedic landscape. They are, more often than not, the target of derision to both their peers on the stage and the audience in the

theater. They are nearly universally to be greeted with laughter as they follow a predictable path of failure in marriage. For some readers the humor associated with these characters obscures their potential for serious commentary. Even scholars who do devote their attention to studies of masculinity and men's roles in the theater all too often reduce the losers I intend to study to static stock characters whose significance remains stable over time. I intend to use the analysis in the chapters that follow to complicate our understanding of the characters and their functions within discussions of marriage both within the theatre and the culture at large.

Theoretical Foundations and Methodology

The approach I intend to apply in this dissertation is a blending of theoretical backgrounds, one now familiar in theatre studies. I intend to blend theory and methodology from three different theoretical fields: masculinity studies, performance studies, and popular culture studies. As my discussion below will reveal, these fields overlap in ways that are surprisingly conducive to the argument I make below.

Masculinity Studies

Over the last several decades, scholars have suggested and then expanded upon the idea of gender as performative. The most obvious performance is formed by the external accoutrement that a culture associates with a given gender. This kind of performance for men of the long eighteenth century could certainly be characterized as more demanding than the ones we are familiar with today; for much of the century men of the upper class, at least, were held to expectations of fashion that would be unimaginable now. A familiar figure associated with this type of gender performance is the ubiquitous fop, who simultaneously used the performance to

create a social identity and to challenge gender and sexuality norms (whether consciously or not).

Many of the more theoretical discussions of the performance of gender were originally based in feminist theory and were not immediately applicable to the performance of masculinity. Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble* suggests the deeper structures of gender performance that exist in a given culture. Butler argues:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts process; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time...instituted through a stylized repetition of acts...[Gender] must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of the abiding gendered self.²

At issue in Butler's work on gender is the matter of agency—how much the gendered subjects are aware of and in control of their own performances. My approach assumes a level of agency on the part of the men that perhaps exceeds what is allowed by Butler. In my analysis of the performances, however, I show that the performative acts I have chosen have multiple well-established options for the men as well as revealing the active deliberation involved in choosing the manner of performance.

Until the rise of masculinity studies, very little effort was made to take advantage of applying the possibilities suggested by Butler's work to men and the performance of masculinity. Laura J. Rosenthal suggests that men and their performance of masculinity is an available subject for critical attention. She identifies masculinity as a concept that needs to be approached more critically:

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Psychology Press, London, 1990), 179.

While historians have long acknowledged the significant social changes during the period and the changes in constructions of the feminine, too often masculinity has been understood as something that transcends history. But while men have long enjoyed certain privileges over women of their own class, the terms of gender division and even the idea of gender itself have been anything but stable.³

In an effort to break from this uncritical assumption, Rosenthal takes the instability of the construction of gender as a foundational starting point for her investigation. The rejection of the acceptance of masculinity as unconstructed or ahistorical and thus the efforts to begin to unravel the manners in which it was constructed is an essential conversation that I will be joining.

In *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, Mark Breitenberg creates the phrase “anxious masculinity” about which he claims, “The phrase ‘anxious masculinity’ is redundant. Masculine subjectivity constructed and sustained by a patriarchal culture—infused with patriarchal assumptions about power, privilege, sexual desire, the body—inevitably engenders varying degrees of anxiety in its male members.”⁴ Although Breitenberg does not discuss the performative potential of anxious masculinity, merely to acknowledge the possibility of masculine anxiety is to acknowledge the possibility that men and masculinity are not the same totemic force as patriarchy. Masculine anxiety is only possible if men are subject to the assumptions and constraints of patriarchal culture. Each of the roles I have chosen is one that exists within the realm of anxious masculinity; these roles are instances in which men fail to meet the demands created by the “patriarchal assumptions about power, privilege, sexual desire, [and] the body.”

³ Laura J. Rosenthal. “Masculinity in Restoration Drama” in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan Owen (London: Blackwell, 2001), 92.

⁴ Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 1.

Michael Mungen's use of the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is an important contribution to the field as well. He suggests:

Hegemonic masculinity is that form or model of masculinity which a culture privileges over others, which implicitly defines what is 'normal' for males in that culture, and which is able to impose that definition of normality upon other kinds of masculinity. Its characteristic tactic is the kind of definition-through-opposition, and the marking off and marginalizing of the 'other'...[Hegemonic masculinity] operates both on an external level, in terms of social roles and relations, and on an internal one, in terms of subjectivity, feelings and definitions of self. Hegemonic masculinity is by nature paradoxical, since it seems to stand still but in fact is always on the move. Its normalizing function means that it repeatedly lays claim to universals and appears to refer to static and enduring values; in reality, however, it is continually in the process of changing.⁵

The losers in this dissertation each fail in their respective ways to maintain a place in the realm of hegemonic masculinity; they become the Other by which hegemonic masculinity is oppositionally defined. The losers' persistent association with nearly universal derision is a comedic signal of the Othering Mungen refers to here. Mungen focuses almost all of his attention on performances of masculinity in the theatre, but his concept of hegemonic masculinity is almost certainly as important to discussions of real-life performances of masculinity.

Thomas A. King makes an important move from the stage to real life and in between. King focuses on performances of the queer, but his discussion is useful for farther reaching studies of masculinity in general:

⁵ Michael Mungen, *Staging Masculinities: History, Gender, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 13.

In this study *queer* names not an essence but a mode of agency restored or revised in everyday practices by diverse social actors. Queerness consists not “in” subjects but in agents’ restorations or residual or marginal knowledge, corporeal techniques, public and private institutions and spaces, and other discursive and bodily practices.⁶

Many of the same statements that King makes for the concept of “queer” work in the same way in my own study of masculinity. In particular, King identifies Richard Schechner’s concept of “restored behavior” as a central term for his work:

The immediacy of a performance is its restoration or revision of previous performances in the continuous flow of performance. The “instability of language” in which subjectivity emerges as (self-) difference may be reconsidered as agents’ ongoing negotiation and revision of accumulated meaning through their restoring and recoding of behavior in the progression of everyday performance.⁷

Restored behavior will also be central to my own discussion (as will become clear in the performance studies section below). My investigation of the connection between theatrical performance and real-life performances must assume that the two kinds of performances create a shared pool of restored behaviors, an assumption that King points to in his discussion of accumulated meaning above. Combining King’s treatment of performance with Mangel’s conception of “hegemonic masculinity” yields an important opportunity to comment on the particular performances I have chosen. Each of the performances—that of the cuckold, the impotent man, or the old bachelor—represents a failure to determine and fulfill (or perform) the demands of hegemonic masculinity. Each loser finds himself in the “continuous flow of performance” that constitutes the culture’s understanding of the roles they play and the failures

⁶ Thomas King, *The Gendering of Men 1600-1750: Queer Articulations* (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 11.

⁷ King, *The Gendering of Men*, 22.

they have become. Each loser must rely on restored behavior to cobble together a performance of their particular role; he must position himself as a performer who negotiates within the “pool of accumulated meaning”—whether in compliance to or resistance of that meaning. My discussion below assumes the possibility that those bits of restored behavior come from a pool created both by the theatrical performances of the role and the real-life performances.

Performance Studies

Performance Studies is a multidisciplinary theoretical approach that is an amalgam of theatre history, drama studies, and anthropology (among other influences). Performance studies influences my work in this dissertation in two major ways: informing my treatment of dramatic performances and events within the theater and informing my treatment of real-life performances (with the ultimate goal of bringing these two different types of performances together to create one multivalent conversation about the roles I have chosen).

Rather than one cohesive theoretical approach, Performance Studies may most accurately be described as being a loosely organized set of methodologies that work to inform our understanding of many types of cultural performances. That which constitutes performance from a performance studies perspective is sometimes difficult to define; the field tends to be more inclusive than exclusive. Obviously for those who approach the field from theatre studies or theatre history, the performance in question is that which occurs upon the stage. Performance studies from that perspective expands the methods of inquiry regarding theater beyond the theatrical text to encompass the realities that shape theatrical performances. The other major contributor to performance studies is the field of anthropology, which expands the concept of

performance to include aspects of everyday life and ritual. In many ways, the conception of the performativity of gender can be associated with this aspect of performance studies.

Foundational methodologies for my own work have been produced by Robert D. Hume (*The Rakish Stage*), Peter Holland (*The Ornament of Action*), Marvin Carlson (“Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance”), and Bruce A. McConachie (“Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History”).⁸ Peter Holland suggests the expansion of the field of inquiry for theater studies and history to include the many different aspects of theatrical production that shaped the performance that ultimately appeared before the audience; these aspects include: theater architecture, costuming, casting, advertisement, etc. Both Marvin Carlson and Bruce McConachie suggest borrowing concepts from other fields to help analyze the potential ideological impact of performance. Carlson suggests “Little is said about how the audience learns to respond [to theatrical performance] or what demands and contributions it brings to the event.”⁹ He suggests several tools from other theorists that will help in further developing an understanding of this response. He suggests that Wolfgang Iser’s concept of “concretization,” which relies on the assumption that “a reader serves as coproducer of the meaning of a text by filling gaps (*Leestellen*) left in the text by the author.”¹⁰ Closely related to this concept of gaps is Umberto Eco’s distinction between closed and open texts; the more gaps that are left in the text for the audience to fill, the more open the text. I will suggest later in this dissertation that the endings of many plays, which demand that an audience accept a hasty

⁸ Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage : Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983); Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979); Marvin Carlson, “Theatre Audiences and the Reading Performance” in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 82-98, and Bruce A. McConachie, “Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History,” in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 37-58.

⁹ Carlson, “Theatre Audiences,” 82.

¹⁰ Carlson, “Theatre Audiences,” 82.

reformation of character, resolution of a central marital conflict, or creation of a marriage also require audiences to concretize the likelihood of these resolutions to persist into the future. Carlson also asserts the importance of Hans Robert Jauss' concept of "horizon of expectations;" based on the "familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre," the "implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings," and the "opposition between fiction and reality."¹¹ In a genre-driven investigation such as my own, the concept of horizon of expectations is important—each time said horizon is challenged or altered is a noteworthy event that provides an opportunity for analysis.

With a similar goal to Carlson's, Bruce McConachie offers Burke's conception of identification as important to understanding the audience's relationship to theatrical performance. Burke separates identification into three major categories: "common ground, identification by antithesis, and the 'assumed we.'"¹² The last is ultimately re-termed "the hegemonic we."¹³ McConachie suggests that one of the most powerful examples of the last form of identification can be found "in early Restoration comedy where the 'fun' depended upon members of the mostly male aristocratic audience taking their sexual prowess and social superiority for granted."¹⁴ In my discussion below, I complicate this assumption in revealing that even for the relatively homogeneous audience McConachie assumes there were plenty of examples of performances of anxious masculinity by characters with whom the audience would potentially identify. This is a point that McConachie acknowledges when he suggests that the matter of identification is rarely straightforward: "Rather than expecting a single orientation from a 'reading' of performance, the historian should anticipate tensions and even contradictions,

¹¹ Carlson, "Theatre Audiences," 83.

¹² McConachie, "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 47.

¹³ McConachie, "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 47.

¹⁴ McConachie, "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 47.

especially if the shows appealed to various groups and classes”—which was ever more the case as the century progressed.”¹⁵

Beyond the foundational, there are several other concepts from Performance Studies that are central to my discussion. One example is Marjorie Garber’s “category crisis,” upon which Cynthia Lowenthal bases her investigation of identity in *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*. Category crisis is a moment of “failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits border crossing from one (apparently distinct) category to another.”¹⁶ Lowenthal goes on to claim, “The Restoration theater responded to and provoked an extraordinary number of category crises—through the constant manipulation of the signs of identity, playwrights and their characters disrupted, displaced, and transgressed a host of comfortable and commonplace assumptions about the stability of identity.”¹⁷ I will assert that this tendency toward category crises does not stop with the end of the Restoration period, but continues on past the turn of the century. Additionally, I believe that category crises were not simply a matter of the stage, but in fact, existed in “real” life negotiations of identity as well. The roles I have chosen to discuss in this play form category crisis based on masculine failure—they are simultaneously representatatives of the patriarchy and a form of masculine Other with whom the audience does not necessarily want to identify.

Richard Schechner’s concept of restored behavior, mentioned above in the “Masculinity Studies” section, is also important to my discussion about the relationship between stage performances and every day performances of the losers’ roles. Michael Mangan broaches the question of the relationship between these kinds of performances:

¹⁵ McConachie, “Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony,” 48.

¹⁶ Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003), 4.

¹⁷ Lowenthal, *Performing Identities*, 4.

If gender (and everything else) is already a performance, where does this leave a history of staged masculinities...Social performativity and theatrical performance may be congruent, they may be related, and they may resemble each other—but they are not identical. Evidence from past plays and performances has a complex and problematic status. It exists not as raw socio-historical documentation or data, but as the trace of a performed moment which was itself part of the complex dialectic between the real and the imaginary, articulated within a historically specific mode of cultural production that relies on particular kinds of conventions for negotiating relations between the fictional and the real world. Moreover it is usually—as the anthropologists’ “performances” are not—aware of itself as a performance.¹⁸

I will suggest that the losers of my dissertation are, in fact, aware of the roles that they play. The very fact that they are subject to abuse and ridicule for these roles would suggest that they have little hope of escaping this awareness. The repetitive nature of the theatrical performances of these roles could be characterized as units of restored behavior reorganized in order to suggest different outcomes—a kind of testing of behaviors and outcomes. In this sense, the real-life performances of the roles are not reflected on the stage, but in fact, tested hypothetically on the stage.

Joseph Roach’s work on surrogation, effigy, and genealogies of performance in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* is also important:

Culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process that can best be described by the word surrogation. In the life of the community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations

¹⁸ Michael Mungen, *Staging Masculinities: History, Gender, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 22.

that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates. Because collective memory works selectively, imaginatively, and often perversely, surrogation rarely, if ever, succeeds. The process requires many trials and at least as many errors. The fit cannot be exact. The intended substitute either cannot fulfill expectations, creating a deficit, or actually exceeds them, creating a surplus. Then too, the surrogate-elect may prove to be a divisive choice, one around whom factions polarize, or the prospective nominee may tap deep motives of prejudice and fear, so that even before the fact the unspoken possibility of his or her candidacy incites phobic anxiety. Finally the very uncanniness of the process of surrogation, which tends to disturb the complacency of all thoughtful incumbents, may provoke many unbidden emotions, ranging from mildly incontinent sentimentalism to raging paranoia. As ambivalence deepens before the specter of inexorable antiquation, even the necessary preparations of the likely successors may alienate the affections of the officeholders—all the more powerfully when social or cultural differences exacerbate generational ones. At these times, improvised narratives of authenticity and priority may congeal into full-blown myths of legitimacy and origin.¹⁹

Roach's discussion of surrogation and effigy suggest some of the ways in which the formulaic figures I have chosen function within the cultural imagination. These figures are, after all, simultaneously comic characters and characters imbued with a great deal of masculine anxiety. The uncanniness of surrogation that Roach mentions above must work to some extent in the theater as men watch and laugh at men upon the stage who function as icons of the potential of the any man's masculinity to fail.

¹⁹ Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of The Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), 2-3.

Ultimately the performances I discuss in this dissertation come from both halves of performance studies. Each chapter focuses on dramatic representations of the figures I have chosen as well as extratheatrical performances in real life and other popular culture venues. The real-life male performances adhere, of course, to Butler's conception of the "mundane" performance of gender discussed above, but go beyond the quotidian into the realms of the dramatic. These particular roles constituted public performances of failure to comply with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. As intimate and seemingly private as the institution of marriage is, it was a matter of public scrutiny on several levels. One commonplace of eighteenth-century British drama is that it represents society as driven by gossip—most, as we might expect concerning the private marital and sexual lives of others. Gossip (or scandal, as it was alternately termed) provided a social currency and a canvas upon which one might display one's wit. The publication of accounts of divorce proceedings in the popular press (discussed in Chapter 2), for example, suggests the avidity with which people observed and consumed the details of the private lives of others. This persistent focus of the public sphere on the happenings within the private sphere suggests that no man's failure in the realm of sex and marriage was likely to be entirely his and his alone, but rather, in one way or another would constitute an opportunity or demand for a performance of his masculinity. These performances, as crisis moments (or, to apply Garber's term, at the point of the creation of a category crisis), demanded a performativity that went beyond the performance that everyone must engage in simply because they are gendered. As the chapters below will prove, these particular performances, both on the stage and off, were vocal and dramatic.

Popular Culture Studies

In her article, “Paradigms of Popular Culture,” Paula Backscheider provides a definition of popular culture that informs my own: “The popular culture I mean was easily available, affordable, familiar to a large number of people representing several social classes, and associated with a profitable endeavor, therefore, to some extent self-consciously ‘manufactured,’ calculated to succeed because composed with high awareness of audience-pleasing elements.”²⁰ In particular, the drama that follows fits this definition—the theater, after all, was (and is) first and foremost a business. The theater’s (and other forms of popular culture’s) drive for profit does not, however, diminish its capacity for ideological work. Backscheider suggests, “[One] reason for popular culture’s danger is the fact that its creators often want something in the world to be recognized—like the emperor with no clothes. They have found something seriously wrong and want to change the world.”²¹ The popular appeal or economic success of popular culture should also not diminish the complexity of its relationship with the forces of the dominant culture; Backscheider suggests, “Popular culture is defined by its relationship to the dominant culture and that is one of perpetual tension, sometimes antagonistic, sometimes perpetuating, but always a site for potential critique.”²²

We must ultimately assume that the author (and those who collaborate in production of the production/text) must, if he or she is going to be commercially successful, balance ideological import with audience identification and entertainment. Perhaps no other form of popular culture was as sophisticated in its approach to this balancing act than the theater. Backscheider asserts, “The theater was already a culture industry, a highly developed business to

²⁰ Paula Backscheider, “The Paradigms of Popular Culture,” *Eighteenth-Century Novel* (2009): 19-59, 20-21.

²¹ Backscheider, “Popular Culture,” 33.

²² Backscheider, “Popular Culture,” 20.

produce cultural works that are marketed for profit to the widest general audience possible.”²³

Even those authors who manage to balance their commercial and ideological interests could not be sure their message would be received in the way they intended. Bakscheider suggests:

The most dangerous thing about popular culture to those wishing to maintain the status quo is its volatility of meaning, and, although this aspect has been long studied, no real paradigms for explaining it have emerged. We know that popular culture seems beyond the control of its author and producers, always open to unexpected readings, and to have minor themes, characters, or even settings seized upon and “recognized.” Readers do not “read” as the artifact was intended; rather than being indoctrinated, they become collaborators or resisters. They seize upon the treasure and escape its erasure, identify with the exercising of the fantasy and find its containment improbably or fuel for rebellion.²⁴

Popular culture theory provides additional tools for this study of these performances; in particular, the assertion that small changes in formulae—tropes and stock characters—can be revealing of hegemonic negotiation concerning the social significance of those tropes and stock characters. All of the performances I have chosen are, in fact, associated with stock characters or situations. These characters and situations change subtly over time—and these subtle changes can and do correlate with significant cultural changes. Bakscheider suggests of variation:

As popular culture theorists we recognize that where numerous variations on the same issue emerge, writers are obsessively modeling a problem and testing solutions and, if they become popular, we know that the culture may share their active engagement...Such clusters of apparently redundant texts picture more fully the situation they reflect; even

²³ Bakscheider, “Popular Culture,” 39.

²⁴ Bakscheider, “Popular Culture,” 32.

small variations reveal different aspects of the problem or alert us to the beginning of a negotiated “solution.”²⁵

In this dissertation, I deal with variation in two ways: by analyzing minor variations in characterization, plot structure, and other elements of superficially redundant plays and analyzing (when possible) adaptations of plays throughout the century. Each chapter contains one significant group of adaptations. Chapter 1 features Wycherley’s *Country Wife* and two subsequent adaptations by Lee and Garrick, Chapter 2 contains adaptations stemming from *Love’s Last Shift* (*The Relapse*, *The Man of Quality*, and *A Trip to Scarborough*) and Chapter 3 contains Aphra Behn’s *Lucky Chance* and Centlivre’s *School for Greybeards*.

In addition, using popular culture studies also helps to illuminate the tensions between the real-life and stage performances above. Creators of popular culture products can rely on these formulaic tropes and characters as a way to communicate with their consumers in a kind of cultural shorthand; these tropes and characters exist in a complex web of influences on the production of pop culture (economic success, ideological impact, audience desires). The lived experiences of those tropes—for example a man who finds himself a cuckold—certainly are not as predictably navigated as they are on stage.

Texts

This dissertation relies on a mix of primary texts from the theater as well as other elements of the culture beyond the theater. In order to create a cultural context in which to put the theatrical treatments of these figures, I have used a combination of texts from all areas of the culture: non-literary texts (divorce trials, advice letters, medical literature, sermons, etc.) as well

²⁵ Bakscheider, “Popular Culture,” 38.

as literary texts in non-dramatic forms (novels and poetry). This blend of texts offers the potential for some striking tensions between the literature and non-literary texts; whereas there appears to be a complementary relationship between the stage and “real world” in terms of changing attitudes towards cuckolds and their performance, there appears to be a disjunction in the treatment of men and women who choose to engage in heterogamous marriage (what I will call “unequal marriage” and what is referred to colloquially as the “May-December” marriage). This blend of texts will allow my work to yield the benefits of a performance studies as well as a cultural studies approach.

Misty G. Anderson comments on a potentially frustrating aspect of working with comedies from this time period—the comedies tend to be fairly repetitive and predictable. Anderson takes this repetition to be important to the social significance and function of the plays:

The repetition of plots about marriage speaks to a cultural desire for mastery in the midst of legal and ideological changes in the institution. The structural repetitions of genre, as Jameson has argued, function like a contract between audience and playwright; the playwright agrees to provide familiar, generically readable comic material laced with new comic events (or at least new combinations), and the audience agrees to laugh.

Playwrights invite audiences to identify with the characters’ desires that shape the plot in order to participate in the reward-fantasy of its ending. While the particular attractions of characters vary in significant ways, the structure of desire, identification, and reward defines the genre and shapes the expectations of the audience. The bribe to the audience

is tremendous: this erotic and economic future is a reward for these plots played out by these kinds of people.²⁶

In my discussion of plays below, I actually seek out plays that rely on the same characters and tropes to create groups of plays amongst which small changes and shifts in representation become significant. Anderson provides commentary on her approach to the plays that informs my own:

[She] examines the relationship between comic closure, which tends to be predictable, and comic events, where the more local jokes and comic conflicts of the comedies play out. Playwrights use the tension between comic events and comic structures to navigate between an ideal plot that the genre reiterates and the impediments or alternatives to that plot along the way to the comic destination, marriage. At the risk of ruining jokes, I take these comic events seriously as the crisis moments within comedy's overdetermined representation of marriage. These are not plays about resisting marriage, but about negotiating the terms, literal and figurative, under which Restoration and eighteenth-century women existed within the institution. The audience's and the playwright's conflicting investments in both conservative ending and more progressive models of modern marriage animate these comedies. Comic events establish positions of authority for the negotiating heroines of these plays, while comic closure assures the audience that marriage will survive these negotiations.²⁷

The comedies of the eighteenth century do, undeniably, rely upon predictable structures to achieve closure, but an investigation of plays that deal with a common trope synchronically and diachronically reveals small changes—adjustments, we might call them—to the structure that I

²⁶ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York, Palgrave, 2002), 41.

²⁷ Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 2.

argue prove significant. Further, although comic closure (marriage) is considered predictable by Anderson, what gets ignored all too often is the number of marriages that fail at the end of the play—marriages called off, marriages in which partners are switched out or exchanged (a young lover for an old fiancé, for example), or marriages that break down—even as the predictable marriages that constitute closure are made. These events, which ultimately undermine the predictability or the positivity of the closure, prove significant. Another disruption of comic closure that I will investigate below is the possibility of marital resolutions (rakes reformed, estranged couples who make peace) that simply do not ring “true”—the action of the play does not “buy” the resolution presented to the audience. Do these endings in themselves suggest something significant about the marriage conflict during this time? This is not a question I ask anachronistically, but is rather one suggested by Vanbrugh’s response (*The Relapse* [1696]) to Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift* [1696]). The whole premise of Vanbrugh’s sequel is based on the question of how long an abrupt (and seemingly, according to Vanbrugh, tenuous) reformation of character can last.

I have chosen a variety of plays for each chapter of this dissertation. What they ultimately have in common is that they contain an iteration of the formulaic figure at the heart of the chapter. The vast majority of the plays are comedies (there are, in fact, only two tragedies: Nicholas Rowe’s *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* [1714] and Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d* [1682]); they range from highly canonical examples (*The Country Wife* [1675], for example) two largely ignored farces. In addition, where relevant I have discussed adaptations. I treat these adaptations with the assumption that the adaptive process takes into consideration changing audience tastes which in turn are related to changing cultural beliefs. Many of the adaptations contained in the following chapters are endeavors to recuperate older comedy from the

perceived taint of immorality, thus they provide excellent guideposts to the self-conscious efforts at moral self-fashioning that occur within the theater. There is no denying, of course, that these efforts are based in commercial interest, but to dismiss them based on that aspect of their production would ultimately be to ignore the fact that the theater was, first and foremost, a business. All drama, no matter how explicitly moralistic or ideological also simultaneously must be commercially successful to find an audience. Many of the adaptations lead to results that are arguably of lesser quality than the play's initial incarnation. An example of this phenomenon from the chapters that follow would be the Garrick and Lee adaptations of Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1777 and 1765, respectively). Most readers who delight in the wit of Wycherley's characters and relish what might be described as their a/immorality would be disappointed with Garrick and Lee's relatively insipid versions (a telling aspect of both is the absence of Horner). To most fans of Wycherley's original such changes are nearly unthinkable, and yet Lee's and Garrick's versions were relatively successful.

I have included examples of what many critics dismiss as "farce" within the following chapters as well. The term "farce" is particularly fraught for the time period in question. Many academics have been prone to dismiss plays that were labeled as "farce" by their authors or publishers as devoid of any real capacity for ideological intent or impact. Of all generic boundaries, farce is easily the most difficult to establish. The label of "farce" was not applied with any kind of consistency during the long eighteenth century. Certainly there are some forms of theatrical entertainment that may have been hugely popular with eighteenth century audiences and simultaneously devoid of any ideological impact (although I hesitate to negate the potential of any piece of entertainment that captures the zeitgeist to have ideological baggage, but some

are clearly more capable than others). Performing animal acts, for example, are less likely to provide raw material for insightful discussion of cultural beliefs.

Farce can mean many things. Its most literal meaning, from the French origins of the word, is “stuffing,” a meaning that acknowledges the place of these shorter pieces within the structure of the night’s entertainment. Holland suggests that farces “do not deal directly with the ambiguities of desire, the social problems of relationships, the tense difficulties of status and power which characterize Restoration comic drama. Their characters are straightforward, stereotypical, often bland, always keeping their thoughts and emotions subordinate to the action.”²⁸ In his chapter on farce, Holland suggests that its ideological import can be diminished by its generic label: “The naming of a work as a tragedy is construed as a label of dignity, an attempt to lay claim to an elevated cultural position and a network of weighty cultural resonances within which the work demands to be deemed worthy of a place; the naming of a work as a farce is more likely to be accompanied by an apology.”²⁹ If farce, as Holland suggests, revolved around garnering laughter through physicality and repressing the social commentary most commonly found in social comedy, we might conclude that farces are of limited usefulness as a study such as this one. Holland is not alone in his doubts about farce’s capacity of carrying satirical content; John T. Harwood suggests:

To perceive farce as though it were satiric comedy raises expectations that the play cannot satisfy. The contempt of late seventeenth-century dramatists for farce is not based solely on their resentment of its immediate success with contemporary

²⁸ Peter Holland, “Farce,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 107.

²⁹ Holland, “Farce,” 208. Holland’s chapter focuses on Restoration farces; *A Wife Well-Managed* is nearly 30 years too late to fit this category, but many of the characteristics persist. The main change Holland indicates as occurring at the turn-of-the-century is that farce became generally more accepted over time. He does not suggest that the genre changes in such a way that would change its relationship to ideology.

audiences...another basis for contempt is dramatists' awareness that farce is completely stripped of its ethical base, its moral assumptions, and its didactic purpose. Farce expropriates the language and some of the structural devices and character types of comedy, but in the farce meaning does not exfoliate from the clash of characters and the values they represent. Farce arouses laughter but does not direct it beyond the jibe or spectacle of the moment: it ridicules but only the most obvious foibles and flaws.³⁰

To dismiss the possibility for farce to carry any social significance is to suggest that a Restoration or eighteenth-century theatergoer would recognize farce as a completely alien form of theater, a form for which their usual ways of understanding the theater are inapplicable. This assumption is somewhat problematic to apply to the farces that I have elected to include in this dissertation because it privileges physical comedy as the defining factor of the drama. My treatment of these plays ultimately assumes that physical comedy does not disqualify the play from containing trenchant cultural commentary. The farces contained in the following chapters are recognizably akin to the longer comedies: they contain many of the same conflicts, plot devices, and other elements in a shorter, and granted, less developed package. Although no in-depth studies of eighteenth-century farces currently exist to support my supposition, I am comfortable in suggesting that (at least in the farces contained here) there are enough similarities between the longer comedies and the shorter farces that audiences were unlikely to use radically different interpretive strategies in the transition from the former to the latter.

³⁰ John T. Harwood, *Critics Values, and Restoration Comedy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982), 88-89.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter, focusing on cuckolds, will serve as an opportunity to establish a methodological approach in which stage performances are paired with real-life performances. I will follow a common event—cuckoldry—through a series of subtle changes that reveal shifting attitudes where perhaps others have been all too eager to perceive static acquiescence to the misery of cuckoldry. I ultimately argue that shortly after the turn of the century men begin to use the possibility for performing the role as a means for gaining sympathy and shifting blame.

The issue of impotence will be material for two separate chapters—the first is a treatment of impotence in general and the second a treatment of male aging centered on a discussion of impotence and the figure of the old bachelor. One major focus of the second chapter will be the manner in which the trope of the impotent character is created and the relationship between that trope and common beliefs about impotency (as described in several examples of medical advice literature). I will ultimately link these beliefs about sexual appetites and impotence to a group of husbands who reject their wives and claim a form of “marital impotence.” This “marital impotence” exists at the confluence of contradicting beliefs about male sexual appetites—in the form of a discussion of “surfeit” and men’s experience of marriage and the cultural expectations about the effect marriage should have on men. One important group of texts for the first part of the second chapter is the “Imperfect Enjoyment” poems—discussions of sexual failure voiced by libertine figures. In addition, John Cleland’s work in both fiction (*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* [1748-9] and *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* [1751]) and medical advice literature (*The Institutes of Health* [1761]) will be used as sites to investigate impotence in the context of the medical and moral beliefs of the time. Analysis of the drama reveals beliefs about male sexual

appetites—both voracious and fragile—calls into question the possibility of men and their sexuality thriving within marriage.

In Chapter 3, I will focus on one particular archetypal form of impotent character—the old bachelor. Whereas the old maid figure is most often the target of a mix of laughter and sympathy, her male counterpart is more often associated with revulsion and suspicion. After establishing the general beliefs about the conflict old bachelors cause within the culture, I turn to a discussion of the old bachelor who chooses at an improbably late stage in life to marry. The old bachelors who do choose to marry more often than not choose a significantly younger woman as their intended bride. As with Chapter 2, I use medical advice literature about older men and their sexuality (they were assumed to be simultaneously impotent and lecherous) before investigating the figure in both novels (*The Adventures of Melinda* [1749] and *The Countess of Dellwyn* [1759]) and the drama. What ultimately becomes clear is that the unequal marriage represents the nadir of noncompanionate marriage, the economic aspects of which are heightened to literalize Defoe's term: "matrimonial whoredom." The surprising result of this investigation is that in varying levels of explicitness, the drama acknowledges the potential misery of both parties within unequal marriage.

Chapter 1

All Cuckolds Really Do Go to Heaven: Cuckoldry as Performance in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries

In *Fashioning Adultery*, David Turner provides a succinct distinction between adultery and cuckoldry; whereas “adultery” is a relatively gender-neutral term, cuckoldry “deflects the sinfulness of marital infidelity by mocking the follies or inadequacies of the adulteress’s husband.”³¹ Cuckoldry, as a concept, has not existed as long as adultery, but it does have a long and rich past. The first use of the word according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* occurs circa 1250.³² The concept of cuckoldry may have existed as early as the thirteenth century, but it did not reach its zenith in cultural discourse until the early modern period, reaching an apex shortly after the Restoration and into the eighteenth century.³³ Most people who are familiar with the literature and culture of Restoration and eighteenth-century Britain will also be familiar on at least some level with the ubiquity of commentary about cuckolds. Common motifs include spiteful wives threatening to cuckold their husbands, jealous husbands expressing intense anxiety at the prospect of being cuckolded, and general jesting about the situation cuckolds find

³¹ David M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England, 1660-1740* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 83.

³² *Oxford English Dictionary* on-line, s.v. “cuckold,” http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50055331?query_type=word&queryword=cuckold&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=V1vt-zLReJH-4666&hilite=50055331 (accessed February 15, 2010). Listed in the OED as well as the related words: “cuckold” (v.), “cuckoldage,” “cuckoldize,” “cuckoldly” (a.), “cuckoldom,” “cuckoldry,” and “cuckoldy.” Though “cuckold” has been in documented use since the mid-thirteenth century, it seems that the use of the word as a verb (as in an action that one man does to another) does not appear to be in documented use until the late-sixteenth century.

³³ Turner identifies the late seventeenth century as the “apogee of cultural interest in cuckoldry” (84).

themselves in. I would like to focus on the point in time where I believe negotiation of this attitude is most active through a discussion of texts being published and performed roughly between 1675 and 1730. It is during this time period that we can find a bewildering variety of cultural texts and performances attempting to negotiate a new attitude toward cuckoldry.³⁴

Certainly, a close look at British culture in the long eighteenth century suggests that an impetus for attitudinal change did exist. In his discussion of criminal conversation suits, Lawrence Stone notes that when the suits first became popular among the gentry and noblemen (the only ones who could afford to pursue such matters in court), they provided an alternative to less structured forms of justice: “These were classes among which the injured husband in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had been accustomed to resorting to murder, open violence, or a challenge to a duel in order to obtain satisfaction for his honour and his wife’s shame.”³⁵ This single comment suggests one large facet of the need for a change in attitudes toward cuckolds; the shame and ridicule associated with being a victim of marital infidelity, coupled with the oppressive cult of masculine honor, led men to feel compelled to acts that were inherently disruptive of social life. It would seem that having access to judicial procedure would alleviate some of the pressure to seek justice for oneself, but certainly there must have been huge numbers of men who could not afford to seek such justice or who desired to keep their wives’ infidelity a secret.³⁶ Stone’s comment above deals almost entirely with members of the upper class, but there were equally disruptive events associated with cuckoldry in the lives of the lower

³⁴ Turner states, “Thinking about cuckoldry in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was influenced by a proliferation of genres deliberating the fate of the wronged husband” (84). The debate Turner identifies seems to overlap with the ideological shift that I am arguing about in this chapter. Turner’s focus, however, is different from mine; the majority of his attention is spent on the popular periodicals and their influence of the reception of cuckolds (which I will touch on briefly here), whereas my focus will be on the more performative aspects of this reception building—which Turner refers to as “self-fashioning” (110).

³⁵ Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 23.

³⁶ In addition, Stone points out that the criminal conversation suit became more and more problematic because of its potential for abuse: collusion between parties for monetary gain (23).

classes: the charivari and horn fair are particular examples (both will be discussed later in this chapter). Although men of lower station might not have access to dueling as a means for righting perceived slights to their honor, certainly they had access to other, less ceremonial, forms of violence such as boxing or brawling. As politeness and civility become important values throughout the century, tormenting men because of the sexual behavior of their wives must certainly have become if not less appealing, less acceptable. Ryan Shoemaker, for example, claims that “Over the course of the long eighteenth century the nature and significance of duels fought in the London area changed dramatically.”³⁷ He suggests that the changes arose from several causes:

During the eighteenth century the nature of the combat, the weapons, and the role of seconds were transformed, and fatality rates declined considerably. At the same time, the role of the duel within the honour culture of elite men was transformed. As such, the history of the duel in this period is emblematic of broader changes in English society: the decline of public violence, the changing ways in which reputations were established, the development of reformed norms of masculine conduct, and the growing role of print culture in conducting disputes.³⁸

Ultimately he argues that the construction of male honor shifted in order to begin to exclude the duel:

As men were told to control their emotions, and taciturnity became a male virtue, the duel was further transformed by changing understandings of the nature of male honour...Critics of dueling attempted to redefine honour as an internal Christian virtue, as opposed to a quality achieved in the court of public opinion. That public performances

³⁷ Ryan Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel,” *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 525.

³⁸ Shoemaker, “Taming of the Duel,” 525-526.

did indeed become less important to gentry honour is evident in the changing nature of homicidal violence committed by gentlemen over the century. Whereas at the start of our period gentlemen used such public violence to assert their distinctive gender and social identity, at the end of the period the limited amount of violence which remained had moved indoors, out of public view, much like the duels which so often took place in remote locations.³⁹

From a literary perspective, ridicule of cuckolds seems as if it must have become intolerably cliché. Within the theater, in particular, it would seem potentially problematic; for a dramatic audience wooed by novelty, the constant expression of anxiety about cuckoldry and the persistent ridicule of cuckolds themselves must eventually have grown tiring. Vicious satire of men whose status was logically not their fault (at least not entirely) was hardly conducive to the interests of sentimental comedy later in the eighteenth century. The perceived moral responsibility of the theater must be considered an important impetus for this change. One important example that reveals the impulse to reform cuckoldry is the body of *The Country Wife* (1675) adaptations that appear in the latter half of the century; in order to shape the play to the expectations of polite audiences, the threat of cuckoldry (which to any fan of Wycherley's original is inherent to the play) is almost entirely removed from the adaptations as well as the consummate cuckold-maker himself (again, seemingly inherent to the play), Horner.

From a critical perspective, Horner can be considered an ambivalent and/or ambiguous character.⁴⁰ He ostensibly triumphs at the end of the play—if we accept his terms for triumph—but he does so at the cost of effectively excluding himself from male homosocial society.

³⁹ Shoemaker, "Taming of the Duel," 541.

⁴⁰ I tend to agree with Michael Mangan's reading of Horner and his position in terms of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's groundbreaking reading of cuckoldry and homosociality in *The County Wife*. Mangan suggests Sedgwick's assertion that Horner's choices in the play lead him to a level of transcendent homosociality—one that puts him in "a more

If we assume the process of adapting a drama is a function of satisfying the ideological needs of the time and the expectations of the audience, then the ways in which *The Country Wife* has been adapted in the eighteenth century reveal that Horner was, in fact, troubling to those audiences as well. David Garrick, in his 1765 adaptation,⁴¹ suggests that his goal in adapting Wycherley's play is "to clear one of our most celebrated comedies from immorality and obscenity. He thought himself bound to preserve as much of the original, as presented to an audience of these times without offense" (n.p.). Garrick does retain a significant portion of the original play's dialogue; whole scenes dealing with the Alithea, Sparkish, and Harcourt triangle remain as well as much of the interaction between Margery and Pinchwife. Ostensibly, however, Horner and any real subsequent mention of adultery must be removed in order to fulfill Garrick's moralistic goal. Pinchwife still chooses his wife and behaves toward her in a way that he believes will allow him to avoid the seemingly inevitable fate of being cuckolded; thus the threat of adultery exists in the hypothetical, but never materializes tangibly within the play. Rather than glorying in the irony of Pinchwife's careful plan failing, Garrick's adaptation works to reform Pinchwife's behavior toward his wife. The effort to reform is captured in Alithea's speech to Pinchwife after he has

intimate and secret relation" to the men who surround him is perhaps a too positive reading of the situation Horner finds himself in; he suggests that although Horner might be in "cognitive control of the systems of exchange" such control is not enough. He suggests: "By announcing himself to be sexually incomplete (not a 'real' man), Horner is removing himself from the masculine camaraderie on which the rich model of homosociality, which Sedgwick delineates elsewhere, actually thrives. The only audience he has left in the Quack to whom, at the end of Act I scene I, he explains his strategy—a temporary confidant and a poor substitute for the recognition of his peers." Michael Mangan, *Staging Masculinities: History, Gender, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 122. While I agree that Horner's victory must be considered a pyrrhic one, I would also suggest that Mangan ignores the audience of the play, which is assumed to enjoy Horner's mastery over the situation but would almost certainly never be tempted to the sacrifices he has made in order to enjoy that same mastery.

⁴¹ David Garrick, *The Country Wife* (London, 1777). Garrick's original version of the adaptation was printed in 1766 as *The Country Girl*. The edition of 1777 was published as *The Country Wife*. The 1777 edition is a corrected edition and is the one that I will be referring to here. Purificacion Ribes suggests that the changes in Garrick's version allowed him to conform to the expectations of romantic comedy patterns, whereas Lee's version (discussed below) conforms to reform comedy patterns (92). Ribes notes that part of Garrick's reason for adapting/reviving the play was the availability of an actress, Miss Reynolds, to play the female protagonist (93). Some changes in the play, then, must be attributed to Garrick writing for the actress' strengths, but the overall changes to the play must certainly be attributed to changes in audience tastes and expectations. "Country Wives and Country Girls in Eighteenth Century England. A History of Theatrical Rewriting," *Sederi* 16 (2006): 91-108.

been humiliated by reading Margery's secret letter to Dorilant (who stands in for Horner as her extramarital object of affection) aloud in front of the assembled characters:

You've seen the folly, by this time, I presume, of resting your happiness upon that slender reed, simplicity! But, believe me in this...that I can assure you her present frailty is more the offspring of that foible, than it is of a vicious appetite...Would ye be happy together? Take my advice—Release her from her bondage; let her associate with the innocent and sensible of both sexes; and improve that mind which has hitherto been too un-informed to defend itself from the attacks of its own passions, or from those of others”
(57-58)

Pinchwife recognizes not only his errors in behavior toward his wife, but also his errors in the foundation of their marriage: “How could I reasonably expect happiness, when I am destitute of every requisite that should form it? Similitude in years, tempers, manners; and in short, all the qualities that can endear a heart and warm it to love” (58). Alithea does attempt to correct or mollify these views by suggesting that Pinchwife is being too hard on himself, but even her confidence in the Pinchwifes' potential for happiness is uncertain; she suggests that Pinchwife's reformation “may make [them] both happy still” (58). Ultimately, the reform that needs to occur is of Pinchwife's fear of being cuckolded, the jealousy associated with it, and the violence and otherwise unreasonable behavior that stems from that jealousy. All of these fears and consequences exacerbate the (greater, but less remediable) problem Pinchwife himself acknowledges—that he has contracted a marriage with a woman completely unsuitable for him.

By never seriously endangering Margery's virtue, Garrick heightens the ridiculousness of Pinchwife's behavior. Whereas Pinchwife in Wycherley's version is more than founded in his concerns (if not his subsequent behavior), Garrick's Pinchwife is concerned beyond reason.

“Sympathetic” is not a term we might readily associate with Wycherley’s views of his characters, but in this case, his treatment of Pinchwife is arguably more sympathetic than Garrick’s. Both versions of the character marry for the wrong motivations and face the potential for great unhappiness because of their folly, but only one is finally made to understand his errors and thus be fully aware that any ensuing unhappiness is necessarily his fault, rather than (in the case of Wycherley) the fault of external influences such as Horner and the cuckolding culture he represents.

John Lee also removes Horner entirely from his 1765 version of *The Country Wife*. Rather than the focus of the play being Horner’s persistent pursuit of women, Lee’s play focuses entirely on creating suitable marriages of equals. Peggy is saved from her marriage with Moody (the stand-in for Pinchwife, who has not yet married Peggy) by Harcourt’s nephew, Bellville, who suggests, “You have a right to chuse for yourself, and there is no law in heaven or earth, that binds you before a marriage to a man you cannot like.”⁴² Unlike Garrick, Lee makes no attempt to reform Pinchwife and his troubled beliefs about marriage and women; he’s left alone at the end of the play, excluded from the marital resolution that occurs in the fifth act.

Ultimately the laughter in both adaptations shifts from being aimed at actual cuckolds to men whose fear of being cuckolded leaves them irrational and potentially miserable forever. These adaptations and the original play thus provide bookends to a period in which humor associated with cuckolds undergoes a substantial shift, a shift that I would argue must be correlated to a parallel shift in attitudes in the culture at large.

Laughter at cuckolds was not without ambiguity even before the shift toward a more sympathetic attitude. In describing the atmosphere of sexual insult in early modern England,

⁴² John Lee, *The Country Wife* (London, 1765), 42. Ribes points out the popularity of “mixed entertainments that included songs and dances” and suggests that Lee shortens the play to a two-act afterpiece in order to make it fit better into a given night’s entertainment agenda (93-94).

Laura Gowing claims that there was a “moral framework in which it is acceptable for women to talk about their husband’s infidelity, but where husbands cannot admit to being cuckolded, in which ‘whore’ is a word of vague yet telling power against women with no equivalent word against men.”⁴³ In her investigation of sexual insult and the resultant defamation and slander trials, Gowing points out that most sexual insults (that led to trials and thus left behind records)⁴⁴ were between woman, but she states, “Even between men, sexual insult was almost invariably about the sexuality of women, not men...Insults of men...revolving around words like cuckold, were not directed at their sexuality but that of their wives.”⁴⁵ Gowing goes on to further develop this assertion: “On the whole, sexual insults of men revolved around their control of women’s sexuality: cuckoldry represented a husband’s failure to control his wife.”⁴⁶ With the baggage associated with the word cuckold—meaning not a victim of female sexuality but a failure of masculine (patriarchal) power, there is no denying that it was a powerful form of sexual insult.

As often as cuckoldry is used as a joke in drama, broadsides, and ballads, one would expect to find a fairly homogeneous derisive response toward it, however, there is a notable shift throughout the century (especially in the later decades) in the portrayal of cuckolds. As popular as the jesting aspect (ballads, broadsides, jokes, etc) of cuckoldry was, it was also a matter of serious sexual insult and cause of real anxiety for everyday men. The repetition of these jests and worries might lead some to dismiss cuckoldry as simply a stock device in literature and cliché in

⁴³ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1. Gowing’s argument has not been accepted by all scholars. Bernard Capp calls her argument “too extreme” and states, “Respectable men, like respectable women, valued sexual ‘honesty’ as an intrinsic part of the ‘good name; that gave them a sense of self-worth and a position of respect within their community. That made the common taunt of ‘whoremonger’ or ‘whoremaster’ used to denote male promiscuity, almost as damaging to men as ‘whore’ was to women, and many men were prepared to initiate defamation suits to silence their detractor and restore their good names” (72). “The Double Standard Revisited: Plebian Women and Male Sexual Reputation in Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 162 (1999).

⁴⁴ For a chart that summarizes the number of cases and the insults that were involved in them see Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 67.

⁴⁵ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 62.

⁴⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 63. In addition to the failure in control of the wife must certainly have been the failure to satisfy a wife (as will be discussed in Chapter 2).

the culture. Familiarity breeds an uncritical view of the attitudes toward cuckoldry—it becomes all too easy to diminish it to a homogeneous and transparent cultural concept. In fact, a further investigation of the sites where many believe that they find stable attitudes will show that hegemonic negotiation was actively underway in both literature and the real world.

Cuckoldry was not only a matter of biting jest or powerful sexual insult (both of which are entangled with concepts of masculinity) but was also a matter that demanded performance on the part of the cuckold. In treating cuckoldry as performance, we can begin to probe the ideological disturbance that existed as sympathy toward cuckolds, often orchestrated by the cuckolds themselves, begins to infiltrate realms of culture where previously only derisive laughter existed. In this chapter, I hope to show elements of the ideological shift that slowly progresses from the sadistic treatment of men who are rendered passive in their role as cuckolds to the infinitely more active performances by men whose cuckoldry occurs within the Christian framework that allows the cuckolds to shift blame or remove themselves from the arena of blame altogether.

A major concern of most debates (whether legal or literary) about cuckoldry is the issue of blame. In the triangle of feminine adultery between the wife (whore), her husband (cuckold) and the wife's lover (cuckold-maker), the expected blame might fall on the wife and her lover. When we look at their labels, however, it becomes obvious that insult and blame is shifted from the cuckold-maker to the cuckold himself. Though blame will begin to shift toward the wife as a more sympathetic view of the cuckold evolves, the cuckold-maker never manages to become the main focus of blame or ridicule, at least within the literature. The culture seems to be struggling to satisfy a growing need to resolve the conflicts caused by the culture of cuckoldry—a conflict,

alas, that had to do with far-reaching problems with marriage and conceptions of gender that were not easily changed.

Certainly, there were sectors of British culture in which cuckold-makers were not devoid of blame. Criminal conversation trials existed for the wronged husband to pursue monetary rewards for the cuckold-maker's trespass upon his marriage. In *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857*, Lawrence Stone provides accounts of criminal conversation trials that reveal that they could lead to financially devastating punishments for the cuckold-makers. Stone suggests that there were three main motivations for a wronged husband to pursue a criminal conversation suit. He suggests the first "was the primitive desire for revenge for a psychologically wounding injury, by financially crippling or even imprisoning the lover" and identifies the period between 1740 and 1820 as a time when this motive was carried out with particular harshness, leading to "damages awarded [that] were so much beyond the defendant's capacity to pay that the verdict was tantamount to a life-imprisonment for debt."⁴⁷ In what we might call a more mercenary turn, men sought monetary damages to fund the cost of pursuing a separation or divorce.⁴⁸ The final motivation was simply to fulfill one step of the process necessary to sue for Parliamentary divorce.⁴⁹ Ultimately these motivations help to clarify why a man would choose to broadcast his own (presumably) humiliating state as a cuckold.

The disjunction between the treatment of cuckold-makers within the literature and within the judicial system is significant

One common characteristic that might be considered surprising about the process of this ideological shift is that almost no texts suggest that blame fall on the cuckold maker. The most iconic example of this phenomenon is, of course, Horner from *The Country Wife*. He is never

⁴⁷ Stone, *Broken Lives*, 23.

⁴⁸ Stone, *Broken Lives*, 23.

⁴⁹ Stone, *Broken Lives*, 23.

punished (except perhaps in his exclusion from homosocial society) for his insistent pursuit of his peers' wives. The author's entirely unsympathetic attitude toward all of the women featured in *The School of Venus* (below)—even those ruined by deception and rape is another example of this phenomenon. Despite the announced presence of cuckold-makers in the book (as indicated by the book's longer title), the actual cuckold-makers receive little attention and virtually no censure whatsoever. When the consequences (duels and other violence, financial ruin, and sexually transmitted diseases) of the cuckold-makers' actions must be, for plot purposes, acknowledged, the discussion is never as salacious as that of the women. In fact, these consequences are easily and often laid as blame at the women's feet; they provide evidence of the women's inherent viciousness rather than the men's folly. Never blaming the cuckold maker allows for the maintenance of a paradoxical set of beliefs that are pervasive at every level of the culture—that a man who is unfaithful to his wife and has himself acted as a cuckold maker with someone else's wife can cast himself as a victim when he himself is cuckolded. The disjunction between the treatment of cuckold-makers within the literature and within the judicial system is significant. Through the possibility of a criminal conversation suit, the judicial system acknowledges what the cultural materials resist acknowledging—that the cuckold is, in fact, a victim. Although the relationship is strictly, at this point, one of correlation, it seems significant that the period during which the cuckold-maker was receiving the most onerous financial punishments for their trespasses coincides with the time period in which the attitudinal shift I am arguing for in this chapter begins to become firmly established.

There are, of course, dramatic examples of resistance to the idea of men rejecting the blame for their own statuses as cuckolds. The prologue of *All in the Right: or, the Cuckold in Good Earnest* (1761) begins with a suggestion that Sir John is a model in his nonchalance about

his own existence as a cuckold: “At court Sir John was dubb’d a Knight for life,/ At home he’s dubb’d a Cuckold by his wife,/ And yet Sir John appears in every Place, and feels no Shame—for ‘tis a common case.”⁵⁰ Sir John’s rejection of the “shame” associated with being a cuckold while freely moving in society suggests that he might function as a representation of the sentiments of an emergent sympathetic view of cuckolds. His actions throughout the play suggest that if, in fact, he is a representative of those sentiments, they are in turn associated with corruption and a failure of marriage. Never actually capable of proving his wife unfaithful, Sir John must make peace not with the possibility of being a cuckold, but rather with the disappointment of his mercenary hopes for a release from his marriage. Sir John does reject jealousy, but only because he is indifferent to his wife. When William, Sir John’s servant, attempts to inform him of his wife’s infidelity, he responds, “For my part, it is quite equal to me, for if once I prove her haggard, as Othello says, I’ll whistle her off. I am resolved not to make a life of jealousy, so if once I begin to doubt, I shall not be long in forming a resolution” (4). We learn later in the play that Sir John’s version of “whistling her off” comes from a fantasy of gaining a divorce from his wife. Sir John is unhappy enough in his union that he sees being labeled a cuckold a reasonable price for the opportunity of release: “If I could but once get sufficient proof to procure a divorce, I should think myself very happy; for tho’ my wife has beauty, and tho’ her virtue has not been hitherto called in question, I am quite weary of her” (4). The play associates nonchalance about cuckoldom with an already failed marriage—both parties detest each other and cheat and both parties have habits that are deleterious to the state of the marriage (drinking and gaming for Sir John and Lady Thoughtless respectively).

The farce sets up our expectations for Lady Thoughtless to be caught and perhaps for Sir John to ultimately have his excuse for divorce, but, in fact, those expectations are turned upside

⁵⁰ *All in the Right: or, the Cuckold in Good Earnest* (London, 1761), n.p.

down with the conclusion of the play. Sir John finds his wife together with Wildair (her lover) and when he suggests that he has finally caught her in the act, she manages to deflect his accusations with some of her own—supported by a letter from Biddy Gayless—apparently Sir John’s lover. Confronted with his own indiscretions, Sir John is forced to accept the excuse Wildair concocts for them being found alone together in a private apartment. The dramatic irony involved in the Lady Thoughtless and Wildair relationship—that we know for certain Sir John has the grounds for divorce that he desires—allows for a reading of the end of the play in which we must enjoy the fact that Sir John is stuck in a relationship that brings him misery simply because he has grown “weary” of his wife. The play suggests that the only way to perform nonchalance about cuckoldry is to do so from a position of desperation.

In addition, Sir John’s invocation of Othello complicates the matter. Sir John invokes Othello’s early philosophy on jealousy in the manner of someone who has only read or seen the first two acts of the play, someone who has stopped reading or watched before Othello is driven mad with jealousy. Othello rejects jealousy, but the play suggests that such a rejection is unrealistic—that a man’s natural response, no matter how destructive those impulses might be, is to be jealous. Sir John’s echoing of Othello’s sentiments suggests an element of naiveté about his own potential to reject jealousy. Ultimately, the play, which was written significantly after the period I associate with a shift toward sympathy, expresses at least some cynicism about this new potential performance of cuckoldry.

What do I mean by performance of cuckoldry? As we shall see, cuckoldry was a surprisingly public enterprise during the Restoration and early eighteenth century (and, of course, even before). The factor that most distinguishes the different performances of cuckoldry is the extent to which self-fashioning of his role is available to the cuckold; it is determined by the

amount of passivity with which the cuckold must submit to ridicule or the amount of autonomy he can achieve in pursuing sympathy and freedom from the traditional meaning attached to cuckoldry. Within the body of cuckold performances are instances that I will categorize as passive, transitional, and active. Passive performances align most easily with more traditional (less sympathetic) treatments of cuckoldry. These performances are inflexible; they cannot accommodate what I see as the hegemonic shift toward a more sympathetic treatment of cuckolds and so become obsolete as other forms of performance become available. Transitional performances are flexible enough to accommodate the shift toward more sympathy; they allow for the cuckold to play a passive, traditional role but also allow him the freedom to shape his performance (for example, to a more active role that allows self-fashioning) in order to reflect changing cultural attitudes. Active performances, in contrast allow for (or even demand) self-fashioning on the part of the cuckold or go so far as to negate that he has any real role to play as a result of his wife's infidelity. The line between transitional and active performances is difficult to draw because transitional performances are those that are able to respond to hegemonic shifts, while the active performances are made possible by that shift. I do not mean to assert that the movement from passive to active performances is in any way strictly linear. For example, *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Rover* (1677) were first performed only two years apart and yet, as we shall see, contain vastly different representations of the performance of cuckoldry.

If we begin to reassess instances of cuckoldry with the assumption that they function not just as a trope to increase humor in a given text, at least some of the treatments become an opportunity for negotiating a nexus of overlapping cultural concerns: the foundations of successful marriage, the nature of female sexual desire, and the boundaries of acceptable masculine behavior. As a testing ground for this possibility, we can reevaluate assumptions that

have been made about familiar plays—assumptions about treatments of cuckoldry that otherwise seem transparent. We can see the opportunities associated with reevaluating the treatment of cuckoldry as hegemonically stable during this period in Dagny Boebel’s otherwise insightful “In the Carnival World of Adam’s Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn’s *Rover*.” Boebel’s discussion of cuckoldry is hardly central to her point, but it does provide us an opportunity see if a reading that assumes a stable and traditional attitude toward cuckoldry holds up to the actual attitudes evident within the text. In her essay, Boebel discusses Willmore’s fate as a potential cuckold; as his future wife Hellena and he go through their proviso scene, Hellena promises to be “inconstant,” a label that insinuates that she will one day make Willmore a cuckold. Although it is entirely possible to understand Hellena’s assertion to be a joke, Boebel chooses to interpret her statement as a serious one. Boebel’s reading of Willmore’s acceptance of his fate occurs within the framework of an unsympathetic, traditional approach to cuckoldry. She states, “He has no choice, however, but to inhabit the topsy-turvy world—Adam’s garden—he had earlier idealized. Whereas Willmore had planned to be the gardener—the planter of horns...he will be, in fact, if we are to take Hellena’s taunts and his proclamation of constancy seriously, the ground in which they are planted.”⁵¹ The first important matter we must deal with is that Willmore does, indeed, have a choice. Willmore freely chooses to enter into a marriage that could potentially make him a cuckold (granted, he has a more than generous financial incentive to do so). This choice, in and of itself, should alert us to a nontraditional stance toward cuckoldry. In marrying Hellena, Willmore has, indeed, made a move from hopeful cuckold-maker to potential cuckold. This move, if Willmore adhered to the traditional view of cuckolds, would be nothing short of devastating, but Willmore does not adhere to this system. Willmore cannot be (and, as I am

⁵¹ Dagny Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's *Rover*," in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Catherine Quinsey (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky, 1996), 68.

about to argue, is not) hurt by the ideological system that he rejects. In pursuing her idea of reversal, Boebel chooses to extend the gardening metaphor from earlier in her essay: “As earth, he is in the female position. Hellena is on top. Willmore is metaphorically where Blunt has been literally after Lucetta robs him and drops him into the sewer.”⁵² This assertion, especially its transition from soil to sewage, is alarmingly extreme. Boebel creates an unsettling link between Blunt and Willmore that is made incongruous by the resolution of the play. Blunt ends up duped, humiliated, and alone at the end of the play, whereas Willmore ends up married to his witty counterpart, the heroine of the play, who is young, beautiful, and brings with her an astounding fortune. These fates do not warrant the juxtaposition that Boebel makes in her assertion. Boebel describes Willmore’s position at the end of the play as a “reversal;” whereas there is a reversal in that Willmore has found himself in a new role—the cuckold maker is now the potential cuckold—he hardly seems bothered by it. Hellena openly acknowledges her potential (or intention) for inconstancy in their proviso scene, and Willmore accepts it with the same equanimity that he accepts the horned men that parade through the carnival night at the beginning of the play.

Willmore provides a model of a highly practical response to female infidelity. This attitude is not only apparent at the end of the play, but is actually introduced almost at the same moments in which Willmore himself is introduced. As the cavaliers, Willmore and Belvile, are first beginning to enjoy the carnival atmosphere in Naples they witness a strange two-part procession. The first part involves the “Roses for every month” who are “women dressed as courtesans.”⁵³ In light of the use of costumes and mistaken identity throughout the play, there is no way to know for certain whether the women are actually courtesans or simply taking

⁵² Boebel, “In the Carnival World of Adam,” 68.

⁵³ Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, ed. Anne Russell, 2nd ed. (New York: Broadview, 1999), I.ii.75.

advantage of the freedom associated with carnival to enjoy the experience of masquerading as courtesans. As the men stand admiring the roses and jesting about the likelihood of enjoying the women, they are surprised by the masculine contingent following the roses: “Two men dressed all over with horns of several sorts” (I.ii.83). In response to this sight, Belvile comments, “Oh the fantastical rogues, how they’re dressed! Tis a satire against the whole sex” (I.ii.102-103). Belvile understands the horned men in the way we would expect him to; when he sees men and horns together, he assumes the gesture is a satire at the expense of men—“against the whole sex.” In fact, he takes the traditional view to its furthest logical understanding that horns satirize all men, not simply the one wearing them (figuratively and metaphorically). Wilmore takes an opportunity to make a nationalistic jest about the frequency of cuckoldry in Italy: “Is this a fruit that grows in this warm country?” (I.ii.104). Belvile continues the nationalistic discussion of cuckoldry when he observes: “Yes, tis pretty to see these Italians start, swell, and stab at the word ‘cuckold,’ and yet stumble on horns on every threshold” (I.ii.105-106) Though these men, presumably Italians, have incorporated horns into their carnival jest, we can gather from Belvile’s commentary about dueling (“start, swell, and stab”) caused by the accusations of cuckoldry the Italian attitude is no more congenial about cuckoldry than that of the British. Wilmore departs from the predictable trajectory of the conversation when he expresses admiration for the men’s jest: “I like these sober grave ways: ‘tis a kind of legal authorized fornication, when the men are not chid for’t, nor the women despised, as amongst our dull English” (I.ii.112-115). Wilmore admires the practicality of an approach to sex that does not attempt to assign blame (within a sexual double standard or otherwise). Whereas I am suggesting that Wilmore’s stance is practical, I am not asserting it is one that Behn was advocating at this stage. Wilmore’s attitude, practical though it may be, is not socially tenable; Wilmore’s

sympathy for (or admiration of) the cuckolds is associated with a license to fornicate. Willmore assumes that to wear horns contentedly is to do so in the general service of indiscriminate promiscuity.

In accepting his possible future as a cuckold and thus, actively constructing his identity as a cuckold, Willmore is able to remove the anxiety associated with that fate.⁵⁴ In accepting the possibility of his future wife's infidelity, Willmore no longer has to worry about the events that will occur in the future. Willmore's performance is probably one of the most straightforward that I will describe in this essay. Willmore is, of course, a fictional character—a cavalier ship captain—who ends up marrying a beautiful heiress. In rejecting the possibility of becoming a victim of women's sexuality, Willmore removes his own capability to be victimized. Of course, as a fictional character, he can afford to reject the onus of cuckoldry with the nonchalance that he does. Real men, and even other fictional men, did not have such an easy time of their own performances of cuckoldry.

Cuckoldry, in its focus on the male victims rather than the female transgressors (or the men with whom they transgress), calls attention to a problematic form of masculinity. Calling the cuckolds "victims" is a convenient, but misleading way to label them.⁵⁵ One of the obstacles to the shift I have suggested is the culture's reliance on the assumption that cuckolds were, in one way or another, the cause of their fate. The system of categorizing cuckolds is suggestive of the manner in which the blame was meted out and justified. There was a surprisingly complex system of categorizing cuckolds, and an individual's place within the taxonomy often went far in

⁵⁴ Behn avoids any practical testing of this attitude in her sequel to *The Second Part of the Rover* (ca. 1681) by the beginning of which Hellena has been killed off and thus denied the chance to make Willmore a cuckold.

⁵⁵ James T. Henke, in *Gutter Life and Language in the Early "Street" Literature of England: A Glossary of Terms and Topics Chiefly of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1988) cites a list of eight types of cuckolds from *The Cobler of Canturburie* (1590,1608): cuckold machomite, cuckold lunaticke, cuckold patient, cuckold incontinent, cuckold by consent, cuckold by act of Parliament, cuckold innocent (72-73).

establishing their level of victimhood. *Hey for Horn Fair: The general Market of England, Or Room for Cuckolds* (1674), for example, lists nine different types of cuckolds: kind, contented, dogged, proud, weeping, jealous, merry, pimping, and horn-mad. Jealous husbands, for example, were believed to drive their wives to adultery because of their unreasonable behavior and lack of trust. Pimping cuckolds, on the other hand, encouraged their wives to cheat for monetary, social, or political gain.⁵⁶ Whether he was a victim or not, the most passive individual in the triangle of adultery, the cuckold, had the most crucial performance once his status was known. I refer to the cuckold here as passive in the sense that he is not actually involved in the intercourse that ultimately leads to his identification as a cuckold. Many people believed that, although the cuckold did not actually take part in the act that leads him to be cuckolded, his actions in his marriage could significantly increase his likelihood of becoming a cuckold; the cuckold would then be active in the process that led to his “horning.”

Additionally, in describing cuckoldry as “performative” I do not mean that the roles cuckolds played can be described as performance only in hindsight. What I mean is that men were consciously engaging with the roles they were expected to play as cuckolds—whether they passively accepted those roles or they attempted to reshape them. First and foremost, cuckoldry is performative because far from being a private matter, it was a public topic of surveillance and discussion. Pamela Allen Brown, in her book *Better a Shrew than a Sheep*, provides evidence of this public aspect of cuckoldry.⁵⁷ Brown characterizes the discovery and discussion of cuckoldry as an everyday drama for which the “most basic playing space was the neighborhood, with its

⁵⁶ I will not discuss this particular phenomenon—wife pandering—at length in this dissertation. For a discussion of its treatment in eighteenth-century drama, see Earla A. Wilputte, “Wife Pandering in Three Eighteenth-Century Plays” *SEL* 38, 3 (1998): 447-464.

⁵⁷ Although the era of Brown’s focus—the late sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries—precedes the time period of my study, the behavior she discusses is useful to provide a model of behavior prior to the shift in attitudes at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

inviting thresholds, windows, yards, and passages. These ordinary stages provided all the props and cast needed for the occasions of horning, whether festive, hostile, or both.”⁵⁸ Brown is careful to explain her examples in a manner that highlights the everyday drama involved in cuckoldry; she provides, for example, the story of Alice Mustian, who in 1614 “gave a one-woman show featuring the sexual lives of her neighbors. She set up her stage on two barrels with boards set across and charged admission of ‘pins and points’ for her performance. Acting and singing all the parts herself, she quickly attracted attention and an audience.”⁵⁹ Brown does not directly comment on cuckoldry as part of Mustian’s performance, but infidelity would undoubtedly have been a part of her exposé of the sexual life of her neighborhood. Obviously performances such as Mustian’s were probably not the norm, but she does provide an example of the level of surveillance and discussion that ostensibly private sexual behavior could receive in a public setting. Mustian’s performance is also not, obviously, a performance of cuckoldry by a cuckold. Mustian represents one of the means through which a man’s cuckoldry might be made public, the means through which his own performance would be initiated. A further investigation of cuckoldry in the neighborhood shows that it was a far more onerous and less entertaining performance for the cuckolds themselves. Evidence of this difference is provided by the everyday discovery scenes set into motion when the cuckolds realized their fates.

Discovery Scenes

Discovery scenes were probably the most complicated circumstances for performance by cuckolds. There is no doubting, however, that discovery scenes were, in fact, performative.

Laura Gowing provides an example of a discovery scene in her book *Domestic Dangers*:

⁵⁸ Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 83-4.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Better a Shrew than A Sheep*, 82.

When William Loder discovered his wife Elizabeth's adultery in 1625, he himself told their friends, endeavoring to insist on the drama of the situation, and perhaps forestall the ridicule that might accompany it. Taking them up to her chamber where she was lying in bed, he announced: 'Oh Lord, I would I had never lyved to this daye, for my wife hath undone me.' This dramatic declaration was received with a willfully innocent response: 'Hath she lost you any leases or writings?' William answered that 'she had disgraced him and stayned the house playing the whore with his tapster.'⁶⁰

Gowing is not mistaken in referring to this scene as "dramatic." She does not overtly refer to Loder's actions as performance, but it is easy to see how it could be seen as such; Loder carefully stages the revelation of his own cuckoldry and also proactively creates the drama of his own exposure as a cuckold rather than playing a part in someone else's drama. He, in essence, gets to write his own lines.

David Turner suggests that discovery scenes were a potential way to diminish the embarrassment associated with cuckoldry; they "gave deceived husbands an opportunity to act like real men and take suitable action."⁶¹ He suggests that "swift action proved that a man was not 'contented' with his cuckoldom."⁶² Meanwhile "husbands who displayed incompetence when faced with the dreadful discovery, in particular those who publicized their shame through their undisciplined reactions were stock butts of laughter."⁶³ The definition of "suitable action" is perhaps not as transparent as Turner suggests. For example, Gowing's scene of discovery does not comply with Turner's "real man" theory of discovery—rather than seeking retaliation in

⁶⁰ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 192.

⁶¹ Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, 93.

⁶² Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, 94.

⁶³ Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, 94.

some physical way, Loder seems to decide that simply gaining control over his exposure as a cuckold is enough.

Even amongst scholars who have the benefit of hindsight there is ambiguity as to what the “right” performance of discovery was. Surely the most effective (ridicule reducing) performance would depend on a number of circumstances: the likelihood of neighborhood discovery, the identity of the man with whom the wife was cheating, the nature of the evidence/discovery, the husband’s plans for future legal action, etc. What is clear, however, is that such a discovery required the husband to make conscious choices as to how he would perform the role of cuckold. The sheer amount of flexibility in his choices allowed the cuckold to shape a performance that was appropriate for the situation and cultural climate—whether it demanded a proactive performance as Gowing indicates, a “real” man’s performance as Turner suggests, or the performance of a good Christian (as we will see the *Athenian Mercury* suggests around the turn of the century). With the flexibility available to the cuckolds in choosing their response to the discovery, these scenes are best described as transitional. The flexibility of performance associated with the discovery scenes provides an area in which we can foresee how a more sympathetic attitude toward cuckolds would be beneficial if not necessary. The “swift action” Turner refers to could amount to many forms of destructive and disruptive behavior: immediate violence toward the wife or lover or the issuance of a challenge to duel at a point in the future.

As with other elements of the experiences of cuckolds, discovery scenes are presented and tested on the stage. Thomas D’Urfey’s *A Fond Husband* (1677) relies entirely on the anticipation of a discovery scene as its central plot device. The play’s conceit is that Ranger (who wishes to supplant Rashley as Emilia’s lover) and Maria (Bubble’s sister) must manipulate

Bubble, described in dramatic personae as “A credulous fond cuckold,” into discovering his wife’s infidelities with Rashley (Bubble’s friend, confidant, and houseguest). Ranger angrily describes Bubble’s credulity to Maria:

Never was an intrigue carried with so much confidence; every word that spoke retain’d a double meaning; but so evident, that any animal, but a dull husband, could not fail to understand it: for they were so far from hiding their amour, that they openly confest all; only speaking in a third person for a slender security. He stood and heard it, and often would laugh heartily to hear himself notoriously abused.⁶⁴

This observation helps to skew the audience’s identification away from sympathizing with Bubble; his denseness (lack of wit) defies even the most flagrant flaunting of his wife and lover. Such witlessness cannot hope to inspire sympathy from the audience.

Bubble adds to the audience’s anticipation of the discovery scene by suggesting his possible response if faced with evidence of his wife’s cuckoldry (in essence, he previews his performance of the discovery scene for himself and the audience). Bubble anticipates, “If I do [find her dishonest], I’ll make her the ugliest in Christendom: for I’ll cut off her nose, and send her to the devil for a new-years-gift” (63). Bubble’s hypothetical rage and subsequent violence grows with every instance of failed discovery; the next yields: “I’ll be so reveng’d , the world shall tremble at it: I’ll first cut off her hair, to affront her family, then the want of a nose shall proclaim her a bawd, and the penny-pot-poets shall make ballads on her—“ (70). Ultimately, Bubble imagines her gruesome death: “ ’Sbud I’ll pinch her to death with a pair of tongs” (97).

D’Urfey sets up a series of six potential discoveries (three in the first four acts and three in rapid succession in the fifth act). Each time D’Urfey allows the anticipation of the discovery to build and then be dispersed when Emilia and Rashley foil the attempt. Each time, the

⁶⁴ Thomas D’Urfey, *A Fond Husband* (London, 1677), 28.

audience's identification with Emilia and its disdain for Bubble are further solidified. The fourth act, in fact, ends with a kind of false resolution in which Rashley celebrates their victory at having once again foiled Maria and Ranger's plans; in celebrating Rashley lavishes praise on Emilia and her wit: "Was ever plot carried thus? Sure never! Her wit has more supplied than I have thoughts, and happily they end still; and gad for my own part I shall love lying the better as long as I live for the success of this—Once more all is well, and he the cuckold still, ha, ha, ha! I must go in and laugh with her" (111). This fourth act ending provides a kind of pseudo-resolution to the play—a false ending—in which the credulous cuckold's witlessness has once and for all been defeated by his wife and her lover's wit and luck. The audience, at this point, must have been lulled into the comfortable position of laughing at Bubble and assumed that his position as the target of ridicule will continue. He has, after all, failed to catch his wife three times despite Maria and Ranger's efforts.

The final act, however, overturns these expectations and troubles the audience's comfortable identification with Emilia and her lover. The act begins with Bubble once again missing his wife in a compromising position despite Maria's best efforts—Rashley and Emilia have escaped Maria through a trapdoor; this, of course, supports the audience's assumption that Emilia will end the play with her reputation triumphantly unspotted and husband still thoroughly deceived. Ranger sets Bubble after them in the sitting room, where again, the plot seems to be working toward deceiving Bubble as Emilia has her maid Betty appear to be meeting with another servant. Finally Bubble, simply seeking out his wife to apologize yet again for not trusting her, finds her and Rashley together kissing. Bubble overhears Emilia say, "Ah, who could have the heart to leave thy blisses for such a fool, such a beast, such a dull, sordid, filthy, insipid creature as my husband," thus leaving Emilia no way of recasting the discovery as

anything other than what it is (139). Rather than setting into motion the violent acts about which he has fantasized, Bubble's plan is surprisingly civilized: "I'll go instantly and get a divorce, and spend the remainder of my life in penning a satyr against women—I'll call it, A CAUTION FOR CUCKOLDS; where I will deplorably set down my own case, and as a warning-piece for rash young men, and for the benefit of my country" (141). The violence that Bubble promises throughout the play has suddenly been dispersed by Bubble's decision to divorce.

In this sense, D'Urfey certainly must have disappointed his audience who anticipated Bubble's violent reaction to discovering his wife's infidelity. In having Bubble anticipate (if only to fantasize about) such violence, it seems D'Urfey is having Bubble react as he was expected to (in the manner, perhaps, of Turner's "real man" approach to discovery). Bubble anticipates an immediate and violent attempt to take justice into his own hands (and, more gruesomely, tongs). D'Urfey's switch at the end to the far more civilized options of the satire and divorce suggest that violence, though expected, is not an attractive option. Bubble's inclination toward violence indicates that he feels he has something to prove with his response, but his ultimate decision shifts the burden of blame from himself to Emelia (who will suffer the outcome of the divorce) and all women (who will bear the brunt of his satire). In this case, the imagined violence is unrealistic, as it never comes to pass. It is grotesquely hyperbolic and stands in stark contrast with Bubble's largely ineffectual response once he comes to actually discover his wife in flagrante delicto.

Nearly fifty years later, Susannah Centlivre's farce *A Wife Well Managed* (1724) presents one possible performance of a discovery scene—one that ends in almost shocking violence. The plot is a fairly predictable one: Lady Pisalto lusts after and attempts to arrange an assignation with her priest, Father Bernardo, but her husband, Don Pisalto, intercepts the letters

and presents himself in his wife's chamber in disguise as Father Bernardo. As Lady Piscalto moves to embrace him, the stage directions suggest that Don Piscalto "catches hold of her arms, and pulls out a rope's end, and beats her soundly, she roars all the while."⁶⁵ Don Piscalto also beats his wife's maid in the same manner, presumably for colluding with her to arrange to assignation. Despite his rage, in a turn that might be inexplicable in a full length play, Don Piscalto (in a matter of moments) goes from threatening his wife with a dagger in order to make her confess her attempted infidelity ("Then I must fetch your speech with this [dagger]") to forgiving Lady Piscalto with the exhortation that if she is ever caught in such circumstances again, she can "expect no pardon"—presumably insinuating that she will forfeit her life to the dagger that he is still holding (22).

Carlos Gomez observes that *A Fond Husband* "is apparently farcical."⁶⁶ Gomez attempts, as many have before him, to understand the relation of farcical drama to serious, satirical purpose. Gomez suggests that in the case of *A Fond Husband*, considering the casting could lead to an understanding of the texts reception: "We should bear in mind that Bubble, the cuckolded husband, was played by the comedian James Nokes, who probably enhanced the unrealistic quality of the script."⁶⁷ Although Gomez notes that Robert Hume rejected the play as potentially satirical because it was too "nonsensical," he himself concludes, "The stage is crowded with fools, but in spite of its farcical nature, the play does have potential as an exposure of serious issues, the tyranny of husbands included."⁶⁸ The difficulty in determining the purpose—if there is one—of this violence is the humor associated with it. Presumably the audience was expected to laugh at the outburst of violence on the stage. Does the audience's

⁶⁵ Susannah Centlivre, *A Wife Well Managed* (London, 1724), 14.

⁶⁶ Carlos J. Gomez, "Farcical Innocuousness Versus Morality and Satire in the Comedies of Thomas Durfey" *Sederi* 13 (2002): 80.

⁶⁷ Gomez, "Farcical Innocuousness," 80.

⁶⁸ Gomez, "Farcical Innocuousness," 80.

laughter suggest that what was occurring on the stage was acceptable? Gomez suggests that the laughter from the audience was not necessarily a signal of acceptance of what was being portrayed. Gomez notes:

Restoration audiences were often asked to laugh at the victims of physical and/or verbal abuse. Who the abused is in the play clearly matters, and he or she may deserve it, but this is not always the case. Certainly, some things are allowed in comedy which would be condemned in the real world; that is part of the spirit of the genre, especially when it moves toward farce of the carnivalesque.⁶⁹

Of course, the scene Centlivre writes into *A Wife Well Managed* is not in the most technical sense a discovery scene; Lady Pisalto herself admits that she has not actually managed to wrong Don Pisalto (because of his intervention, she has wronged him “tho’ but in thought”⁷⁰) Obviously, however, this scene functions as a version of discovery in which the husband’s reaction is presented and tested. The question requiring interpretation is how the audience is supposed to react to the strange combination of violence and forgiveness. What does it mean that this kind of reaction is being presented in a farce? And how is the audience to judge the appropriateness of the actions in the farce?

The function of the play as a farce certainly makes interpreting its potential message about discovery, cuckoldry, and violence less straightforward than a typical comedy. Whereas pantomimes and the other more spectacle-driven entertainments that were popular diversions on the eighteenth-century stage might alienate viewers from their usual critical response, *A Wife Well-Managed* would certainly not achieve such alienation to the same extent. Centlivre’s farce, although brief and relying on lower comedy for many of its laughs (the presence of a lascivious

⁶⁹ Gomez, “Farcical Innocuousness,” 79.

⁷⁰ Centlivre, *A Wife Well Managed*, 25.

priest, a bumbling Irish servant, etc.), revolves around an episode lifted from standard comedy. Play-goers would have been familiar with a wife's attempts to cuckold her husband and the complications that arise therein from any number of full-length plays; we must assume then that they would have used similar reception strategies despite the label of "farce."

The aspect of *A Wife Well-Managed* that distinguishes it from almost any full-length play is the burst of violence that is exhibited on stage. Whereas some husbands might verbally anticipate their own violent response to a discovery scene (as is the case in *The Fond Husband*, for example) that violence is not actually enacted. The expectation of physical humor within a farce actually allows Centlivre to display an aspect of cuckold culture that otherwise might not be literally displayed. Presumably the audience would have laughed at Lady Piscalto's beating, but the nature of the laughter need not be entirely uncritical or insignificant. Certainly much would depend on the manner in which the beating was acted; the reliance of farce on physical humor suggests that more likely than not the violence of the moment would be exaggerated and hardly representative of real violence. The traditional farcical representation of domestic violence—Punch and Judy—might be a comparable version of this type of enactment of violence. The audience's laughter could simply be inspired by the fact that Don Piscalto's response is laughable; it is an example of overreaction that makes his character ludicrous. On the other hand, the laughter that Don Piscalto inspires might suggest the tension and anxiety reducing laughter of an audience faced with a comical version of a very real cultural problem. I would like to suggest, however, that farce can show us behaviors that are laughable—and universally so. Don Piscalto's rage and violence is laughable, and, as the abrupt ending of the play suggests, untenable.

In James Miller's *The Picture* (1745), the untenable plight of the cuckold is highlighted by a notable amount of reflection of the part on the suspected cuckold himself. Mr. Dotterel's anticipation of the outcome to his suspected cuckolding incorporates many of the aspects of cuckolding culture discussed in this chapter: "Must thou be forked at, as thou passest along the streets? Must thou be the subject of all the ballad-makers of Grub-street, and hang dangling upon a string against Bedlam-wall? Must thou be portraited with all thy honourable branches about thee, like a tree in a great pedigree, and then be past up in coblers stalls?" (19). Mr. Dotterel accounts for the varying ways in which cuckolds could be humiliated within the culture—in particular the first, "be[ing] forked at" would probably be the most popular. A mild form of charivari (discussed below), Mr. Dotterel assumes that his neighbors will know about his horns and remind him of them constantly. It is perhaps important to note that Mr. Dotterel does not seem to anticipate personal shame or a sense of having failed his wife; his anxieties seem to solely be attributable to public forms of humiliation.

Mr. Dotterel is faced with several interactions with his suspected rival to his wife's affections. Struggling with what he perceives as a necessity for (violent) action on his part, he becomes frustrated with his complete lack of courage to confront him: "But here stand I with my arms across, like a poor sneaking cuckoldly fool as I am, and let the rascal pass after all. I—I—I shou'd have rais'd the neighbourhood upon him, and had him laid by the heels, for a pick-pocket as he is, of a married man's honour" (24). Even in imagining taking action, Mr. Dotterel fantasizes about passively confronting his supposed cuckold-maker; he imagines rousing the neighborhood for them to take action. Of course, his horrified imagination has already provided him with the possible consequences of making the issue public: forked fingers, ballads, effigies, and horned portraits. Some of play's humor comes from the dramatic irony of Dotterel's

struggle with himself (we know that Heartly is innocent of having cuckolded Dotterel), but some of it must also have come from the audience's amusement at Dotterel's cowardice. In a scene that seems unusual in a play that is most easily aligned with farce (one act with a heavy reliance on physical humor), Miller allows Dotterel an extended soliloquy on the confusion he faces in deciding how to act on his suspicion of being cuckolded:

No man can sit down with patience under such affronts, without being a mere sot, a post. [*Is going, but returns again.*] Yet hold thee, a little, Timothy—Softly, softly, methought he look'd like a bloody minded fellow, and adad! Who knows but he may lay me one worse upon my back, than he has upon my brow? I own I cannot abide your choleric people. I am not altogether for beating, for fear of being beat. My honour tells me I ought to revenge.—But let my honour say what it pleases, it is no small praise to bear affronts well, Where lies the great mischief of it? Can my wife's gambols put a leg or an arm out of joint? Or can my horns spoil my periwig? A pox on the doctor, I say, that first invented this imaginary disease! That ever it should enter into people heads that the honour of the wisest man shou'd stand upon so frail a bottom as that of a wife! If they are led in any mischief, it all falls upon our heads. They play the fool, and we wear the cap and bells. Have we not a thousand accidents that happen to us in spite of our teeth? Quarrels, law-suits, losses, poverty and diseases; are not these plagues enough, without creating imaginary evils? I am now my own man again, and, and laugh at all my wife can do. 'tis many an honest man's fortune, now-a-days, to see his wife—and be forc'd to win and say nothing. And yet, shame is a damn'd thing. Shame! Shame! Now, for all my philosophy, my passion is rising again.—I feel it, I feel it, and some brave action will ensue.—it is too much to bear—to be such a rascal as I am—it is too much.—I'll find him out, and tell

him what a cuckold he has made me; and perhaps he may beat me into valour enough to kill him. I wish he may. Mean while the world may see what a villain he is. (26-27).

Dotterel's speech contains many of the arguments that appear, for example, in more serious locales like *The Athenian Mercury*. The thought processes in Dotterel's soliloquy becomes a confluence of many of the attitudes toward cuckoldry available at the time. Although the struggle occurs to a character we must accept as risible—a cowardly grocer who has become a member of the nouveau riche and has social hopes far beyond his capabilities—the struggle itself cannot be dismissed. What makes this particular iteration of the argument somewhat difficult to interpret is that it is voiced by a man who is a self-identified coward. By putting the soliloquy's later moments of philosophy on the nature of blame in the mouth of a coward, does Miller suggest Dotterel's sentiments are those that only a coward would accept? Does the sentiment have any validity outside of Dotterel's cowardice? One must seriously question if a man's reluctance to attack another in public is cowardice or commonsense.

When it comes to an actual confrontation, Dotterel fails to find the valor necessary to call Heartly to account for his supposed actions. Armed with a sword and seeking Heartly, he mutters to himself, "My anger is up now, and wants Action. My Choler is upon the grand Paw, and if I shou'd meet him now, Blood, Blood must be the Consequence. His Death—nothing shall hinder me—it is resolv'd—wherever I find the Dog, I'll dispatch him the Moment—this Sword shall pierce his Heart, and—" (28-29). When he finally (accidentally) finds Heartly he avoids conflict and reproaches himself: "What a poor, sneaking, cuckoldly, chicken-hearted Puppy thou art, to bear all this, and not kill him!" (29). The resolution of the play, in which the Dotterels are brought back together and their conflict is clarified as a miscommunication, suggests that Mr. Dotterel's cowardice has saved most of those involved in the action a great deal of heartache.

Dotterel's reluctance to act on his supposition (even if it is inspired by cowardice) is the only response that yields a happy resolution. The ambiguity of Dotterel's motivations suggests a reluctance, however, on the theater's part to relinquish entirely the cuckold as a figure of ridicule while simultaneously resisting violence as a solution.

Charivari

The flexibility available to the cuckold in instances of discovery becomes more obvious when contrasted with the rigid inflexibility of more traditional performances of cuckoldry—perhaps best embodied by the charivari rough ridings. Martin Ingram describes the charivari as “a set of popular customs, variants of which have existed in many parts of Europe over many centuries, which characteristically involved a noisy, mocking demonstration usually occasioned by some anomalous social situation or infraction of community norms.”⁷¹ The most spectacular example of charivari is the “rough (or skimmington) ride.” Although the targets of rough ridings were most often men who allowed their wives to scold or even beat them, Ingram comments, “It was conventionally assumed that a man who allowed himself to be beaten by his wife was inevitably also a cuckold. Simple cuckoldry was itself, sometimes, the occasion of charivaris.”⁷² In general, a rough riding involved the henpecked husband (who might be married to a scold [a verbally abusive wife], a physically abusive wife, and/or an unfaithful wife) being placed on a horse and being led in a procession. The procession would include individuals who would bang on pots and pans and otherwise attempt to make as much noise as possible to announce the

⁷¹ Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music and the ‘Reform of Popular Culture’ in Early Modern England” *Past and Present* 105 (Nov. 1984) : 81.

⁷² Ingram, “Ridings,” 86-87. James Turner is less cautious than Ingram in aligning the men being punished during the ridings with cuckoldry: “The ‘riding’ or antiprocession, displaying those who transgress the laws of gender in a public ritual at once humiliating and triumphant. The dominant wife and timid husband—inevitably branded a cuckold—were forced to ride backwards on a wretched horse” (32). *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002).

presence of the rider. Spectators tended to become involved in the procession; they jeered at the rider, made obscene gestures, and threw various forms of filth.⁷³ Other than these general characteristics, the ridings were surely unique depending on the local customs and the ingenuity of those involved. Although the superficial purpose of the rough riding was to shame a man who failed to fulfill his masculine duties (and at times to shame the woman who proved his better), Ingram asserts that there was another purpose to these events: “The explosive laughter of charivaris represented a cathartic release of tensions built up by Everyman’s experience of the day-to-day conflicts between the dictates of the patriarchal ideal and the infinite variety of husband/wife relations.”⁷⁴ In this sense, the male subject of the rough riding becomes a festive form of scapegoat, who is ultimately humiliated in order to bear the burden of the pressure that his fellow men felt under patriarchal expectations. The men in the audience must have experienced a two-fold awareness when it came to these ridings; while they got to enjoy the festive nature of the occasion and the opportunity to laugh at another’s misfortune, they also must have been reminded that they could easily become the next subject of the rough riding.⁷⁵

The charivari are important because they represent a performance of cuckoldry, as involuntary as it might be. In *Customs in Common*, E.P. Thompson suggests that “the forms are dramatic: they are a kind of ‘street theatre.’ As such, they are immediately adapted to the

⁷³ Ingram, “Ridings,” 86. The most obvious link between the rough ridings and cuckoldry is the presence of horns during the event: “rams’ horns and bucks’ horns... were then and there lifted up and shown” (qtd. 82). The presence of horns during the rough riding is probably a carryover of the practice of hanging horns outside a cuckold’s house (82).

⁷⁴ Ingram, “Ridings,” 98. Elizabeth Foyster suggests that the relative rarity of events like the charivari and the cucking stool makes the ubiquity of ballads concerning marital discord seem a more likely source of an understanding of the general experience of the rural and urban public (6). “A Laughing Matter? Marital Discord and Gender Control in Seventeenth-Century England” *Rural History* 4, no. 1 (1994): 5-21. As ballads are not performative in the manner I have delineated earlier in this chapter (they demand no performance on the part of the cuckold, although they were, in fact, performed), I have excluded ballads from the scope of this chapter. Foyster does offer some illuminating commentary on the nature of the laughter involved in ballad performances.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the carnival nature of the Charivari, see James Turner’s *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

function of publicizing scandal.”⁷⁶ No matter how good natured the laughter involved in the rough ridings, they must be characterized as an event that punishes cuckoldry. In fact, Thompson goes so far as to diminish the possibility of good humor in order to emphasize the seriousness of the event: “It announces disgrace, not as a contingent quarrel with neighbors, but as a judgment of the community. What had before been gossip or hostile glances becomes common, overt, stripped of the disguises which, however flimsy and artificial, are part of the currency of everyday intercourse.”⁷⁷ Elizabeth Foyster additionally suggests, “The fundamental purpose of charivari was penal not festive, and any regulatory effect upon the behavior of its audience was chiefly the result of witnessing the punishment and humiliation of the couple involved, with laughter as a mere by-product.”⁷⁸ Ultimately, the punitive display of the rough ridings left men with what seems to be little, if any, agency in their own fates or roles as cuckolds. The rough ridings allowed for nothing but passive performance; the cuckolds had no real opportunity to resist or reason with the crowd. Even the milder, less spectacular charivari, such as nailing horns to doors and gates or neighbors pretending that the cuckold had actual horns, are examples of performance being pressed upon the cuckold. The only practical response to any form of the charivari was submission. Any other response, especially protest, would almost undoubtedly lead to more ridicule. The rough ridings, as one of the most traditional forms of performances of cuckoldry, are also unsurprisingly the least flexible in their accommodation to the evolution of a sympathetic attitude toward cuckoldry.

⁷⁶ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1991), 478.

⁷⁷ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 487.

⁷⁸ Foyster, “Marital Discord,” 6.

The Country Wife

The sadism inherent in the charivari has a corollary on the stage in *The Country Wife*, a play I would not hesitate to label the consummate cuckolding comedy. The premise of the play is that Mr. Horner creates gossip about himself being sexually incapacitated after a French treatment for a sexually transmitted disease. In broadcasting that he is no longer capable of intercourse, Horner hopes that his peers will feel comfortable allowing him access to their wives, which they do without hesitation. Although Horner's plan goes spectacularly well for the first four acts, the fifth act unsurprisingly yields complications that must be resolved to avert disaster. Horner finds himself in a maelstrom that could lead to the discovery of his deception. One of his lovers, Margery Pinchwife, has tricked her husband into delivering her into Horner's hands. Simultaneously, a dinner party composed of his other lovers and their husbands and guardians is gathering downstairs. The women not only fear that their honorable reputations will be compromised, but they are also growing jealous as each one realizes that she is not the sole object of Horner's attentions. The tension comes to a head when the highly suspicious and jealous Mr. Pinchwife (who has not heard the rumors of Horner's "unmanning") reacts explosively when he finds that he has delivered not his sister, but his wife, into Horner's hands. Pinchwife offers to draw his sword, and when Sir Jasper (who has also been unknowingly cuckolded by Horner) asks him why he is reacting in this manner, he responds, "Why, my wife has communicated, sir, as your wife may have done too, sir, if she knows him, sir."⁷⁹ This comment sets off a scene of confusion until the Quack, who has assisted Horner in spreading the rumor of his "unmanning," enters to confirm the lie that he has created. The play ends with Alithea, Pinchwife's sister, giving him the lesson that he has so needed throughout the entire play; too late, she tells him, "Your wife is yet innocent, you see; but have a care of too strong an

⁷⁹ William Wycherley, *The County Wife*, ed. Ken Bush (Oxford: Cambridge UP, 1997), V.IV.324-325.

imagination, lest like an overconcerned, timorous gamester, by fancying an unlucky cast, it should come” (V.IV.420-423). As Alithea gives her version of the popular adage that “cuckolds make themselves,” the play seems to have found a sort of harmonious resolution—the husbands still have their deluded belief in their wives’ fidelity, the women maintain the illusion of honor, and Horner has avoided any real repercussions for his actions.

At the conclusion of the play, however, this resolution is unsettled. As the last lines of dialogue, Pinchwife states, “For my own sake fain I would all believe; Cuckolds, like lovers should themselves deceive”(V.IV.454-455). This conscious decision on Pinchwife’s part to believe in his wife’s innocence—despite the fact that he obviously still has doubts—unsettles the previously harmonious resolution. The resolution is further unsettled by what follows Pinchwife’s lines—“A Dance of the Cuckolds”—performed to the tune of “Cuckolds All [in] a Row.” We have to imagine the dramatic irony involved in how this scene must have appeared to the audience. The audience has followed the players through a potentially explosive climax of the play and has seen what they believe to be a complete resolution of the play’s conflicts. Pinchwife, however, becomes a loose end. Still harboring doubts about his wife, he must consent to watch a cuckold’s dance. During this last scene, the audience watches a group of men and women (many of whom are now entangled sexually) watch a dance that comments on all of their roles within the plays. The women are watching a figurative dance of what they have made their husbands. Horner, the cuckold-maker, is watching a dance of cuckolds that he has made, literally and figuratively. On one level he watches the dance that he offers to his guests for entertainment, but on another level he has just finished watching the dance of cuckolds—Sir Jasper and Pinchwife—that he has quite literally created. This ending represents a fairly sadistic application of a passive role on the cuckolds. Sir Jasper and Pinchwife are not given a chance to shape the

role that they will play as cuckolds; instead, they become a form of entertainment for the double audience—the one on the stage with them and the one watching them from the seats in the theater—both of which are composed of people who know far more about the situation than they could ever hope (or probably want) to know.⁸⁰ Ultimately what most links the attitudes implicit in the rough ridings and *The Country Wife* is the sadistic entertainment of those involved (other than, of course, the cuckolds).

Horn Fair

Perhaps the most important step that occurs in this process of hegemonic negotiation is Horn Fair. Unlike the discovery scenes and the charivari rides, Horn Fair was an annual, planned event that occurred outside of individual neighborhoods and communities. As we will see, Horn Fair has little to do with actual individual cuckolds or even with actual cuckoldry. What Horn Fair does, however, is align Christianity and cuckoldry in a manner that will become important in the everyday life of cuckolds outside of the fairgrounds.

Accounts of Horn Fair are scattered at best. The accounts we do have leave much to the imagination. The origin of Horn Fair is repeated in almost every source that describes it. King

⁸⁰ Wycherley's "Dance of the Cuckolds" has garnered critical attention in several different arguments about *The Country Wife*. Peggy Thompson suggests, in her reading of the play as a commentary on female sexuality, "From one perspective, of course, Horner seems anything but a failed antagonist of female sexuality. By the play's end, he has been granted the favors of several women, and his final speech proclaims a continued willingness to be 'despised' by the men in order to be 'priz'd' by the ladies (5.4.415-18). Wycherley also continues to remind us, however, that the forbidden fruit this sacrifice brings Horner may well be bitter, if not poisonous. The last visual of the play is "A Dance of Cuckolds," victims of women's insatiability and deception" (112). "The Limits of Parody in *The Country Wife*" *Studies in Philology* 89:1 (1992): 100-114. H.W. Matalene acknowledges the ambiguity of the function of the dance: "The 'Dance of the Cuckolds,' the significance of which has never been precisely established, might plausibly be staged as the celebration of the cuckolded Pinchwife and Fidget households at having safely escaped Horner's involvement with them. The dance could be the means by which everyone but Horner leaves the stage, whereupon, ostracized, in the final couplets, he discover that maturing as a ladies' man in fashionable London means abandoning homosociality" (409-410). "What Happens in *The Country Wife*" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 22, no. 3 (1982): 395-411. What we do know for certain is that the Dance of Cuckolds was a country dance of two couples also referred to as "Cuckolds All a Row," the lyrics of which can be found in many permutations in song books of the eighteenth century.

John, in passing through Charlton comes across a Miller's wife with whom he decides he would like a dalliance. The Miller catches the King at a point in the commission of the seduction (at which point varies throughout the origins) and threatens the King until he promises that he can have all of the land he can see before him. The condition of this gift however, is that the Miller must walk around once a year throughout his new land wearing horns upon his head, announcing himself a cuckold. This event was celebrated with a fair outside of Charlton on St. Luke's Day (October 18th). One of the most comprehensive accounts of the event comes from Aubry de la Mottraye in his account of his travels in Great Britain (1732). Mottraye describes the Horn Fair he attended in 1721 as "rather a Farce or a Maskerade" that "begins with a Cavalcade of 20 or 30 Persons well dress'd and well mounted."⁸¹ Mottraye goes on to describe the procession, which met at Cuckold's-Point and proceeded to the fairgrounds. During this procession, Mottraye notes that the path was "border'd with an Aboundance of People, who laugh at one an other [sic.] calling names every Body that they see and giving them the most vexatious language they can think of" (368). This behavior must have shocked Mottraye because he specifies that it occurred "without the least Regard to or Distinction of Persons, Sexs, Ranks, and Dignities" and he goes on to conjecture that "they wouldn't spare the King if he came thereto" (368). Once the procession reaches the fairground "they eat, drink, dance &c" (368).

In his *A Tour thro the whole island of Great Britain* (1748), Daniel Defoe expresses outrage at what he witnessed at Horn Fair:

The rudeness of which in a civilized, well-governed Nation, may well be said to be unsufferable. The Mob at that time takes all liberties, and the Women are eminently impudent that Day; as if it was a time that justified the giving themselves a Loose to all

⁸¹ Aubry de La Mottraye, *Voyages en anglois et en francais d' A. de la Mottraye, en diverses provinces et places de la Prusse ducale et Royale, de la Russie, de las Pologne etc...* (Hague, 1732), 367.

manner of Indecency without any Reproach, or without incurring the Censure such behavior would deserve at another.⁸²

Whereas Defoe's comments are not seemingly meant to comment on the humor of cuckoldry in general, it could easily be read as such. The general unruliness of the humor associated with Horn Fair and the culture associated with cuckoldry are closely related. Defoe's description of Horn Fair suggests a general dislike of cuckolding humor and a rejection of such humor as disruptive to a "civilized, well-governed nation" and as providing an opportunity for women to be impudent. According to Pamela Allen Brown, Defoe's concerns about women and Horn Fair were not entirely unfounded. She suggests, to those who question why cuckolds were seen as an object of satire rather than pity that women's place in the audience of that satire cannot be discounted: "This view [pitying cuckolds]...fails to take the gender of hearers and tellers into account or to frame such jesting in relation to the harsh subordination under which women lived. Considering the grinding inequalities of legal wife beating, scold bridling, and the double standard, some women may have found the spectacle of the horned husband more deserving of laughter and pity."⁸³ In light of this assertion, Brown suggests that women had a vested interest in the fun of an event like Horn Fair, despite the fact that it seemed to rely on a dim view of their virtue: "Although it seems counterintuitive that women would celebrate symbols that impugn their sexual honor, in fact this famous fair was a carnival for, and dominated by, women."⁸⁴

Tolerance for Horn Fair decreases as the years go by. In *The Curiosities, natural and artificial of Great Britain* [1775], the people attending Horn Fair are referred to as "a meer mob" and "the dregs" of the area surrounding the fairground "who indulge themselves ...in every

⁸² Daniel Defoe, *A Tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain*. (London, 1748), 134.

⁸³ Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep*, 85.

⁸⁴ Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep*, 91.

infamous and licentious rudeness, which is a shame to a civilized country.”⁸⁵ In the decades that have passed between this account and Defoe’s, it seems that the authorities have interfered with the celebrations and that they have begun to be more controlled; the author admits that “through the vigilance of the magistrates and others it is not quite so disorderly as some years ago.”⁸⁶ By 1779, the author of *The Modern Universal British Traveller*, describes the characteristic debauchery in the past tense: “Horn-Fair, where the lower sort of people from London used to commit disorders and indecencies, but by the vigilance of the magistrates, of late years such riots have been prevented.”⁸⁷

As the years go by and Horn Fair becomes more and more distanced from its origins, cuckoldry seems to become less and less important to the event (although certainly the persistent presence of horns must have assured that cuckoldry was never entirely forgotten). The fair itself seems to have been treated as little more than an excuse to engage in publicly sanctioned debauchery. There are, for example, no accounts of individual cuckolds being targeted during the fair (as we have seen in the rough ridings); instead accounts indicate that anyone and everyone was a target for attention during Horn Fair. Edward Ward’s 1709 account, “A Frolick to Horn-Fair with a Walk to Cuckolds-Point Thro’ Deptford and Greenwich” provides a level of detail that is omitted from many other accounts of the fair. In the course of one afternoon, the speaker manages to have a sumptuous meal, takes a boat ride to Horn Fair during which he and his female companion must dodge the ladlefuls of water and human waste that are being thrown by neighboring boats, and enjoy the actual fair while defending themselves from ladle-wielding

⁸⁵ *The curiosities, natural and artificial, of the island of Great Britain* (London, [1775]), 352.

⁸⁶ *The curiosities*, 352. One source, John Barrow’s *A New Geographical Dictionary*, s.v. “Horn Fair” (London, 1759-60), 2: n.p. actually makes a plea for something to be done about Horn Fair where “vice in all its appearances is propagated;” the author of the dictionary calls for “a speedy redress” which would involve “a suitable compensation made to the proprietor of this manor by the public, for abrogating this school of indecency.” The author is so alarmed that he suggests that it is a matter “not unworthy of the consideration of the legislature”

⁸⁷ Charles Burlington, *The modern universal British traveller; or, a new, complete and accurate tour through England, Wales, Scotland, and the neighboring islands* (London, 1779), 23.

individuals who are running through the fairground attempting to hit anyone not on their guard. All of this occurs in an atmosphere in which insults like “whore” and “rogue” pale in comparison to “brandy-fac’d, bottle-nos’d Bawdry, brimstone whore,” for example.⁸⁸ In this atmosphere, in which everyone is equally subject to insult and degradation, the targeting of individual cuckolds seems not only nearly impossible but not particularly desirable.

I believe that the most noteworthy aspects of Horn-Fair are the ones that go almost ignored by scholars: the summonses and the sermons; these documents are more intimately concerned with the concept of cuckoldry than the actual events that occurred upon the fairgrounds, and they also provide a site to seek out evidence of shifting sympathies toward cuckoldry. Unfortunately there are few examples of these documents available today, but those examples that are available offer insight into how Horn Fair could become a form of transitional performance of cuckoldry.

The first noteworthy set of documents is the summonses that were printed and posted annually. Serving as announcements for Horn Fair, these summonses have several common themes: they address the cuckolds, they request (or demand) their presence at the event, and they suggest that the cuckolds will engage in creating paths for their wives and their lovers by digging and spreading gravel prior to the actual event. The activity of preparing the pathways for the wives and their lovers itself represents a good natured acceptance of the cuckold’s fate that we have not seen in the other instances I have discussed here. Of course, this act of preparing the paths also places the responsibility for the infidelity with the cuckolds, who have literally prepared the path—a play upon the trope of cuckolds making themselves. These summonses were often accompanied by cuckold-themed ballads that narrated the events of Horn-Fair.

⁸⁸ Edward Ward, “A Frolick to Horn-Fair. With a Walk from Cuckolds-Point, Thro Deptford and Greenwich.” *The London Spy Compleat. In Eighteen parts. The first volume of the authors writing.* 2 vols. (London, 1709) 2: 210.

Although we might expect little change in these summonses, one aspect in which they vary is the tone, which shifts in level of authority and congeniality. “A General Summons for Those Belonging to the Hen-Peck’d Frigate,” for example, takes a depersonalized and anonymous stance towards summoning the cuckolds: “Your presence is required...to appear at Cuckold’s Point,” whereas the “Cuckolds All a-Row” summons is addressed from the Brethren of Master-Cuckolds to the town’s cuckolds, which creates a sense of community rather than authority.⁸⁹ The difference in tone follows through in the directions the cuckolds receive for their duties on Horn-Fair day. The former is not surprisingly more blunt in the directions: “To march in good order to the Gravel-pits, there to dig Sand and gravel for repairing the foot-ways, that your wives with their friends may have pleasure and delight in walking to Horn-Fair.”⁹⁰ The latter, however, states about the same task: “To march at the word of command, down to the Gravel pits, there to dig graves, and bury all thoughts of your Wives dishonesty, that you may then carry gravel with a peaceable conscience, to amend the Highways, that your wives (with their gallants) may walk with pleasure to Horn-Fair.”⁹¹ Although they both describe the same task, there is a subtle but important difference in these two descriptions; whereas the men in the first summons are merely being impressed into hard labor for the benefit of their wives and lovers, the cuckolds in the latter summons are benefiting from the labors. In digging the gravel pits, they bury their concerns about their wives’ actions and their place in cuckoldom. In essence, the humiliating labor of the first summons becomes a cleansing, cathartic process in the latter.

We can observe similar shifts in tone in the Horn Fair sermon. Although scholars do, on occasion, mention that there was a sermon read at every Horn Fair, we have little textual

⁸⁹ *A General Summons for those belonging to the hen-peck’d frigate*. Reprinted in *Roxburghe Ballads*, ed. J Woodfall Ebsworth, (London, 1897) repr. (New York: AMS Press, 1966): 667 and “Cuckolds all a-Row.” repr. in *The Pepys Ballads*, ed. W.G. Day (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987): Appendix I, p.10.

⁹⁰ *A General Summons*, 667.

⁹¹ *Cuckolds all a-Row*, 10.

evidence of the actual content of these sermons. Edward Ward's account notes a sermon, but not the actual topic:

Tho' it's the rudest fair in England, it begins with a Sermon; which makes another old saying good, viz. *In the name of the Lord begins all mischief*. They say the parson usually takes his text upon the Occasion out of Solomon's Proverbs; and I asking why he did so, was told, because Solomon was a cuckold-maker, and therefore, the doctrine was the fitter to be preach'd at Horn-Fair.⁹²

Although we do not have the texts of these sermons available, there is one text, *The Cuckold's sermon preach'd at Fumbler's Hall*, that is available. It is doubtful that this "sermon" was preached at the Charlton Church; it seems more likely that it was preached at the meeting place—Fumbler's Hall—for the Horn-Fair procession. Either way, the sermon preaches a surprisingly sympathetic view of cuckoldry. It begins with the epigram:

Since cuckolds all to Heaven go,
Why should we grieve for being so;
Exalt your horns, lead patient lives,
And praise the Mercies of our Wives.⁹³

This epigram forms the theme of the sermon, which goes on to advocate patience and humility in the face of cuckoldom. The circumstances under which the sermon was delivered are unfortunately obscure. The most likely function of the sermon would be satire—either against the actual sermon given at Charlton or against the prevailing attitudes about cuckoldry.

⁹² Ward, "A Frolick to Horn Fair," 221. The seriousness of this comment, as with the rest of the document, is up for speculation. How much Ward engages with irony or fictionalizes his account is not entirely clear.

⁹³ Dr. Make-Horns, "The Cuckold's sermon preach'd at Fumblers-Hall on Wednesday the 18th of October being Horn-Fair Day, before the Worshipful Society of Cuckolds and Cuckold-Makers," (London, 1704).

The flexibility of these documents lends to the transitional aspect of Horn Fair's performativity. As attitudes change toward cuckoldry, the documents that accompany Horn Fair can reflect those changes without damaging the debaucherous atmosphere of the fair itself. Horn Fair becomes a performance that allows cuckolds to shape their role as cuckolds as well as revel in at least one day of the year when everyone wore horns on their heads. In addition, the message of all cuckolds going to heaven is an important one. The linking of cuckoldry with Christianity is a message that we can begin to see cropping up in other media.

I do not mean to argue that Horn Fair is the only reason that cuckoldry is eventually placed within a Christian framework of behavior. There were undoubtedly many cultural influences that assisted in that process. The behavior called for within that framework—scorning to react physically, rejecting the taint of another's actions, and as we will see in *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, beneficent forgiveness—create a far more tenable system of behavior that must have helped to maintain peace and order. Within this framework, for example, dueling to protect one's honor is not only unnecessary, but discouraged (even sinful). Another example comes from Ingram's definition of the charivari—an act to regulate behavior in the instance of an “anomalous social situation or infraction of community norms.” The rough ridings however, must ultimately be seen as an explosive disruption to everyday neighborhood life—they destabilize even as they are meant to punish and restabilize abnormal behavior. As soon as cuckoldry is subsumed by Christianity, a new set of morals is laid over the role of cuckold.

The advice letters of the popular periodical press are the last step in the performative process I am describing in this chapter, an important step in shifting the scrutiny of cuckoldry to a lens of Christianity. David Turner states, “By the end of the seventeenth century the new periodical press began to allow deceived husbands to present alternative stories of infidelities

which challenged the clichés of cuckoldom and elicited sympathy for their circumstances.”⁹⁴ *The Athenian Mercury*, which is the first question and answer periodical to offer advice, treats the topic of cuckoldry throughout its five years of circulation (1691-1696). The advice letters are an active performance because they allow cuckolds to help in the process of fashioning a new, sympathetic attitude toward cuckoldry on their own terms. The cuckolds were allowed to write anonymously to the *Athenian Mercury* (and other periodicals that copied the *Athenian Mercury*'s format) and receive comforting reassurance that cuckoldry was not their fault. This is the only performance related to cuckoldry that places the cuckold in a position with nothing to lose and no humiliation to bear. Perhaps more importantly, the advice the cuckolds received placed it within their Christian duty to suffer cuckoldry with forbearance and grace. One individual for example, writes in to ask how a cuckold should react when he discovers his wife's infidelity. The response acknowledges that Roman law would dictate that the cuckold kill both his wife and the cuckold-maker, but ultimately advocates that “There needs be the very height of Christianity and the depth of stoicism to forgive” and suggests, “Private men have no tribunal to fly to, if the Public rights ‘em not, but that of heaven. The noblest revenge therefore would be in our Judgments, to slight and scorn the person who had been guilty of such actions, to let ‘em know we thought ‘em not worth our concern, and to trust their punishment to t’other world.”⁹⁵ This advice marks a significant change in attitudes, because it shifts the blame back on the most logical target—the wife who has broken her wedding vows. In addition, the *Athenian Mercury*'s advice shifts the expected response; no longer does the cuckold have to navigate the bewildering array of options we encounter in the discussion of the discovery scenes (the “real man” approach and the proactive revelation approach). This new advice limits the cuckold's choices to one

⁹⁴ Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, 84.

⁹⁵ *Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 2. N3. Q. 2.

simple one: be a good Christian or be a bad Christian. The onus of response has been lifted from the cuckold's shoulders.

The Athenian Mercury specifically tackles the issue of blame in its first year of publication: "God nor Nature ever required impossibilities of us; a vicious action ought be only imputed to the author, and so ought the shame and dishonor that follows it; if we expect such sentences we give now, at the Day of Judgment, we shall be deceived."⁹⁶ In reassuring cuckolds that their injustices will be righted in Heaven, the *Athenian Mercury* seriously echoes what was only flippantly expressed in the Horn-Fair Sermon: "All Cuckolds Go to Heaven." The *Athenian Mercury's* advice is a bit more onerous, however. All cuckolds will go to Heaven if they act as Christians in the face of their cuckoldry. According to the *Athenian Mercury*, this Christian response includes "slight" and "scorn" but no other forms of retribution. This advice allows for a performance that is the most radically different from the traditional performance; the cuckold is allowed to remove himself from the stage of cuckoldry all together. With a gesture toward God and Heaven, the cuckold, in essence, negates the fact that he has any role at all to play. Helen Berry acknowledges the Christian bent of the advice of the *Athenian Mercury*:

[It] condemned both male and female adulterers with equanimity, there being "no essential Evil in the Crime committed by one [sex], which is not in the others"...Here we see Dunton's periodical maintaining a closer adherence to the Ten Commandments and the tenets of Christian morality than to secular standards of the day, but which a husband's adultery was viewed less severely than a wife's.⁹⁷

As with the other types of performances of cuckoldry, this point in the ideological shift is also represented upon the stage. One of the most noteworthy examples is *The Tragedy of Jane*

⁹⁶ *Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 1 N.20 Q.8.

⁹⁷ Helen Berry, *Gender Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Athenian Mercury* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 208.

Shore (1714). Although Jane Shore's husband, the cuckold of the play, is absent and believed dead throughout most of the action (he does appear briefly in disguise as Dumont), in the final scenes he manages to take the advice given in the *Athenian Mercury* to a new level. The *Athenian Mercury* advocates that cuckolds avoid violence and acts of revenge as the Christian response to cuckoldry. William Shore, however, finds it within himself to forgive his wife, and in so doing is lauded with a description that likens him in a remarkable way to Jesus Christ. When William Shore decides to come to his wife's aid at the end of the play, he does so in the face of a decree that makes doing so treason. Further, Bellmour is unsure of the confidence with which Shore expresses his ability to forgive Jane's transgressions. Bellmour asks, "Has mercy fixed her empire there so sure,/ That Wrath and Vengeance never may return?/ Can you resume a husband's name, and bid/ that wakeful dragon, fierce resentment, sleep?"⁹⁸ In questioning William Shore in this manner, Bellmour becomes the voice of the more traditional view of cuckoldry, if only in the service of testing Shore's resolve.

After this challenge, Shore spends almost eighty lines delivering a speech in which he recounts the circumstances in which he was cuckolded (the king comes for Jane and takes her away) as well as his anguish in the aftermath of these events. William's speech ensures that the reader (or viewer) of the play knows that forgiveness is not the easy path, but that William knows it is the right path. Ultimately Shore concludes, "Hence with her past offences; They are atoned at full" (V.i.129-130). Shore's resolve is once again tested when he and Bellmour find Jane, who at this point in the play, is on the verge of death. Shore informs Jane of his intention to forgive her: "Cast every black and guilty thought behind thee,/ And let 'em never vex thy quiet more./ My arms, my heart are open to receive them,/ To bring thee back to thy forsaken home/ with tender joy, with fond, forgiving love" (V.i.323-327). Jane, however, cannot immediately

⁹⁸ Nicholas Rowe, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, V.i.53-56.

accept William's gesture of forgiveness. She suggests, in a second temptation of William, that he seek revenge upon her; Jane exhorts,

No, arm thy brow with vengeance, and appear
The minister of heav'n enquiring justice;
Array thyself all terrible for judgment,
Wrath in thy eyes, and thunder in thy voice;
Pronounce my sentence, and if yet there be
A woe I have not felt, inflict it on me. (V.i.329-334)

There is nothing subtle about the Christian overtones of Jane's suggestion. She is begging William to become the earthly hand—the "minister of heaven"—of a vengeful God. When William once again refuses to seek revenge, Jane responds by crying out,

Art thou not risen by miracle from death?
Thy shroud is fall'n from off thee, and thy grave
Was bid to give thee up, that thou might'st come
The messenger of grace and goodness to me,
To seal my peace and bless me ere I go. (V.i.349-344)

These lines startlingly reward William Shore for his forgiveness with an unmistakable parallel to Jesus. Of course, the special circumstances of Shore's reappearance after he was reported dead certainly add to the similarity, but even excluding the miraculous return, William, in his forgiveness, becomes a "messenger of grace and goodness." William's forgiveness is characterized as a sacrifice; he must, as a good Christian (or in his likeness to Jesus), sacrifice concerns about his masculinity and place within society. This sacrifice is part of the repercussions of aligning the role of the cuckold with Christian duty. The role that society

demanding a cuckold play to prove his masculinity is simply not compatible with the role the tenets of Christianity would demand that the cuckold play.

The ideological work that Rowe is engaging in throughout the creation of William Shore becomes more sharply apparent when we consider the version of the same story in *The School for Venus or Cupid Restor'd to Sight, being a History of Cuckolds and Cuckold-Makers* (1716), a collection of stories (some of which have nothing, actually, to do with cuckoldry) that tells salacious tales of British individuals (royal and common) throughout history. The anonymous author of the *School of Venus* offers an alternate version of the Shores' story that makes clear the competing narrative with which Rowe had to contend. Rowe makes important changes to the received version of the story in order to produce a Jane Shore who is virtually blameless for what occurs to her. Rowe's Jane Shore is kidnapped from her home by the King, whereas *School of Venus's* Jane plots with the king to escape William's house: the latter's Jane reveals the premeditation of her escape by sending her jewels off ahead of her as well as concocting a story about her mother's illness to excuse, at least temporarily, her absence from her husband's house (45). In addition, Rowe's William Shore survives to forgive Jane, whereas *School of Venus's* William dies penniless and alone—and stays dead: “This unhappy Man was thown into a deep melancholy by his Misfortune, and became incapable of following his Business; and to cure his distempler'd Mind went into Foreign Parts...til he had Spent all that he had. And returning Home when he though every Body had forgot him, liv'd Poor, and died Miserably in the Reign of Henry the Seventh” (46). Ultimately William Shore's return from the dead offers Rowe the chance to have him so thoroughly forgive his wife as to sacrifice his life for her—the Shores as a couple are martyred by the cruelty of the royal court.

The effort Rowe goes to in shaping the audience's response to Jane Shore can be read as anticipating resistance by an audience not ready to accept a forgiving cuckold (especially one whose forgiveness is characterized as a noble and Christian decision). By casting Jane Shore as a victim (twice over—of kidnapping and the abuse of royal power after she loses favor at court), Rowe makes William Shore's decision to forgive Jane more understandable and thus acceptable for the audience. Certainly the effort Rowe makes to ease potential reluctance becomes clear in light of the manner in which the author of the *School of Venus* revels in Jane Shore's punishment: "She acknowledged...her notorious uncleanness and declared her repentance for it. Now this mean, contemptible, helpless woman is thrown down from the palace to the prison, reduc'd from the highest seat of honour to a very low state of infamy and reproach."⁹⁹ The author takes the opportunity to editorialize Jane's behavior with his description of her as "mean, contemptible, and helpless;" the last term, "helpless," is almost certainly not introduced as an opportunity to pity her, but rather to stress the heights from which she has fallen. If anything, the lengths to which Rowe goes to alter the received version of the Jane Shore story reveals that the newly emergent attitudes I identify in this section were not immediately accepted or not accepted without reluctance; although we cannot know for sure Rowe's motivations for adapting the story in the manner he did,¹⁰⁰ they do seem to make the forgiving cuckold more palatable by closing off potential audience reactions and sympathies.

⁹⁹ Alexander Smith, *The School of Venus, or, Cupid restor'd to sight; being a history of cuckolds and cuckold-makers* (London, 1716) 1:49-50.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Helgerson provides a history of the treatment of the Jane Shore figure beginning with Sir Thomas More's contemporaneous mention in his biography, *Richard III*, and arriving at Rowe's dramatic treatment. In the context of the character's history, Rowe's version seems most closely linked with Thomas Heywood's treatment in *Edward IV*: "The play in which she first acquired the endearingly familiar name of 'Jane'" (462). Helgerson notes of Heywood's version, "She also got a brave and loving husband. From More's 'honest citizen, young, and goodly, and of good substance,' to the 'doting old and cold and foolishly jealous' husband of Chute's *Beauty Dishonored*, Master Shore had assumed almost as many guises as his wife. Heywood's Jane and Matthew Shore—he gets a first name too—are bound to one another by an intense love, a love that survives her infidelity and his jealous anger. This

All of Rowe's work to close the text did not exclude it from critical attentions and debate about Rowe's attempts to cast Jane Shore as a tragic heroine. One example of resistance comes from a dialogue represented in *The Ladies Tales: Exemplified in the Vertues and Vices of the Quality with Reflections* (1714):

I hear we are to have a Rival of *Cato* this Winter, in the Mistress of one of our Kings, and one of our Nobleman. He has chosen an Heroine said Misogamus...that till now never arose above a Penny Dogrel, or a Bartholmew-Fair [sic.] Droll...I confess (said Eumanthia) my Quarrell [sic.] to this Play is the same it was to the Fair-Penetent, in giving his Heroine not weak Failings, the unhappy Effect of violent Passions but those scandalous Crimes, that every Woman of Honour detests, and justly thinks her self incapable of committing, and therefore can never offer an Adulterous Prostitute their Pity for her Sufferings, tho' never so great and terrible; and a Subject that can by no means move out Pity, can never be proper for Tragedy. (14-15)¹⁰¹

The several voices of the dialogue are all agreement—at least on the matter of whether or not Jane Shore constitutes an appropriate subject for tragedy. There are two major elements of resistance represented in this dialogue, however, the moral and the generic (which is not to say the two are not linked). The first argument suggests that Jane Shore is simply unsuitable because she is a fallen woman, and thus should not appear as a character on the stage. The latter suggests that given the assumptions about how tragedy works (inciting sympathy from the audience

love makes Heywood's *Edward IV* a 'domestic' tragedy in a way that no other version of the story could have been." (463). "Weeping for Jane Shore" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (1999): 451-76. D.F. Rowan offers a similar history in "Shore's Wife" *SEL* 6.3 (1966): 447-64.

¹⁰¹ *The Ladies Tales: Exemplified in the Vertues and Vices of the Quality with Reflection* (London, 1714)

through identification) and what it should accomplish (moral edification), Jane Shore simply would not do.

The author of *A Review of the Tragedy of Jane Shore: Consisting of Observations of the Characters, Manners, Stile, and Sentiments* (1714) counters these views. Although entitled a “review,” the text would be better be described as an impassioned (it’s 22 pages long) defense of the play. On the matter of the appropriateness of the selection of Jane Shore as the topic of tragic genre, the author’s first justification is particularly telling given what I have already argued about Rowe’s adaptation of the story and the relationship between the Shores: “First that vice it self, tho’ the most immortal and pernicious it self, have some Abatements from common or peculiar Accidents, the strength of the Temptation, the natural Weakness of the Offender, or the Power and Influence of some other Person in the Commission of the crime.”¹⁰² The author highlights as mitigating elements the very things that Rowe alters in his attempt to repackage Jane Shore as a tragic (sympathetic) heroine.

A description of Sarah Siddons playing this role of Jane Shore in the 1780’s suggests that whatever ambivalence existed at the original production of the play, it had been by and large erased by the last decades of the century: “Women sobbed and shrieked, and men, after struggling to suppress their tears, ‘at length grew proud of indulging’ them. Before the intense appeal of Rowe’s play and Mrs. Siddons’s acting, ‘the nerves of many a gentle being gave way. . . and fainting fits long and frequently alarmed the decorum of the house.’ Sobbing, shrieking, and even fainting over a royal concubine? What’s going on here?”¹⁰³ The last questions—Helgerson’s—are important to consider. The fact that Jane Shore becomes an object of vociferous sympathy can, of course, be attributed to Rowe’s skills in writing tragedy and Ms.

¹⁰² *A Review of Jane Shore: Consisting of Observation of the Characters, Manners, Stile, and Sentiments* (London, 1714).

¹⁰³ Helgerson, “Weeping for Jane Shore,” 451-2.

Siddons' skills in playing the tragic heroine, but I believe there must have been some shift in attitudes toward adultery that prepared the audience to consider forgiveness. In particular, perhaps the most noteworthy aspect is not the sympathy for Jane Shore, but the attention that William Shore's forgiveness is given. Rowe goes through great lengths (that don't seem necessary to elicit the tragic response to Jane he seemed to desire) to feature William's forgiveness.

Although I am arguing that the advice letters (and their corollary on the stage) represent a step in creating an attitude toward cuckoldry that is radically different from the one that was dominant decades before, I am in no way arguing that the new attitude was homogeneously accepted. By no means does cuckoldry cease to be a concern after the turn of the seventeenth century. For example, a cursory glance through documents (plays, pamphlets, ballads, etc.) available from the latter half of the eighteenth century yields an ongoing conversation about cuckoldry; some of these texts continue the work of soliciting sympathy for cuckolds and certainly do not take this sympathy for granted. For example, in 1771, *Cuckoldom Triumphant or, Matrimonial Incontinence Vindicated* was published in London.¹⁰⁴ The anonymous author states, "This work, intended to comfort the afflicted, and confirm the contented, among those who are married, as well as prepare the unmarried for the happy state of cuckoldom is humbly inscribed to the British nobility and gentry."¹⁰⁵ The author states, "I'm amazed that out of so many wits as the present age abounds in, that none have made it their province to defend cuckoldom."¹⁰⁶ Of course, many had made that attempt in the decades before this author, but he

¹⁰⁴ ECCO lists 1771 as a probable publication date. The only identification for the author is the name with which he signs the inscription, Cornuto, which is a pseudonymous adoption of the word "horn" in Latin.

¹⁰⁵ Cornuto, i. It is unclear exactly what Cornuto is alluding to in dedicating his work to the noblest gentry, although he does state, "And the amazing encrease of antlers of late among the nobility, whose customs the common people are so fond of copying, gives me the pleasing promise of cuckoldom's becoming universal" (7).

¹⁰⁶ Cornuto, 3.

does not seem to recognize these previous works. It does seem that the perceived need for these works is cyclical; in 1724, another anonymous author published *The Horn Exalted or, Room for Cuckolds*, which he states on the title page is “very proper for these times when men are butting, and pushing, and goeing, and horning each other.”¹⁰⁷

In addition, it would certainly be an oversimplification to characterize the changes I am suggesting here as entirely progressive or positive. Part of the shift of blame for women’s marital indiscretions included a coping mechanism that relied on an already present and all too convenient set of beliefs about the genders in the eighteenth century; alongside William Shore’s and the *Athenian Mercury*’s Christian forgiveness and trust in divine justice existed a fatalistic cynicism about women. Preexisting misogyny is repackaged with varying degrees of sincerity as a manner of shifting blame for adultery and protecting men’s manliness. One common theme that arises in these texts and performances is the inevitability of women’s infidelity; in constructing the entire sex as generally prone to sexual indiscretion neither man in the adulterous triangle need bear the burden of blame.

A return to *The School of Venus* shows the clear functioning of this misogynistic mechanism. The title page of the text builds a set of expectations (the revelation of humiliating tales of cuckolds) that suggests opportunities to feel superior in the ridicule of cuckolds, but a disjunction between advertised content and actual content becomes apparent.¹⁰⁸ From the beginning of the book, we can sense spiraling misogyny; the preface suggests “the following sheets containing the secret history of the lives and amours of the most celebrated beauties of the

¹⁰⁷ *The Horn Exalted, or, Room for Cuckolds. Being a Treatise concerning the Reason and original of the word cuckold, and why such are said to wear horns.* (London, 1721), i.

¹⁰⁸ This is certainly not a unique case of the title page misleading the reader for the purpose of sensationalizing the content and increasing sales. What is revelatory is that the bait and switch involved suggests that the history of cuckolds was tempting enough to encourage potential readers and that the actual content works to suggest sympathy for cuckolds and hatred for women in tandem. In addition there is an element of confusion in that this book shares the title of popular pornography.

female sex, who have been admired mistresses and concubines of kings, princes, dukes, earls, lords, and other eminent persons” (3). The preface suggests a shift in attention from cuckolds (male victims) to the loose women who make them, although at this stage they are still acknowledged as “celebrated beauties” and as “admired” members of the female sex. The author shortly suggests a moral purpose to the text, it functions as a lesson to women who might have hopes of using their bodies to climb the social ladder: “For hereby seeing the sudden rise and strange fall of women, who have proclaimed themselves open enemies to chastity, a miserable catastrophe oftener attending them than prosperity” (4).

Once the stories are actually considered, the true purpose of the book—to show the mostly bad fates of sexual women, rather than to display cuckolds for ridicule—becomes apparent. Several of the stories do not, in fact, actually involve a cuckold at all, for example. A strange lack of coherence exists across the text. In an effort to blame the women in all the stories, the author must ignore moments in which men are obviously to blame for the fall of the women (drugging, rape, false marriages, etc.). In the poem with which the book closes (“Thus we conclude the miserable lives,/ of harlots; whether virgins, widows, wives/ at first; and misery be the fate/ of most notorious strumpets soon or late” [4]) the author makes no distinction between any of the circumstances related to the women’s ultimate fate as “strumpets” whether they are “virgins, widows, wives.” There is, predictably, almost no blame for any men involved in the betrayals the book reveals, and what little blame does get placed on men is reserved for truly appalling behavior. One particular example of this weakly placed blame appears in the story of Alice Smallwood; drugged and raped by James Wilson (who was deemed originally an unfit candidate for marriage by Alice’s parents). Alice finds herself disconcertingly pregnant with no memory of losing her virginity. Wilson casts himself as a charitable savior who takes the now

ruined Alice off her parents' hands. Wilson eventually boldly brags about how he brought about the marriage in front of his wife, who becomes, unsurprisingly, enraged. Alice ultimately cuckolds Wilson with the former suitor who was the most likely candidate for marriage before his deception. The story proceeds to follow Alice's life after being discovered, turned out of her house, going into keeping, and ultimately committing suicide. Even though Wilson "treacherously robb'd" Alice of her "honour and virginity," it is the sad outcome of Alice's life—culminating in suicide by poison at the age of 20 that garners the attention of the author and through him, the audience (239).

The cynicism that I am suggesting acts as part of the attitudinal shift is apparent in Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* (1681). Ravenscroft's play has been dismissed in the past as not particularly worthy of critical attention. John T. Harwood offers a succinct overview of reception of *The London Cuckolds*:

What can be said about Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* (1681), a comedy that enjoyed enormous popularity for nearly a century but is characterized by Nicoll as "flagrant," with a "perfectly immoral plot, descending, because of its workmanship, to utter vulgarity." Steele and Cibber thought it contemptible, David Garrick ceased to present it on Lord Mayor's Day after 1751, James Sutherland calls it "the old pagan comedy of sex, the worship of Dionysius in seventeenth-century London," and Robert D. Hume regards it as 'blithely indecent.'¹⁰⁹

Additionally farcical nature of the play causes some critics pause. Harwood suggests that the farcical aspect of the play disqualify it from containing serious commentary on marriage:

Ravenscroft's characters are not anatomized under the corrective lens of satire, which reveals their underlying crudity or viciousness. His characters are one-dimensional and

¹⁰⁹ *Critic, Values, and Restoration Comedy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982), 78.

static. What is base is immediately shown to be base, and the characters neither improve or degenerate as a result of interaction with other characters... The risqué dialogue, the obscene puns, the disguises and mistaken identities, the slapstick..., and the hide-and-seek bedroom antics make this work farcical rather than satirical.¹¹⁰

I will suggest, however, that lurking among the admittedly farcical elements of the plot is a somewhat surprising suggestion about conceptions of marriage. *The London Cuckolds*, with its various male victims and their carefully thought out approaches to choosing wives: the carefully bred country dolt, the witty woman and the godly woman (all of which fail), is at first glance a study in simple misogyny. The underlying assumption of the play is that all women are deceitful and lascivious and will ultimately combine these two characteristics in order to cuckold their husbands. But in its universal failure on the part of the men and its universal distrust of women, *The London Cuckolds* (1729) is a text that ultimately releases men from responsibility for controlling their wives.¹¹¹

In a movement away from the scenario of *The Country Wife* (for which the most immediate point of comparison is the Pinchwife/Wiseacres character type), Ravenscroft opens up all of the men for ridicule. Wiseacre's approach (he picks out his wife as a child and purposely has her raised to be a simpleton: "I have been at the charge to breed up and fool, and will marry her so young, that I may make a fool of her life long, and will keep her, and order her so, as she

¹¹⁰ Harwood, "Critics, Values, and Restoration Comedy," 86.

¹¹¹ I have obviously chosen to deal with *The London Cuckolds* as a literal commentary on marriage and cuckoldry. I would be remiss in ignoring important readings of the play in terms of class and politics. J. Douglas Canfield suggests, for example, that as a cit-cuckolding comedy, there are important issues of class and politics to acknowledge: "The conflict of those Restoration comedies featuring cit-cuckolding is related to the same class warfare, reinscribes the same ideology, and does so, in Foucault's terms, not only through language but through the body-language of stage performance and, indeed, through the bodies themselves, where the perfect, potent bodies of Cavalier rakes dominate the imperfect, impotent bodies of cits, and where the bodies of women become the contested found for class dominance and, ultimately, symbols of the contested land of England itself. However much wit these women are given, however much sexual energy of their own they display, in these wars between men they are merely counters" (115). "Tupping Your Rival's Women: Cit-Cuckolding as Class Warfare in Restoration Comedy" in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine Quinsey, (Lexington: Up of Kentucky, 1996), 113-28.

shall never grow wiser”¹¹²) to marriage serves as a kind of red herring—he is so obviously desperate and so inhuman in his desperation that the audience is primed to watch and ridicule him as the play progresses. In contrast with Wiseacre’s plan, the other two marriages seem to have healthy foundations and the other two husbands seem to have made reasonable decisions (we might be reminded, for example, of Harcourt’s marriage to Alithea, which is meant to serve as the positive example of marriage at the end of *The Country Wife*). Ravenscroft, however, undermines any expectations that any of the marriages will end up a success (assuming that success can, at the very least, be measured by fidelity) when we systematically see each wife break her vows of fidelity.

We are given an early scene in which the three men disagree over which kind of wife is more desirable; so much time is devoted to the discussion that the audience could easily be deceived into believing that one form of wife will be proven triumphant in the end. Doodle argues for the witty wife: “If my wife was a fool, I should always suspect her a whore, for ‘tis what makes ‘em believe the flatteries of men; she that has sense will discern their traps and snares, and avoid them” (7). Wiseacre presents his counterargument for a dimwitted wife: “A witty wife is the greatest plague upon the earth; she will have so many tricks and inventions to deceive a man; and cloak her villainy so cunningly, a husband must always be upon the spy” (7). Much to Dashwell’s chagrin, both men agree that a godly wife presents no security: “A godly woman! I would not have my wife a church zealot. How many cuckolds must there needs be in a parish, when the bell tolls twice a day to assignations” (9). Doodle and Wiseacre come at the argument from opposite views of women. Wiseacre sees the woman as the potential villain in cuckolding him—to remove wit from the equation removes an important tool women can use to deceive men. Doodle assumes that women are the naïve victims of men’s seductions and that wit

¹¹² Edward Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds*, (London: 1729), 7.

is an important tool for them to resist these attempted assaults. As the play continues and both of their wives do cuckold them, Peggy by being incapable of seeing through her seducer's deceptions and Arabella, who uses her wit to escape discovery, we realize that both men are, in fact, correct about the other's wife.

Despite well-reasoned arguments on each side, all the men fail to protect themselves from cuckoldry. The belabored issue of how to choose a wife becomes inconsequential when all wives (and thus, presumably, all women) prove themselves untrustworthy. This cynical despondency about a women's ability to remain faithful does represent a positive shift when it comes to attitudes about cuckolds; they can hardly be blamed for their status when all women share the same weakness. Ravenscroft suggests, however, that not all of the cuckolds' fates are the same. Whereas the only safe stance on women is to assume that they will be unfaithful even if they lack the wits to do so (as is the case with Wiseacre's Peggy), all hope is not lost for marriage. Doodle suggests in his argument with Wiseacre that "the chief end of a wife is to be a comfort and a companion to a man" (9). With this definition of marriage, the three fates of the men are not actually comparable despite having all been made cuckolds. Doodle and Dashwell have chosen women whose attributes other than fidelity allow them to function as successful wives for their respective husbands, whereas Wiseacre's plan has failed to yield him either a faithful wife or an otherwise functional life partner. Wiseacre's particular failure to choose a realistic partner becomes more apparent when he explains to Peggy the "duty of a wife"—to guard over her sleeping husband, marching back and forth through the bedchamber and guarding his nightcap when he is absent (78). In creating this duty, Wiseacre explains, "Now will she be watching all night, and a sleep all the day, so she will be always free from impertinencies of the world, and I can have no dread upon me in my absence of her misbehavior" (78). The lengths that Wiseacre

will go to in an attempt to avoid being made a cuckold are patently ridiculous; but when we consider Doodle's suggestion of what a wife should be—"the comfort and companion to a man"—the only way in which Peggy can fulfill these expectations, with her unnatural nocturnal schedule, is simply by not making Wiseacre a cuckold. Wiseacre's paranoia reduces Peggy to a virtual nonentity.

The end of the play finds all three men cuckolded. While each denies that there is any definitive proof of his own wife's dishonesty, they are all three aware of their own and each other's fates. The only one whose wife has not attempted to spare him the infamy of being a cuckold is Wiseacre, whose simple Peggy persists in reminding him of Ramble's nighttime visit to her chamber and his lessons about the alternate "duty of a wife." Wiseacre has no foundation upon which to deny his status as a cuckold; his only response is to remind his friends that they share a similar fate. Oddly enough, the group's response is to laugh—omnes.¹¹³ It is notable that all present laugh at Wiseacre's angry reminders of the other wives' infidelities—including the cuckolds themselves. The question is, who or what is actually being laughed at? And how does that laughter help us to understand the audience's expected identification within the play? The fact that Wiseacre is the only one who does not laugh suggests Ravenscroft intends for him to be the target of the laughter of those on stage and in the audience. All three of the men have been cuckolded and know it to some degree, but only one man becomes the target of laughter; the distinction suggests that there is a qualitative difference between Wiseacre's cuckoldry and that of Doodle and Dashwell. I would suggest that Doodle and Dashwell's superiority is founded on two important distinctions: Wiseacre's hysterical attempt to avoid being known as a cuckold and that fact that he truly makes himself a cuckold (through the careful breeding of a fool who can neither know how to avoid the attentions of other men nor dissimulate in any way to protect his

¹¹³ Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds*, 94.

honor). The other men may have neglected their, but have made otherwise reasonable decisions when selecting them.

The temptation to laugh at cuckolds certainly exists long past the turn of the eighteenth century. No one could reasonably expect that laughter to disappear without some resistance, it was, after all, a deeply engrained part of the culture far before this time period. What becomes apparent, however, is that the massive cultural changes we associate with the Restoration and eighteenth century (concerning marriage, gender, and sexuality, for example) have an influence that reaches far enough into the culture to undermine (at least partially) the easy humor associated with cuckolds. This conversation continues even today, although we may not be as aware of it as our counterparts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas the horning imagery may no longer carry the resonance that it did, the humor and derision associated with the betrayed man still remains in many fora. Watching daytime talk shows on any given day will almost certainly yield spectacles revolving around cuckoldry—men confronting their cheating wives, wives divulging their infidelities, and perhaps the most spectacular of all, paternity test shows that have been made popular on several day time talk shows.

Chapter 2

Scraping Upon the Poor Domestic Instrument: The Performance of Marital Impotence in Eighteenth-Century Drama

Sexual performance has almost certainly been a masculine anxiety since men had the cognitive powers to evaluate their own abilities. Considering the number of years such a vast history would entail, it is a bold move to suggest that there is perhaps no other time period (at least in British history) more concerned with evaluating and maintaining such performances than the long eighteenth century. The eighteenth century provided a uniquely ripe time for such anxieties to become rampantly discussed in almost every realm of cultural discourse. Past and present divorce trials concerning impotence were published and certainly, if their popularity is any indication, discussed.¹¹⁴ Growing medical knowledge and its dispersal through popular medical advice literature provided another impetus by providing a new understanding of the mechanisms of conception and an improvement in general anatomical knowledge.¹¹⁵

The culture surrounding the Restoration, of course, brought male sexuality to the forefront of cultural awareness. Charles II's sexual exploits were a matter of discussion (and

¹¹⁴ For a thorough discussion of the history of divorce trial publication and reception in eighteenth-century Britain, see Peter Wagner, "The Pornographer in the Courtroom: Trial Reports about Cases of Sexual Crimes and Delinquencies as a Genre of Eighteenth-Century Erotica" in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982): 120-140.

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of eighteenth-century medical beliefs related to sex, see: Ray Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995); Peter Wagner, "The Discourse on Sex—or Sex as Discourse: Eighteenth-Century Medical and Paramedical Erotica," in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), 46-69; and Paul-Gabriel Boucé, "Some Beliefs and Myths in Eighteenth-Century Britain" in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982), 28-47.

concern) at court and in the popular media. Charles II's role as libertine icon and its aftermath are suggestive of the anxieties potentially produced by this kind of performance of male sexuality. Charles II's inability to produce a legitimate heir while publicly keeping expensive mistresses (who produced plenty of illegitimate heirs) ultimately culminated in the massively disruptive events of Monmouth's Rebellion and the Exclusion Crisis. Certainly no other man's sexual choices were as scrutinized or as consequential as Charles II's at the time; his is a case that suggests how very inextricably linked with the wellbeing of the society those sexual choices were perceived to be. The whole culture of libertinism celebrated debauchery and inspired the figure of the rake, which haunted the culture well after the Restoration libertines were safely dead and buried. The rake figure, in particular, is an important one for fueling an obsession with sexual performance;¹¹⁶ he, after all, broadcasted a persona of sexual excess (excess in general—drinking, whoring, gambling, spending, brawling—being the central characteristic of the rake or libertine ethos). The rake figure, of course, was propagated in part by the theater, which throughout the eighteenth century engaged in nearly obsessive discussions of both feminine and masculine sexuality.

All of these influences, and certainly many others, suggest that male sexual performance was a matter of cultural scrutiny. In particular, Angus McLaren in his *Impotence: A Cultural History*, implicitly suggests one of the major changes that could provide such scrutiny: "In the Middle Ages there always had been some who attributed sexual dysfunctions to problems of diet, regimen, and excesses, but only in the eighteenth century did such views supplant the Christian notion that sexual problems were sign of man's fallen state."¹¹⁷ This shift in beliefs could not have made suffering impotence or other forms of sexual dysfunction any easier for men at this

¹¹⁶ Robert D. Hume suggests a reevaluation of the figure in "The Myth of the Rake in 'Restoration Comedy,'" in *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983), 138-175.

¹¹⁷ Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 50-51.

time; rather than being an effect of the general fallen state of man, sexual dysfunction becomes the effect of each man's decisions and actions.¹¹⁸

While there is no evidence that Brown's Alice Mustian was proclaiming upon the sexual performances of individual men during her neighborhood harangue or that sexual performance was a matter of public surveillance in the way of cuckoldry, we do have evidence that it was not as private a matter as we might expect. In his lengthy treatise on marriage (*Conjugal Lewdness: Or, Matrimonial Whoredom* [1727]), Daniel Defoe comments with disdain on those who discuss their marital sex lives in public. Whereas he suggests in general that any commentary on their private lives by members of a married couple was inappropriate, he stresses that commenting on sexual dissatisfaction in public is particularly odious. He offers an example of a woman of his acquaintance who, in the hearing of others, belittled her husband after he suffered a "fit of sickness" that "brought him very low, and by which he was grown a little paralitick."¹¹⁹ That Defoe can provide an example he himself (ostensibly) had witnessed and that he feels compelled to spend several pages commenting on the phenomenon suggests that such public commentary

¹¹⁸ Over the course of the long eighteenth century, McLaren suggests a major shift in attitudes regarding impotence: "Impotence was increasingly described by commentators as a physiological problem rather than as a consequence of sin or Satan. Such a perspective was best represented by, if not primarily due to, enlightened medical men countering theology by offering new, materialistic explanations of the workings of the body... On the other hand, just when sexual dysfunctions were increasingly viewed as resulting more from physical than from moral deficiencies, the very subject came to be treated by the respectable with greater and greater reserve. In the mid-1660s, the upper classes shared the common view that impotence was inherently funny; by the mid 1700s, the elite seized on the notion that it had to be regarded as inherently tragic. It was, the elite declared, a private sorrow that only the vulgar would seek to subject to public scrutiny. These two transformations in the discussion of impotence, so apparently contradictory, were in fact intimately entwined." The linkages can be detected in a number of cultural changes:

- The success quacks had in attributing impotence to venereal disease and masturbation
- The public's interest in embryological advances that undermined the assumption of women's desire for pleasure and their right to judge a man's performance, and
- In the bourgeois stress on privacy that curtailed a wife's right to have her marriage to an impotent spouse annulled. (78)

¹¹⁹ Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness: Or Matrimonial Whoredom* (London, 1727), 70.

was not rare.¹²⁰ Certainly insulting sexual performance is one of the more immediately obvious weapons in the arsenal of an unhappily married spouse.

Defoe also provides an implicit warning to those (presumably women) who might utter such complaints; they should have a care lest their complaints be cast as a symptom of an overly active sex drive. The husband in question retorted (also publicly), “He would hire her a journeyman, since she took such care to let every body know she had occasion for one, that if one was not enough for her, as he thought it would not, he would provide her two or three, that, if it were possible, she might be satisfied, though he very much doubted it.” (71). Although the husband obviously is insinuating that his wife is inappropriately sexually voracious, implicit in his statement might also be an insinuation that her very voraciousness led to his sexual undoing.¹²¹

In his treatment of impotence, Angus McLaren suggests that anxieties about women’s sexual appetites were enmeshed in the anxieties surrounding sexual incapacity: “Sexual impotence was not so much a problem in itself, but in what European culture believed it represented and could inevitably lead to—the social disorder starkly represented by the woman becoming the sexually active partner and making her man a cuckold.”¹²² The assertion that impotence in and of itself was not a problem is an odd one—particularly in a book entirely devoted to impotence and the problems associated therewith. Nevertheless, McLaren’s assertion that the possibility of male sexual failure was inextricably bound with anxieties about the potential consequences of unfulfilled female sexual appetites is an important one.

¹²⁰ Although Defoe does not mention them, certainly there were instances of very public commentary on sexual performance in the form of divorce suits (which will be discussed later in this chapter).

¹²¹ For a discussion of the treatment of sexually voracious women, see Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

¹²² McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History*, 58.

Defoe, however, does acknowledge that sexual satisfaction (within reason and as he comments repeatedly, the bounds of decency) is a reasonable expectation within marriage:

It is, no doubt, a duty on both sides to yield, to please, and oblige one another, where no just objections are to be made; and those husbands or wives who decline one another criminally, ought to consider the matrimonial vow and duty in all its particulars; but especially upon the ill consequences which such a coldness may produce; which, though not justifiable at all in the person that might so fly out, yet 'tis what we ought to avoid, as we are not to lead one another into temptations.¹²³

Far from suggesting that sexuality within marriage be solely for the purpose of procreation, Defoe's statement acknowledges the purpose of mutual enjoyment and satisfaction; after all, "to yield, to please, and to oblige one another" is not the language of procreation. Defoe's commentary is surprisingly free from the sexual double standard; he expresses an expectation of satisfaction (yielding, pleasing, and obliging) for both parties of the union. He describes the failure of either party in fairly severe terms ("to decline one another criminally").

I would like to investigate the implicit performance of impotence on the stage in the repeated figures of alienated husbands and wives. The performances rely on a number of specifically eighteenth-century ideas about male sexual appetites and marriage (in particular men's experiences and expectations thereof). In order to engage in this investigation, I would like to contrast these performances with performances that occur elsewhere in the culture—off the stage and outside of marriage. These alternate performances and commentaries will illuminate the limitations and conventions of the stage and dramatic literature that provided an opportunity for playwrights to comment on the problems of marriage and the construction of male sexuality in the culture. This context will come from three popular forms of literature in the

¹²³Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness*, 90.

Restoration and eighteenth century: poetry, novels, and medical advice. In particular, poetry will come in the form of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems and their counter (which have not officially been named, but I will call The Enjoyment Poems). The latter (prose) texts will be represented by a portion of John Cleland's work: *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-9), *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751), and *Institutes of Health* (1761).

The "Imperfect Enjoyment" and "The Enjoyment" Poems

The Imperfect Enjoyment poems appear in multiple miscellanies and collected works between the years 1670 and 1685. Although they are inspired by classical literature and French translations thereof, the Restoration versions often make changes that significantly comment on the state of male sexuality at the time. The poems, which appear translated in France significantly before they became popular in England, resonate particularly with the libertine ethos. For example, the most popular version (notably one that is commonly anthologized as a representative work in textbooks) was written by the iconic libertine John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester.

Whereas many scholars have argued that patriarchal society is unsettled by the concept of a vigorous sexual appetite in its wives, mothers, and daughters (as opposed to prostitutes, whose sexual appetite is a fantasy of willingness), these texts reveal alarm over the state of male sexual appetites. These anxieties reveal the double nature of the male sexual appetite—it is both voracious (at the very least difficult to control) and fragile. The Imperfect Enjoyment poems are not, technically, about impotence as we understand it today; whereas our conception of impotence is a matter of lack of erection, the conception of impotence in eighteenth century England is broader and encompasses not only the inability to perform sexually, but also other

forms of sexual dysfunction: premature ejaculation (as in the case of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems) and debilitated sex drives that required extra stimulation (fetishes, sado-masochism, and an obsession with taking maidenheads—all of which are represented in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*). Angus McLaren acknowledges the breadth of impotence by including all of these forms of sexual dysfunction in his chapter on the eighteenth century in *Impotence: A Cultural History*.

Ultimately, the Imperfect Enjoyment poems express a libertine stance in terms of sexual dysfunction. Critically, the discussion of sexual dysfunction in the Imperfect Enjoyment poems, particularly Rochester's and Behn's, has yielded a reception that casts them as commenting on a vast array of topics: political power, the state of man, economic status, and (with Behn) feminist approaches to sex and the double standard. Few critics have decided to deal with the poems for what they are at face value—reflections on the pressures of sexual performance. As I have stated above, commentaries on male sexual performance infiltrated nearly every level of society and many, many cultural fora. This ubiquity leads me to be comfortable with treating the poems as commentaries on that subject rather than endeavoring to reveal the implications of less explicit levels of meaning.¹²⁴

Any study of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems must start with and acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Richard E. Quaintance. Quaintance, in his "French Sources of the Restoration

¹²⁴ I do not mean to insinuate that such efforts are not appropriate or worthwhile in general, but there are not as helpful for this chapter's larger concerns. Leo Braudy, "Remembering Masculinity: Premature Ejaculation Poetry of the Seventeenth Century," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 33, no.1 (1994): 177-201; Carole Fabricant, "Rochester's World of Imperfect Enjoyment," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 73 (1974): 338-350; Jessica Munns, "'But the Touch Were Soft': Pleasure, Power, and Impotence in 'The Disappointment' and 'The Golden Age,'" in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178-196; Jessica Munns, "Perfect Enjoyment, 'The Golden Age,'" in *Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999): 92-103; John H. O'Neill, "Rochester's 'Imperfect Enjoyment': 'The True Veine of Satire' in Sexual Poetry," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 25 (1980): 57-71; Joseph Pappa, *The Parodic Pornographer: Rochester's "Imperfect Enjoyment" as "Anti"-Pornography* (Villanova: Villanova University, 1998); Reba Wilcoxson, "Pornography, Obscenity, and Rochester's 'The Imperfect Enjoyment,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15, no. 3 (1975): 375-390; Lisa M. Zeitz, "Power, Gender, and Identity in Aphra Behn's 'The Disappointment,'" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 37, no.3 (1997): 501-516.

‘Imperfect Enjoyment’ Poem” endeavors to trace the connections between the French versions of the poems and establish conventions shared by the British versions.¹²⁵ In so doing, he creates a list of the French sources that influenced the production of the British poems, all of which were originally based on Ovid’s *Amores* (Book III Elegy VII) and Petronius’ *Satyricon*. Focusing on Quaintance’s list of five British poems, we see an interesting combination of highly canonical authors, lesser known authors, and anonymous works. John Wilmot (Lord Rochester) and Aphra Behn are responsible for two of the poems that Quaintance presents—“The Imperfect Enjoyment” and “The Disappointment” (1680) respectively—both of which were originally published in the same volume of Rochester’s work. George Etherege was also responsible for a version of “The Imperfect Enjoyment” (1673).¹²⁶ Also preceding Rochester and Behn’s additions to the group is the anonymous “Imperfect Enjoyment,” published in 1674.¹²⁷ The last poem Quaintance identifies in the group in anonymous as well: “The Lost Opportunity Recovered,” published in 1682.¹²⁸

The French poems, which seem to rely more strictly on the original Classical sources, provided a starting point from which the British authors seemed to have felt free to deviate; the British works within the Imperfect Enjoyment group (as Quaintance establishes it) vary along a continuum ranging from relatively faithful translations (“The Lost Opportunity Recovered”) to

¹²⁵ Richard E. Quaintance, “French Sources of the Restoration ‘Imperfect Enjoyment’ Poem,” *Philological Quarterly* 42 (1963): 180-199.

¹²⁶ All dates, unless otherwise noted, are dates of publication. In light of the popularity of manuscript distribution of poems before their publication at press, it is almost impossible to determine when the poems were composed.

¹²⁷ “Fruition was the Question in Debate.”

¹²⁸ Attempting to place the poems in chronological order, of course, proves problematic; there is some dispute as to when the poems were composed, which unfortunately complicates any attempt to establish a pattern of influence. John O’ Neill expanded the ranks of the “Imperfect Enjoyment” poems with the discovery of a previously unaccounted for poem. O’ Neill argues that though the poem is obviously of a lower quality than the poems identified by Quaintance, these differences do not arise necessarily from a lack of skill, but from a conscious decision on the author’s part; he claims, “This author was interested only in the sensational, pornographic elements of the tradition and he worked to heighten these (with a wealth of erotic detail exceeding even that in the Rochester poem, and with starkly obscene diction) and to suppress the less sensational meditative elements” (200). “An Unpublished ‘Imperfect Enjoyment’ Poem,” *Papers on language and Literature* 13 (1977): 197-202.

fairly free emulations (Rochester) and somewhere in between (Behn).¹²⁹ Quaintance does not undertake an extensive reading of these poems; most of his attention is spent in establishing the provenance of the various poems and creating an approximate timeline for their composition and publication. Quaintance does briefly spend time with Behn's poem, "The Disappointment," in order to provide an example of the way in which the British poems deviated from their French predecessors. He describes Behn as translating the first one-third of Benech de Cantenac's poem, "L'Occasion Perdue Recuverte," "not at all slavishly" and compares her rendition to the far more conscientious version created by the author of "The Lost Opportunity Recovered." Quaintance is fairly strict in his criteria for inclusion in the Imperfect Enjoyment poems group. He, for example, rejects a series of five poems by William Wycherley on the topic of sexual failure.¹³⁰

I believe a return to these poems as a group (with the inclusion of the poems Quaintance rejects) is a project worthy of more critical attention, but this chapter is not an appropriate forum. I would like instead to look at two versions by Rochester ("The Imperfect Enjoyment" and "The Disabled Debauchee").¹³¹ In his complete works of Rochester, David M. Vieth has placed the poems in roughly chronological order and has suggestively named the time periods of Rochester's life to which they correspond. "The Imperfect Enjoyment" is happily placed in the section entitled "Early Maturity" and "The Disabled Debauchee" lands within the "Tragic

¹²⁹ Quaintance, "French Sources," 190-1.

¹³⁰ Quaintance recognizes the five poems by William Wycherley as his attempt to engage with the "Imperfect Enjoyment" sub-genre after it had become clichéd. Four of the poems, "The Double Disappointment; or, Love Retarded by Meeting too Soon," "Too much Love too Little," "To a Mistress, Disappointed by Her Lover's Meeting Her too Soon," and "The Disappointment, by Meeting to Soon," were published together in 1704 in a Miscellany edition of Wycherley's poems. The last, "The Unperforming Lover's Apology" was only published posthumously, but is so similar to the other four, in that it is quite plausible that it was composed at around the same time as the other poems. All five of the poems vary in stanza formation, line length, and metrical formation, but they all deal cleverly with the lover's attempt to shift blame after an unsatisfactory sexual performance.

¹³¹ Rochester's "The Disabled Debauchee" is also not represented in Quaintance's treatment of the poems. Although it does not follow the conventions of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems strictly, it does provide a perspective in the discourse about failed sexual performance and male sexual appetite.

Maturity” years of Rochester’s life. Although surely not purposely, Vieth has captured the significant difference between these two poems in labeling the time periods they come from. Although more somber than many of the other examples of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems, Rochester’s “The Imperfect Enjoyment” still contains many of the same elements of insouciance over the speaker’s sexual failure. On the contrary, “The Disabled Debauchee,” whose speaker contemplates his future of permanent sexual failure, contains an element of finality that is not common to the Imperfect Enjoyment poems.

Before a more extensive analysis of Rochester, Sir George Etherege’s version of “The Imperfect Enjoyment” is useful in establishing the general conventions of the group of the poetry. The object of the speaker’s attentions resists the speaker: “She does resist my Love with pleasing Force;/ Mov’d not with Anger, but with Modesty.”¹³² Once this first show of modesty is over, she ceases to resist and becomes a willing (and eager) participant: “Her Arms the joyful Conqueror embrace, And seem to guide me to the sought-for place...She falls o’th’ Bed for Pleasure more than Rest” (292). This moment of abandon and willingness is what ultimately proves the speaker’s undoing: “But Oh, strange Passion! Oh, Abortive Joy!/ My Zeal foes my Devotion quite destroy;/ Come to the Temple, where I shou’d Adore/ My Saint, I worship at the Sacred Door?...When overjoy’d with Victory, I fall/ Dead at the foot of the Surrender’d Wall” (292-3). This moment of failure causes the authors of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems to create various images of conquered towns unplundered, but they all signify the moment of premature ejaculation that troubles and disappoints both lovers. Ultimately, the speaker does not accept the responsibility for the moment of failure, but rather places the blame with the woman: “Alas...Condemn your Self, not Me/ Y’d be more Happy, had you been less Fair” (294-5).

¹³² George Etherege, “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” in *A collection of poems: viz. The Temple of Death* (London, 1701), 292.

Rochester's version of "The Imperfect Enjoyment" is perhaps the most popular version of the poem and perhaps the most graphic as well (the two aspects might very well be related). Faced with the reality of his own sexual failure, the speaker contemplates the heart of the problem:

To show my wished obedience vainly strive:

I sigh, alas! And kiss, but cannot swive.

Eager desires confound my first intent,

Succeeding shame does more success prevent,

And rage at last confirms me impotent.¹³³

Although the references to "shame" and "rage" might lead to the conclusion that Rochester's poems significantly deviates from the pattern we see in Etherege's poem, it can be argued that ultimately, again, the "eager desires" which are separated from the control of the speaker, are to blame. Rochester invokes impotence, but its meaning skirts the line between powerless and the more sexual connotation; as the situation does not seem to be permanent, it seems more likely that that former connotation has resonance with the situation rather than the latter. If this is, indeed, the case, Rochester's invocation of powerlessness serves the same function of shifting the blame as in the other Imperfect Enjoyment poems: Rochester is powerless to remedy the situation that his 'eager desires' and his lover's "busy hand" have wrought (38). What follows this realization of powerlessness is an extended harangue at the speaker's penis, which he characterizes as a traitor ("Thou treacherous, base deserter of my fame") (39). Whereas this type of phallocentric harangue is not common to the "Imperfect Enjoyment" poems, it serves a function that many of those poems do include: a reflection on past sexual successes. Even as the

¹³³ John Wilmot (Earl of Rochester), "The Imperfect Enjoyment" in *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 38.

speaker is debasing his penis for deserting him in his moment of need, he recalls all of the other moments in which he has been able to perform:

Didst thou e'er fail in all thy life before?
When vice, disease, and scandal lead the way,
With what officious haste dost thou obey!...
E'en so thy brutal valor is displayed. (39)

The speaker's address simultaneously berates and praises the penis, acknowledging its "brutal valor," a sense of pride that will be echoed in "The Disabled Debauchee." The inclusion of praise for the bravery of the penis for having performed in the face of "vice, disease, and scandal" undermines and sense of shame that Rochester's speaker may have expressed earlier.

"The Disabled Debauchee" is perhaps most noteworthy because it is a reflection on a future, but permanent, removal of the speaker from the battlefield of sexual performance rather than a reflection on an instance of sexual failure as it occurs. The poem revolves around the central image of a battle-scarred admiral who can no longer fight but who can watch appreciatively from the sidelines of the battle. That image provides the metaphor for the disabled debauchee who will be "forced from the pleasing billow of debauch/ on the dull shore of lazy temperance."¹³⁴ The debauchee's imagined role is that of an advisor to debauch; he hopes that he will be able to "not let the sight of honourable scars,/ which my too forward valor did procure/ Frighten new-listed soldiers from the wars:/ past joys have more than paid what I endure" (116-7).

The poem is significantly different from "The Imperfect Enjoyment" in that the sexual dysfunction, rather than premature ejaculation, is a far more permanent impotence. The speaker

¹³⁴ John Wilmot (Earl of Rochester), "The Disabled Debauchee" in *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 116.

also takes complete blame for his fate (although credit might be a more accurate description). The overall tone of the poem is contented and unapologetic wistfulness. The debauchee seems resigned to reliving his past excesses through memories and tales: “I’ll tell of whores attacked, their lords at home;/ Bawds’ quarters beaten up, and fortress won;/ Windows demolished, watches overcome;/ And handsome ills by my contrivance done” (117). Further through these tales the Debauchee hopes to inspire young men to follow the path he has chosen, despite his existence as an impotent man of the “lazy shores of temperance” serving as a warning of the eventual outcome.

The Debauchee continues to contemplate his role in urging others into debaucherous battle and states, “Thus, statesmanlike, I’ll saucily impose,/ And safe from action, valiantly advise;/ Sheltered in impotence, urge you to blows,/ And being good for nothing else, be wise” (117). That impotence is sheltering is noteworthy; the debauchee acknowledges that he will be “good for nothing else,” but his comparison to a statesman suggests that he sees his role as important. His impotence functions as a signifier of a job well done, a reminder of his experience and the wisdom he has gained (a convenient continuation of the admiral metaphor would allow a comparison of the impotence to his medals). Rather than an embarrassing burden, impotence provides a comforting shelter in the Debauchee’s old age.

We cannot take the Debauchee’s stance as anything more than just that, however. His bravado in the face of impotence is certainly founded in rhetoric rather than reality. Certainly it is important that the speaker of this poem, along with many of the others, rejects shame for sexual failure, even in its most absolute forms. It should be noted, however, that the speaker of the “Disabled Debauchee” is contemplating a future reality of impotence from the perspective of one who can still ostensibly perform. He predicts contentment, but his sentiments when he is

actually impotent are, as yet, unknown. The probability of the prediction coming to fruition is similarly unknown, and thus the rhetorical stance of bravado is ultimately infused with doubt by Rochester.

There is a little-recognized group of poems that are in conversation with the Imperfect Enjoyment poems—generally entitled “The Enjoyment.” They often appeared in the same miscellanies as the Imperfect Enjoyment poems and they offer a counter to the failed excess of the sexual exchanges we find there. The Enjoyment Poems are what one might assume they are—poems that express the enjoyment that a man and woman can experience together in the absence of the obstacle of impotence. They are probably largely ignored because they lend themselves, in their straightforward celebration of successful sexual union, to less extensive readings than do the Imperfect Enjoyment poems. They are, however, an important part of any investigation of the poems from the standpoint of sexual performance. Thus far, I have identified four “Enjoyment Poems” from the years 1674, 1679, 1701, and 1707, which means that they are fairly evenly spread throughout the timeline of the “Imperfect Enjoyment” poems.

Quaintance does not acknowledge these poems; it is not clear if he knew that they existed and rejected them without mention or if he was not aware of their existence at all. Even if he did not know about them at the time he published his article, it is unlikely he would have included them had he been aware of them; in rejecting Wycherley’s poems, which are much more closely related to the members of his Imperfect Enjoyment group, he has shown a sense of exclusivity that would most certainly not have accommodated the Enjoyment poems. The Enjoyment poems are important, however. They offer a resistance to the Imperfect Enjoyment poems and their easy acceptance of sexual failure. In celebrating successful sexual performance, the poems suggest that the loss of that pleasure is to be mourned rather than unapologetically shrugged off.

John Sheffield's (The Duke of Buckingham) version of "The Enjoyment" is a representative example of the group of poems. The content of the poem is, for the most part, unremarkable: the woman initially resists the speaker's advances, the speaker describes his efforts to woo her while planning the strategy for the most expedient removal of her excuses, and the speaker celebrates the ultimate success of his efforts with a long description of their eventual intercourse. What is noteworthy is that these poems advocate a reasonable level of passion that may not burn as bright, but certainly lasts longer. Sheffield's, for example, features his speaker contemplating passionate excess, but he reasonably decides to restrain himself:

I rage to shew how well but will not do.
Thus would hot Love run it self out of breath,
And wanting rest, finde it too soon in death,
Did not wise Nature with a gentle force
Refrain its rage, and stop its headlong course.¹³⁵

The speaker suggests an element of rational control to his sexual decision-making, control that serves as an indictment of the attitudes expressed in the Imperfect Enjoyment poems. Whether these poets use the Enjoyment poems as a didactic responses that urge restraint to their less controlled poets, or these poems provide a form of satire on those who try to blame their impotence on lack of self-control as opposed to other, more shameful causes, is unclear. What is clear, however, is that The Enjoyment poems are in conversation with the Imperfect Enjoyment poems and that they fundamentally reject the nonchalance over failed sexual performance that is exhibited in the latter.

¹³⁵ John Sheffield, "The Enjoyment" (London, 1679), 4.

Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure

Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (commonly called *Fanny Hill*), with its long history of suppression and censorship, is undoubtedly the most sensational of John Cleland's works.¹³⁶ With few exceptions, critical attention to Cleland's body of work would indicate that it is the only element worthy of attention—almost everything else is ignored. Cleland actually had a diverse publication history that included several other novels and nonfiction texts.¹³⁷ This dissertation is certainly not the forum to suggest a critical reevaluation or recovery of Cleland's oeuvre, but I would like to look more closely at a set of texts that make an important commentary on the subject of this chapter: male sexual performance and the performance of sexual appetite.

Many have argued that Cleland's ending to *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*—one that finds Fanny reunited with her true love and safely ensconced in a loving marriage that ostensibly functions as a rejection of her wanton lifestyle—is an act of artificial moralizing in order to mollify those offended by the sexual content of the book.¹³⁸ Although they do not use this comparison, for them the ending functions in much the same way as a dance at the end of a Restoration comedy; it distracts the reader from what has gone before (unresolved issues, the implausibility of offered resolutions, etc). In fact, I would suggest the entire novel is deeply moral in its own way and contains strong exhortations about the control of male sexual appetites. Cleland offers often disturbing warnings about the disordering of that appetite.

¹³⁶ For an overview of the publication history of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, see Peter Sabor, "The Censor Censured: Expurgating *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*," in *Unauthorized Sexual Behavior During the Enlightenment* Special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9 (1985): 192-201 and David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England: 1660-1745* (New York: University Books, 1965).

¹³⁷ For a discussion of Cleland's literary career, see James G. Basker, "The Wages of Sin: The Later Career of John Cleland," *Etudes Anglaise* 40:2 (1979): 178-94.

¹³⁸ See Patsy S. Fowler, "'The Tail-Piece of Morality': Phallic Reinforcements of Patriarchy" in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* in *Launching Fanny Hill: Essay on the Novel and Its Influences*. ed. Patsy S. Fowler and Alan Jackson (New York: AMS, 2003): 49-80.

Although these messages are contained fairly clearly within *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, they become more stark still as we consider the other texts I have chosen to pair with Cleland's first novel. Cleland more explicitly engaged with this discussion in *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, which could superficially be described as a male version of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. The similarities are superficial only, however, as few would find the novel's sparse and often negative description of sex comparable to the lush description it receives in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. *The Institutes of Health* represents the most explicit example of Cleland's discourse on the matter of male sexual appetite; Cleland eschews the novelistic form in favor of outright medical advice. All three texts are haunted by men (the last being Cleland himself¹³⁹) whose disordered sexual appetites have left them impaired sexually.

Critical studies of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* are generally deeply influenced by the novel's categorization as pornography (those who doubt the literary value of pornography might generously describe the novel as erotica). Pornography, by its very nature (and purpose) is almost universally assumed to be sex positive.¹⁴⁰ Many critics generally approach *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* from this perspective. In his introduction with G.S Rousseau for *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, Roy Porter states his views about the attitudes toward sexuality he locates within *Memoirs*: "That sex was a basic more to human enjoyment, and that whatever forms of sexual expression created more pleasure than pain—be they modes traditionally labeled as vicious, sinful, or unnatural—were ipso facto desirable and good."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Whether or not Cleland's testimony on his own experiences is true remains to be seen. Certainly the stance he takes is an effective rhetorical one that lends credence to his advice.

¹⁴⁰ Angela Carter offers a succinct definition of this attitude: "Yet the gripping nature of pornography, its directly frontal assault upon the senses of the reader, its straightforward engagement of him at a non-intellectual level, its *sensationalism*, suggest the methodology of propaganda. Indeed, pornography is basically propaganda for fucking, an activity, one would have thought, that did not need much advertising in itself, because most people want to do it as soon as they know how" (15). *The Sadeian Woman* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978):

¹⁴¹ Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau, *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), 1.

Although Porter does not invoke it, Steven Marcus' concept of pornotopia is helpful in understanding his assumptions about Cleland's work. Steven Marcus, in his construction of pornotopia, suggests:

In pornography, life or existence in time does not begin with birth; it begins with one's first sexual impulse or experience, and one is said to be born in pornotopia only after one has experienced his first erection or witnessed his first primal scene. Similarly, one is declared dead when, through either age or accident, one becomes impotent—which helps to explain why in pornotopia women are immortal, and why in pornographic novels there are so many old women, witches and hags, and so few old men.¹⁴²

Central to my argument is the fact that the space Cleland creates within the novel is populated with men who should rightly be dead in pornotopia. Cleland undermines the pornotopic moments by having the sexually lame interrupt the pornotopic flow of time. Peter Sabor, the editor of the most recent critical edition of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, rejects the application of the concept of pornotopia to Cleland's novel. He argues that "Cleland's world is assuredly not the 'pornotopia' Stephen Marcus defines...Cleland's fiction, in contrast, contains impotent men, women without sexual desire, and a measure of jealousy, possessiveness and anger."¹⁴³

Sabor is one of the few critics who acknowledge (even in passing) the presence of the men who break in on the pornotopic passage of time in *Memoirs of a Woman and Pleasure*. In

¹⁴² Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 270. Marcus's commentary about space in pornotopia is similarly difficult to easily apply to *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. He states, "pornography...may be said largely to exist in no place, and to take place in nowhere" (268). He follows up with a more concrete application of this concept of otherness to the novel: "What typically happens is that after having presented the reader with some dozen concrete details—by way of a down payment on credibility, one assumes—the novel leaves this deposit of particularities behind and proceeds by means of abstraction to its real business, which is after all largely irrelevant to considerations of place" (269). Although I do not want to belabor what might seem to be a tangential argument, it seems important to point out that Fanny's story is very much one about surviving in London. There are, of course, pornotopic moments within Fanny Hill's story—Mrs. Cole's house, for example, which exists in a timeless state in which the only purpose of time is to allow for multiple couplings.

¹⁴³ Peter Sabor, introduction to *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, by John Cleland (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), xxi-xxii.

“The Management of Desire in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*,” Andrew Elfenbein suggests, “Sex is potentially dangerous because it leads to intemperance. Cleland’s text is filled with warnings about the dangers of excessive indulgence, as in his representation of Mr. Norbert...[whose] destruction of ‘natural’ desire and reliance on artificial stimulation leave him vulnerable to the machinations of clever prostitutes.”¹⁴⁴ Elfenbein then does acknowledge Mr. Norbert, but the warning he provides is, for Elfenbein, a matter of vulnerability to unscrupulous prostitutes rather than a general warning about the dangers of excess. In fact, Mr. Norbert’s presence (and presumably the presence of the other impaired men in the novel) is not enough to discourage Elfenbein from concluding that:

For the first time in the English literary tradition, Cleland treated non-procreative sex, non-marital heterosexuality not merely as pleasurable but as healthy, healthy, healthy. Healthiness of such magnitude is no simple matter and extends far beyond the bounds of mere bodily well-being. In *Memoirs*, under the right circumstances, sex virtually substitutes for salvation: it guarantees health, endless profit, and the most rigorous ethical and bodily discipline.¹⁴⁵

What I will argue below is that Cleland suggests “the right circumstances” are difficult to achieve, and sex, more often than not, is deleterious to the man’s health. (Fanny and the other prostitutes are notably able to avoid adverse consequences of sex).

David Weed does produce an extended reading of the men of *Memoirs*, but with a different agenda in mind. In “Fitting Fanny: Cleland’s *Memoirs* and the Politics of Male Pleasure,” Weed asserts that Cleland creates a idealized group of nearly perfectly homogenous prostitutes within the world of his novel; Cleland creates “fair-skinned Englishwomen who are

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Elfenbein, “The Management of Desire in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*,” in *Launching Fanny Hill: Essays on the Novel and Its Influences*, ed. Patsy S. Fowler and Alan Jackson (New York: AMS, 2003), 31.

¹⁴⁵ Elfenbein, “The Management of Desire,” 28.

incapable of pregnancy, immune to disease” and surprisingly sexually responsive for prostitutes; in the process of “verbally air-brushing both the prostitutes’ looks and the harsh realities of their working conditions,” Cleland manages “to stimulate a male readership that has libidinal investment in the novel’s sexual fantasy.”¹⁴⁶ In contrast with this homogeneity, “the men in Cleland’s novel present the reader with a range of physical traits, class positions, and identities. The figure of the standardized prostitute serves to mediate between these men...in order to calibrate them according to their penis size and sexual performance.”¹⁴⁷ Weed broaches the topic of sexual performance, but strikingly excludes most of the men who cannot perform sexually. In so doing, Weed does not take into account the troubling effect impotence must have had on the very same libidinal investment that he asserts Cleland works to cultivate. Ultimately, Weed creates an argument that focuses almost entirely on categorizing Fanny’s lovers according to their economic status and their ability to perform sexually; he argues that the novel “intently scrutinizes the way that men’s sexual practices at once reflect and influence their social status.”¹⁴⁸ Weed also asserts that a “subsidiary function” of the discussion is “as a classification system of various types of masculinity in the era,” which he acknowledges as “equally interesting and important” but does not expand on this aspect of his argument because of his interest in social status. The novel creates “a taxonomy of male identities rooted deeply in the relationship between an emerging vision of English national identity, class, and sexuality, which ultimately justifies a new and, surprisingly...rather narrow conception of bourgeois male sexuality while it decries aristocratic men and sodomites for the various ways that they misuse

¹⁴⁶ David Weed, “Fitting Fanny: Cleland’s Memoirs and the Politics of Male Pleasure,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 31, no. 1(2003), 7.

¹⁴⁷ Weed, “Fitting Fanny,” 7.

¹⁴⁸ Weed, “Fitting Fanny,” 7.

and overuse pleasure.”¹⁴⁹ Weed comes the closest to engaging with the investigation I am interested in, but in his zeal to categorize neatly the men according to their class yields little discussion of what their various failures mean in terms of the confluence of sexual beliefs in play during the period of Cleland’s composition of *Memoirs*.

Throughout *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny encounters men whose sexual appetites are disordered and whose sexual performance is subsequently a disappointment. Their persistent presence in a novel that would function better as an example of its genre without them suggests their presence is important to the novel nonetheless. Mr. Crofts, the first man with whom Fanny has sexual contact, is a ghastly example of such a presence. He was “a man rather past threescore, short and ill made, with a yellow cadaverous hue, great goggling eyes that stared as if he was strangled; an out-mouth from two more properly tushes than teeth, livid lips, and a breath like a jakes. He had a peculiar ghastliness in his grin that made him perfectly frightful, if not dangerous to women with child.”¹⁵⁰ That Fanny suggests Mr. Crofts could be dangerous to pregnant women underscores just how hideous Mr. Crofts is; the eighteenth-century understanding of pregnancy included beliefs that a woman’s unborn child could be detrimentally affected (i.e. miscarriage or malformation) by the sights she was exposed to during pregnancy.¹⁵¹ Fanny thus suggests that Mr. Crofts is so terrifying he could potentially cause damage to a woman’s unborn fetus.

Mr. Crofts provides an exemplary instance of *Memoirs* resisting identification as a pornotopia; old, decrepit, and grotesque, Mr. Crofts is undoubtedly a character we might expect

¹⁴⁹ Weed, “Fitting Fanny,” 8. Weed is the only scholar I have thus far found who acknowledges that Cleland’s views might not be as subversive or progressive as they immediately appear.

¹⁵⁰ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 53.

¹⁵¹ For further discussion of belief in this phenomenon, see Paul-Gabriel Boucé, “Imagination, Pregnant Woman, and Monsters, in Eighteenth-Century England and France,” in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), 86-101.

to have died in the land of pornotopia. As Crofts attempts to rape Fanny, we find that he is, unsurprisingly, as sexually decrepit as he is physically decrepit: “Impotence, rather than necessity, made him seek in variety the provocative that was wanting to raise him to the pitch of enjoyment, which too he often saw himself balked of by the failure of his powers: and this always threw him into a fit of rage, which he wreaked, as far as he durst, on the innocent objects of his fit of momentary desire” (53). Mr. Crofts’ appetite has been disturbed (ostensibly through overindulgence) and can now only be satisfied through a more exotic variety or stimuli to supply the “provocative” that was wanting. In this case, the provocative is a resistant virgin. Mr. Crofts lacks the nonchalance exhibited by the speakers of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems. When faced with his own ‘failure of...powers’ he is “thrown into a fit of rage.” Mr. Crofts, rather than the speakers of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems, reacts in the way we might expect; after all, “impotence” means not only the lack of sexual performance but more generally a lack of power, which is a meaning Fanny evokes when she comments on Mr. Crofts’ failure.

Even when the provocative is supplied, Mr. Crofts cannot perform adequately: “The brute had, it seems, as I afterwards understood, brought on, by his eagerness and struggle, the ultimate period of his hot fit of lust, which his power was too short-lived to carry him through the full execution of; of which my thighs and linen received the effusion” (167). Mr. Crofts’ position in the novel as the first man with whom Fanny has any sexual contact ensures that her future encounters will be haunted by the specter of Mr. Crofts cadaverous and impotent body; each man she meets has the potential to turn into Mr. Crofts if he does not manage his own appetites.

Lest we discount Mr. Crofts’ grotesque presence as simply satiric of men his age having inappropriate sexual desires or expectations (a matter that will be discussed at length in Chapter 3), Cleland provides the example of Mr. Norbert. Mr. Norbert is:

A gentleman of a great fortune, which, with a constitution naturally not the best, has greatly impaired by his over-violent pursuit of the vices of the town, in the course of which, having worn out and staled [sic.] all the common modes of debauchery, he had fallen into a taste of maiden-hunting, in which chase he had ruined a number of girls, sparing no expense to compass his ends. (166)

Fanny reveals that Mr. Norbert is thirty years old, but has the constitution of one of “sixty winters.” Mr. Norbert may be young, but his constitution aligns him with Mr. Crofts (who conveniently, is also sixty) and thus suggests that in the land of pornotopia he should rightfully be dead and not disturbing the potential titillation of those reading the novel. For those who might wish to dismiss Mr. Crofts as a satire of age rather than the ravages of an abused sexual appetite, Cleland uses Mr. Norbert to close off the text and reinforce the warnings associated with Mr. Crofts’ troubling presence in the text. Other examples of men with similar depraved appetites are Mr. Barvile, whose penchant was flagellation:

But what yet increased the oddity of this strange fancy was the gentleman’s being young; whereas it generally attacks, it seems, such as are, through age, obliged to have recourse to this experiment for quickening the circulation of their sluggish juices, and determining a conflux of spirits of pleasure towards those flagging, shrivelly parts that rise to life only by virtue of these titillating ardours created by the discipline of their opposites.” (180-181)

A final example is provided by the older gentleman who has a hair fetish and “Another peculiar taste he had, which was to present me at once with a dozen pair of the whitest kid-gloves at a time: these he would divert himself with drawing on me, and then biting off their fingers’ ends”

(190). This last is particularly interesting as it was not encompassed in any acknowledged form of fetish.

Cleland ends Fanny's career with the rational pleurist who serves to cleanse the palate of the reader from the distaste the likes of Mr. Crofts and Mr. Norbert most certainly have created. Notably there's almost no sexual content associated with the rational pleurist; his sexual presence forms an aporia in the text. This absence is frustrating as he is supposed to provide a model within the text for the right form of sexual appetite. Cleland does not (or perhaps cannot) lead the reader to imagine what that might be.

Memoirs of a Coxcomb functions as a kind of bildungsroman of the rational pleurist; the narrator learns (again through the presence of the impaired) a rational approach to sexual appetite which he ultimately reflects upon thusly:

I had denied myself such pleasures with infinitely more satisfaction, than I should have found in taking a fulsome fill in them! In short I was naturally too much the true voluptuary, to mud-suck my pleasure in such dirty dull debauches, or to content myself with joys, that had not some degree of taste for their sanctioning and reasoning.¹⁵²

Memoirs of a Coxcomb is littered with examples of impaired men, mostly absent from the text because they have not heeded the dictates of good taste and have died from their excesses (and left their widows available to the attentions of William, the protagonist). Although not as grotesque as Mr. Crofts, these men haunt the text. Mrs. Rivers, with whom William shares his first sexual experience is the "widow of a gentleman of a very good estate in M--, whose constitution she had broke by overdrawing upon it" (74). The rest of his story goes as follows:

He had been at Bath for the recovery of his shattered health, but in vain, through the ignorance or neglect of his physicians, who had omitted the most material prescription,

¹⁵² John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, ed. Hal Gladfelder (Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2005), 171.

that of leaving his wife behind him. It was even whispered, with how much justice I do not pretend to decide, amongst the dealers in secret anecdotes, that a fit of jaundice he took at a young officer's assiduities, which she had not enough discouraged, had given him the finishing blow. (79)

Mr. River's death shows the double-edged nature of the compromised constitution; his constitution is undone by his wife's overdrawing upon it, but is also ultimately destroyed by his inability to satisfy her continued appetites and thus he must watch, humiliated, as she turns her attentions to another. Mr. Rivers is an unusual case in that the destruction of his constitution begins in his marriage as opposed to debauchery about town. Defoe, however, suggests in *Conjugal Lewdness* that excessive venery is a possibility even within marriage:

Whence come palsies and epilepsies, falling-sickness, trembling of the joints, pale dejected aspects, leanness, and at last rottenness, and other filthy and loathsome distempers, but from the criminal excesses of their younger time. 'Tis not enough to say that it was lawful, and they made use of none but their own wives, the natural course of things go on their own way' nature's streams flow all in the same channels; if the fountain is drawn dry, if the vitals are exhausted, the engines of nature worked with unreasonable violence, the parts feel the same unreasonable force, and the consequences will be the same, whether the acts were justifiable, and lawful in themselves or not. (91)

Here Mrs. Rivers is responsible for breaking her husband's constitution, but as William introduces additional examples of these broken men, the manner in which a constitution is broken clearly becomes an active, rather than a passive process. Rivers, even in (or, perhaps more so, because of) his silent absence from the text is perhaps more alarming than Mr. Crofts and Mr. Norbert. Although their excesses leave them sexually crippled, they are still alive.

Whereas Rivers is cast as a victim in the process of destroying his constitution, Thomas Oldborough has no help from his wife except the resources provided by her money, which became the “insnaring instrument of his destruction” (117). He subsequently :

Abandoned himself to such riotous excesses of all sorts, he drove with such fury, that his constitution failed under him, before it could carry him half way though his fortune: bagnio-amours, tavern-vigils, the momentary racks of ill fortune at play, in short the whole tasteless despicable round of the joys of the town, in which so many young fellows of good estate so lamentably consume character, health and fortune. (117)

Ultimately “drained then, consumptive, and exhausted, he died, before he was thirty” (117).

Again, the ultimate result of the abuses of the constitution through sexual excess (as well as the stresses of gaming and drinking) is death. William is moved by these stories but continues on what he believes is a reasonable path despite their warnings.

Lady Travers and her lover Buralt provide the shock to William that causes him to disavow even his more tasteful entertainments. Even as William himself is beginning to feel that he is being “battered to...ruins” by his dalliance with Lady Travers, he feels compelled to continue until he witnesses a scene that alarms him more greatly than even realizing that his “sprightliness, vigour, and florid freshness, the native attendants of healthy youth, began to shew of dropping, and flagged” (186). Faced with the image of Buralt, Lady Travers’ servant, and we must presume, lover, William realizes the potential for destruction that he has only begun to feel: “Wrapped in a blue coat, that sat on him yet less loosely than his skin, which was of a dun fallow hue. His eyes goggled from him sockets appearing sunk inwards, but the retreat of the flesh around them, which likewise added to the protuberance of his cheek-bones” (188). The grotesquerie of Buralt, whose appearance recalls that of Mr. Crofts (particularly in his “goggled”

eyes) is compounded by William's witnessing the attempts to restore his constitution: Buralt breastfeeds from a wet nurse. The horrifying inversion of the nurturing of a mother ultimately breaks William's desire for sexual variety. Buralt's perverse appetites represent a particularly creative extension of the unusual provocative theory of appetites expressed throughout *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*.

The Institutes of Health

Central to his argument within *Institutes of Health* is Cleland's identification of human nature and its tendency to desire instantaneous and excessive gratification as the greatest stumbling block to health and longevity:¹⁵³ man is "in most points where his happiness is the most concerned, the capital enemy to himself, the greatest tyrant preparing tortures against himself, and in the countries of the greatest politeness and refinement ever the surest suicide."¹⁵⁴ Cleland argues generally against hedonism and a culture of instant gratification: "the weakness [sic.] of men in general" is "that they are ever more powerfully affected by what immediately strikes the sense, and often egregiously deceives them, than by the juster deductions of their own reason, with their passions suffer them so little to consult" (xv). Rather than taking the stance of moral superiority, Cleland suggests that he has learned the lessons of temperance through his

¹⁵³ Basker, "Wages of Sin," 186. Basker identifies 1759-1760 as the period during which Cleland was working on the *Institutes*. Both Lonsdale and Epstein establish that the anonymous author of the work was Cleland, but Basker provides evidence that Cleland's anonymity might have functioned in name only within some circles. Basker points our attention to "a copy owned by Thomas Hollis, an eminent eighteenth-century New England figure who traveled frequently to London and moved in literary circles, and who sometime before August 1769 wrote on the title page of his copy 'By Mr. Cleland!'" (186). Basker goes on to say that "The reason for Hollis's punctuational excitement is unknown, though in part perhaps it was surprise and amusement that such a work could have been written by the author of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*" (186). I shall argue that there is evidence within the text of *Memoirs* that Hollis's surprise—if it was inspired by the coexistence of these two texts within one man's literary career—is not entirely warranted.

¹⁵⁴ John Cleland. *Institutes of Health* (London, 1761), xii-xiii.

own suffering. In so doing, he distinguishes himself from many other forms of advice literature that make impersonal dictates on behavior. Cleland laments the losses he has suffered:¹⁵⁵

I forfeited by [neglect], in all human probability, the inestimable advantages of a permanently established health. I have seen or rather felt my folly too late. Too far now advanced in years, when probably my stamina has suffered irretrievable damage by the most abandoned intemperance of all sorts, and when many other reasons besides concur to invalidate the benefits I might still reap from this tardy remodel of my system of life, by following the rules. (iv)

I do not want to belabor the advice that Cleland gives, as it is by no means unique or terribly innovative. To argue for temperance in all endeavors is to repeat advice that has existed for a long time. On sex in particular Cleland suggests, “The act itself, when committed at the instigation of mere lust, leaves a kind of momentary blast both on body and mind. This blast, if at all sensible, is incomparably less so after an enjoyment from moral love, of which even the sensual pleasure will hardly have been less intense or less exquisite” (30). What is noteworthy, ultimately, is that Cleland feels compelled to give this advice—and that this advice explicitly states philosophies about sexual appetite that I have tried to reveal in both *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*.

The sexual failure of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems is never cast as dangerous or alarming; the stance of the speakers almost always involves shrugging off the instance of failure and looking to the past and future as examples of and opportunities for success. Even Rochester’s Disabled Debauchee (who invokes the far more permanent state of impotence) sees

¹⁵⁵ For a general discussion of medical advice and self-help advice, see: Roy Porter, *Health for Sale* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989) and Ginnie Smith, “Prescribing the Rules of Health: Self-Help and Advice in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Cambridge UP, 1985).

a role for himself that may not involve sexual success but yields the contentment of marshaling the sexual success of others in the future. The Imperfect Enjoyment poems cast sexual failure as an inevitable occurrence in a lifestyle that, as the Disabled Debauchee suggests, is worth the pains and costs no matter how permanent. At the most what is lost in the poems is pleasure—the man's and the woman's.

Cleland's impaired men have also paid for pleasure with the loss of pleasure. The tone surrounding them is certainly not as light—they are cast as often grotesque figures and pathetic individuals caught in a vicious cycle of pursuing sexual pleasure in ways that will only eventually make finding that pleasure more arduous. The losses of the men in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* are not frivolous, but the ramifications of their actions only really affect themselves. Certainly Cleland's reflections upon his own decisions and their consequences contain a level of pathos not characteristic to the other representations. In *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, Cleland begins to suggest potentially widespread issues stemming from the men's tasteless abuse of their own constitutions; William foretells the fate of young men who do not preserve their future by modulating their sensual endeavors with taste: they will “sacrifice their healths and fortunes to despicable systems of debauchery,” fall “headlong into a ruinous course in which their persons and purses” will be “the sponges of the meanest and dissolutes of mercenaries in one sex, of the most dangerous sharpers and sycophants in the other” (277). William suggests a series of consequences in the members of the upper class that will lead to the ruin of themselves, their families, and potentially their entire class. These ramifications are only fleetingly considered and never developed in a way that suggests to the reader that they are more important than the immediate and personal costs that the men face. Cleland's treatment draws the

reader's attention to the narrator's personal process of awakening and his fears of the very personal ramifications of his decisions.

Both of these groups of literature involve a discussion of men's sexual performance outside of marriage (although Cleland's *Institutes of Health* is general advice that is equally applicable to single and married men, his discussion is not specifically about married men). The examples of the stage, however, take the anxieties expressed in these texts and imagine their farther reaching consequences within marriage. For my discussion of the drama, I would like to look particularly at a similar discussion that revolves entirely around married men. Mainly I will discuss several comedies by Cibber and Vanbrugh roughly between the years 1690 and 1710.¹⁵⁶ About these plays, Laurie Finke suggests that they deal with "the problems of what happens after the rake and his conquest pair off."¹⁵⁷ I would suggest that the problems the plays engage with are not particular to rakes, but to married men in general. In particular, Finke (as well as many other critics) focuses on the women of these plays:

By the 1690's many of the heroines of wit comedy have, in the words of Millamant, "by degrees dwindled into a wife" and their metamorphoses substantially transform the genre. The comedy becomes darker, the gay couple more morose. The erstwhile rake seems more jaded as he abuses his wife instead of his cast-off mistresses the heroine, more acted upon than acting, becomes silent and passive.¹⁵⁸

Instead of considering the plays as a failure between a rake and the witty heroine, considering them from a general perspective of a failure between a husband and wife allows for the

¹⁵⁶ Paula Backscheider identifies these plays, as well as others as particularly important to the discourse on marriage in " 'Endless Aversion Rooted in the Soul': Divorce in the 1690-1730 Theater," *The Eighteenth Century* 37, no. 2 (1996): 99-135.

¹⁵⁷ Laurie Finke, "Virtue in Fashion: The Fate of Women in the Comedies of Cibber and Vanbrugh" in *From Renaissance to Restoration: Metamorphoses of Drama* (Cleveland: Bellflower, 1984): 154-179, 155.

¹⁵⁸ Finke, "Virtue in Fashion," 157.

revelation of deep-seated anxieties about marriage and masculine sexual behavior in general. Finke certainly does not suggest an element of sexual dysfunction in her discussion of the married relationship between rake and heroine, but I will suggest that these plays (and several others) have implicit discussion of a kind of sexual dysfunction particular to marriage.

In 1711, Edmund Curll, inspired by the success of the publications of divorce trials, turned his attentions to the trial of Robert, Earl of Essex and Lady Frances Howard.¹⁵⁹ Unlike many of the divorce trials that were published by Curll, this particular one was based upon an accusation of impotence. The trial can hardly be considered instructive of the judicial process; the matter was decided through political influence far before it went before the council, a fact the Archbishop of Canterbury makes clear in the materials he provides to explain his dissenting opinion.¹⁶⁰ What is noteworthy about the suit is the Earl's defense. Reluctant to stay married to Frances Howard, but equally reluctant to admit to impotence (a matter that would seriously have impaired his honor), he makes the bizarre claim of being impotent only with his wife: *impotentia versus hanc*.¹⁶¹ The Archbishop reports that the Earl described the situation thus: "He gave the reason of his having no motions to know his lady carnally, and of his thinking that he never should. *When I came out of France I lov'd her; I do not so now, neither ever shall I.* When he was to answer to the article, that she was Virgo incorrupta; he smiled, and said, *She saith so, and she is so for me*" (8). The Archbishop of Canterbury and those who dissented with him found this argument spurious and entirely lacking in precedence. Resistant to allowing the annulment,

¹⁵⁹Frances Howard Carr (Countess of Somerset), *The Case of Insufficiency Discuss'd, being the Proceedings at Large, Touching the Divorce between the Lady Frances Howard, and Robert Earl of Essex* 2nd ed. 2 vols. London, 1715 (London, 1715). Rather than the much shorter first edition Curll published, I have chosen to use the expanded second edition.

¹⁶⁰ Married when they were adolescents, and reunited when they were in their late teens, the couple seems to have been miserable from the start of their marriage. Frances developed a passionate attachment with Robert Carr (Viscount Rochester), who was one of the King's (James I) favorites. James ultimately used his influence over the commission devoted to the annulment to push the nullification (in 1613) through with little evidence.

¹⁶¹ Howard, *The Case of Insufficiency Discuss'd*, 6.

he suggests, “My lord should be inspected, or that physicians should use their art to discern and remove impotency, if any were to be found, or that fasting, prayer, and alms should be excercised [sic.] to over-come this evil, and divers other points of like nature” (119). Ultimately, through the influence of the King, the annulment was granted with several of the commission dissenting and without the Earl ever being examined. At debate, of course, was not whether impotence is a ground for the nullification of a marriage—the Archbishop of Canterbury and the dissenters agree that it is—but whether a profound lack of desire for one’s wife is tantamount to impotence. Whereas *impotentia versus hanc* never became a precedent for granting annulments (or later divorce), I will argue that it reveals underlying assumptions about marriage and the relationship between man and wife that are more explicitly expressed in a group of important performances of impotence in the long eighteenth century.

In most senses, performing impotence is an oxymoron, but from a cultural perspective, it was a reality in eighteenth-century Britain. Divorce trials (although not the Essex v. Howard suit) initiated through an accusation of impotence often required the man in question to prove that he could in, fact, perform sexually before an audience composed of doctors and witnesses.¹⁶² While not required to, the Earl of Essex was rumored to have provided an impromptu version of such a performance:

My Lord of Essex, on that Sunday morning, having five or six Captains, and gentlemen of Worth in his chamber, and speech being made of his inability, rose out of his bed, and taking up his shirt, did shew to them all, so able, and extraordinary sufficient matter, that

¹⁶² McLaren provides a discussion of impotence trials and the various ways proof of impotence was sought in *Impotence: A Cultural History*. Barbara Chubak uses the Weld case in particular as an example of legal and medical treatment of impotence: “Impotence and Suing for Sex in Eighteen-Century England” *Urology* 71: 3, 2008: 480-484.

they all cry'd shame of his lady, and said; that if the ladies of court knew as much as they knew, they would tread her to death.¹⁶³

The Earl's enthusiasm for proving his general sexual ability (if whilst arguing for conjugal incapability) can be understood when the beliefs about impotent husbands are further probed.

The author of *The Cuckold's Chronicle* (1793), in which was published coverage of "The celebrated Case and Trial of the Marquis de Gesvres," clearly wanted to create sympathy in the part of the reader. Of the suffering Mademoiselle de Mascranny, the author states:

Let it be considered, to what trials the modesty of a woman is exposed, if united to a sham husband!¹⁶⁴---What cruel assaults and experiments has she not to sustain! The image of such a husband, lifeless as it is, cannot but kindle some kind of desire, yet, like the apples of Tantalus, it can only torment.---And, as it is notorious, that the rage of the fumbler, is apt to hurry him into extravagancies, and even revenge; the life of a woman, hampered with such a one, may be highly endangered.---These imperfect men always seek to do away with their own shame by criminating somebody else.¹⁶⁵

As I have shown, other performances of impotence can be found throughout British literature, including the Imperfect Enjoyment poems and the works of John Cleland (*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Memoirs of a Coxcomb, and The Institutes of Health*). Almost all of these non-dramatic texts concern themselves with impotence outside of marriage. Impotence outside of marriage is a matter of too much—the rhetorical stance of the "Imperfect Enjoyment" poems is

¹⁶³ Frances Howard, *The Case of Insufficiency Discuss'd*, 42.

¹⁶⁴ This refers to the physical trials women underwent as part of the proofs of impotency. Although the author does not elaborate in this case, the reader would almost certainly have been expected to understand that whereas the husband's potency was a matter of scrutiny, the wife's virginity (unless she was a widow) would also be under scrutiny.

¹⁶⁵ "The celebrated Case and trial of the marquis de Gesvres, upon the complaint of his Lady, Mademoiselle de Mascranny, who, after three years of Marriage, commenced a Suit against him, at Paris, for Imbecillity and Impotency," in *The Cuckolds Chronicle; being select trials for adultery, incest, imbecility, ravishment, &c* (London, 1793), 208-9.

almost always an excuse of too much desire for the female object—the woman and her desirability are at fault rather than the man (one can argue that the man’s lack of control is certainly a matter to be reckoned with, but the speakers are almost all male and thus too little control is always an effect of too much desire). This is not to say that men are never at fault for their own impotence; in fact, almost all other cultural discussions of the matter outside of the Imperfect Enjoyment poems come to blame the man. Too much past debauchery is the cause of poor sexual function in many texts—including the important group by John Cleland discussed above. Within the plays, however, the impotence becomes a matter of too little: love, lust, desire, and respect.

The stage, of course, offers more limitation as to what can be depicted than other forms of media. Other than aged men pursuing young women, a common figure who was often assumed to be impotent (and the subject of Chapter 3), there is no immediate way in which something as intimate as sexual dysfunction can be enacted as explicitly as in nondramatic forms of literature. Of course, one exception is Horner (Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*), but other than him, no immediate performances present themselves. I would like to suggest, however, that there is a kind of impotence performed regularly on the stage, a form that could most easily be described as *impotentia versus hanc*—which I will refer to hereafter as “marital impotence.” Signaled by a series of unsatisfied wives and the husbands who avoid them (and often seek other sexual partners), marital impotence is a common trope throughout long eighteenth-century drama. The fact that these two figures are associated consistently together suggests that the deep disgust men express toward their wives in the plays might be a fashionable stance to parrot, but was also (at least within the worlds created by the plays) a physical reality; what may start as a fashionable stance seems to become a state of mind and ultimately a way of being.

Whereas we might be tempted to dismiss the characters of the wife-loathing husband and the neglected wife as a dramatic cliché, the fact that the plays persistently insist that the husband's loathing is not simply a pose but a reality that leads to a form of impotence, suggests that serious cultural anxieties about the state of marriage are at work. The ramifications of marital impotence are potentially quite widespread. At the most basic level, marital impotence threatened the fabric of social existence. Whereas few people must sincerely have believed that sexual intercourse in the marriage was solely for the purpose of procreation (as we have already seen, Defoe suggests that sexual satisfaction is part of marital obligations), it must certainly have been acknowledged as one of its most important aims. A husband's sexual rejection of his wife would have an undeniable impact on the possibility of procreation. Reduced levels of procreation would lead naturally to decreased population growth—a disservice to the county. Further, childless couples complicated inheritance and could ultimately lead to the ending of family lines. In addition, the husband's desperate and persistent seeking of sexual fulfillment outside of marriage is potentially disruptive of the social structure. Certainly, as has been shown in chapter one, the neglected wife who seeks sexual satisfaction outside of her marriage was an alarming prospect for the culture.

Perhaps one of the most stunning examples of this kind of impotence comes in the form of the Cockwoods from Sir George Etherege's *She Would if She Could* (1668). Sir Oliver is portrayed as a man who attempts to play a fashionable libertine role and almost always fails. Part of this fashionable role is expressing disdain for his wife while ostensibly pursuing women outside of his marriage. Etherege makes clear, however, that the disdain Oliver expresses for his wife (in, as we shall see, truly repugnant terms) is not simply him parroting the sentiments he believes he should have; he thoroughly follows through on those sentiments. We know this

because Lady Cockwood expresses certainty that he is not, if his performance at home is to be believed, capable of being unfaithful to her: “I know he’ll talk of strange matters behind my back; but if he be not an abominable hypocrite at home, and I am not a woman easily to be deceived, he is not able to play the spark abroad thus, I assure you.”¹⁶⁶ Although Lady Cockwood has the couth to avoid overtly saying she is sexually frustrated by her husband’s neglect, she does indicate that he certainly is not playing the “spark” at home. Further, her sexual dissatisfaction leads her to pursue Courtall, although unsuccessfully.

Sir Oliver expresses his disdain for his wife in increasingly disturbing terms that ultimately reinforce that he is, in fact, suffering from marital impotence. He clearly states to his wife: “Avoid my presence; the very sight of that face makes me more impotent than an eunuch” (21). Certainly Sir Oliver’s statement is rife with hyperbole (for how could one be more impotent than a eunuch), but the fact that he hyperbolizes the impotence his wife causes him is interesting—it reveals that he feels his impotence is laudatory and certainly not a matter of shame. In addition, Sir Oliver offers a series of metaphors to illustrate his disgust for his wife that is overtly about sexual intercourse with her. First he states, ‘Sometimes one is obliged to kiss, and fawn, and toy, and lie fooling for an hour or two, when a man had rather, if it were not for the disgrace sake, stand all that while in a pillory paulted by rotten eggs and oranges’ (8-9). It is noteworthy that Sir Oliver makes this a comment about “a man,” and thus presumably, all men, rather than just himself. He seems to perceive the hatred he feels for his wife as a universal state shared by all men. Sir Oliver further compounds his own negative review of his sexual performance when he states, “A Poor fiddler, after he has been three days persecuted at a country wedding, takes more delight in scraping upon his squeaking fiddle than I do in fumbling on that

¹⁶⁶ George Etherege, *She Would If She Could*, ed. Charlene M. Taylor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 16.

domestic instrument of mine” (67). That Sir Oliver characterizes his own performance as “fumbling” is noteworthy as it is one of the predominant euphemisms for poor male sexual performance. The imagery of the exhausted fiddler “scraping” on his instrument yields a grotesque evaluation of Sir Cockwood’s sexual performance when faced with his wife. In *Impotence: A Cultural History*, Angus McLaren suggests that “the sharing of bedroom fiascoes could serve as a male bonding experience, diminishing the shame of some and inflating the bravado of others.”¹⁶⁷ Whereas McLaren suggests that sharing sexual failure of any kind can be a bonding experience, Sir Oliver stresses a certain kind of impotence as a means for gaining respect from his compatriots. In a way then, the danger of marital impotence is created by a shared male philosophy about marriage that becomes central to homosocial bonding. Whereas Horner is excluded from homosocial circles because of his performance of impotence, these men gain further access to homosocial circles with their performance—in fact, their performance is in a way *de rigueur*—a fashionable form of impotence. After all, Sir Oliver is vociferous in his protestations of marital impotence, declaring it in terms so hyperbolic and grotesque that we must assume he wears his incapability as a badge of honor.

Sir Oliver’s thoughts on marriage are ultimately rejected as wrongheaded within the play. The first indication of the faultiness of Sir Oliver’s sentiments comes in the characterization of Sir Oliver himself; Cockwood’s performance is faulty because for all his posturing about hating his wife, he fails to perform with other women. Though he attempts the pose of a libertine, he has failed to master his role. In addition, Etherege has Sir Oliver seem to reject his own sentiments as his compatriots end the play having paired off with the women they have pursued throughout. Sir Oliver gets the last lines of the play in which he states in verse, “Give me thy hand, my virtuous, my dear. / Henceforward may our mutual loves increase, / And when we are

¹⁶⁷ McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History*, 75.

a-bed, we'll sign the peace" (120). Whereas Etherege suggests that the Cockwoods have found a resolution to their problem and new hope for their marriage (in particular sexual compatibility as their marriage bed will be the site of the peacemaking), savvy audience members must have noted that there is no action in the fifth act of the play (or anywhere else for that matter) to suggest that Sir Oliver's views of marriage have been reformed. Certainly there is nothing in the final act that can hope to erase the imagery of the pilloried man and the pathetic fiddler. Lady Cockwood confronts Sir Oliver ("Do not stay and torment me with thy sight. Go, graceless wretch, follow thy treacherous resolutions, do, and waste that poor stock of comfort which I should have at home, upon those your ravenous cormorants below"[110]), but this hardly "buys" the resolution that Etherege attempts at the end of the play. While more vociferous than her complaints elsewhere in the play, this final confrontation is hardly the first time she (as well as his male companions) have called Sir Oliver to account for his uncivil behavior toward her.¹⁶⁸ Rather than read this somewhat haphazard resolution as a fault in Etherege's construction of the play, I would suggest that this resolution calls attention to the irreconcilable differences that exist in the relationship.

As we will see, Oliver Cockwood is one of the only husbands in this section who does not in some way invoke the term or concept of surfeit in his discussion of his wife (although an argument can be made for the image of the fiddler serving as a metaphor for surfeit). The persistent invocation of the term "surfeit" (even when they don't actually use the word, they often invoke the concept) by men in their discussions of their wives is revealing of a system of related cultural beliefs and anxieties. Surfeit, which in its most general sense simply means "excessive amount of supply of something," was also a matter of moral and medical import.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Hume rather unsympathetically refers to Lady Cockwood as "a domineering wife [who] tyrannizes an ineffectually rebellious husband" (254). "Marital Discord in English Comedy from Dryden to Fielding" *Modern Philology* 74:3 (1977): 248-72.

Morally “surfeit” would indicate a lack of control: “excessive indulgence”—a polite euphemism for the sin of gluttony (unsurprising in a culture that loved euphemisms for sin—consider the use of the term “gallantry” as it is applied to extramarital sex). Medically, “surfeit” was applied to the results of excessive consumption and was considered a real, tangible (and sometimes dangerous) medical condition: “The morbid condition caused by excessive eating or drinking; sickness or derangements of the system arising from intemperance.”¹⁶⁹ Whereas men have all three different levels of meaning available to use when choosing the word, it seems that most often they intend to invoke the last; the feelings they have towards their lives form a physical, debilitating condition that make both themselves and their wives miserable.

For a culture that seems both attracted to and repelled by excess, the existence of a medical condition caused simply by “too much” is unsurprising—and that these anxieties are subsequently related to men’s sexual appetites is even less surprising. “Surfeit,” no matter which meaning is invoked, is a matter of disordered appetite, an appetite conditioned by excess or variety to no longer be satisfied by normal means. We have seen such an association in the works of Cleland. Especially in the latter half of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny encounters several men whose unusual sexual tastes (fetishes, sado-masochism, etc.) indicate a disordered sexual appetite. Surfeited on “normal” sex, the men must turn to more unusual and invigorating stimuli to achieve erection and release.

The same is not exactly true of the husbands and their marital impotence, but they certainly do seem to have a disordered appetite that reveals anxieties about male sexuality. These men experience a “surfeit” of their wives; they feel oppressed by marriages that attempt to channel their sexual appetites toward the single target. Their craving for variety drives them

¹⁶⁹ “Surfeit” was also a medical term for “fits and fevers arising from other causes” and was thus not always associated with gluttony.

away from their wives and into the arms of other women (or to male companionship in the pubs). Ultimately the cult of male sexuality creates the myth of a sexual appetite that persistently seeks gratification and variety—putting it at odds with the superficial expectation of fidelity in marriage. On the stage we can associate this kind of appetite with rakes and would-be rakes, many of whom, simply for the sake of variety will pursue multiple intrigues at any one time (sometimes seemingly with every woman they encounter).

Rather than releasing women from responsibility for the mess of male sexuality that patriarchal culture has created, the full burden of reform falls upon them. The possibility for successful reform or the manner through which it would be achieved is generally associated with skepticism and pessimism—the culture has to place its faith in something (female virtue) of which it is deeply suspicious. Even the highly moral Daniel Defoe suggests that women who are neglected by disdainful husbands can only be expected to tolerate so much:

It must be confessed 'tis a wise man's business after matrimony, by all means possible to preserve the affection of his wife entire, to engross her to him, and make and keep himself the single and entire object of her best thoughts. If she is once brought to loath and abhor him, she must have an uncommon stock of virtue, and be more a Christian than he ought to expect of her, if she does not single out some other object of her affection; and can a man think his wife, who is thus every day disobliged, in the grossest manner ill used, and, in spite of her resentments, exposed to be laught at by him, will long preserve an inviolable affection to him.¹⁷⁰

Anxiety for the power of female virtue to persist and reform is constantly expressed throughout the drama—a tug of war between pessimism and optimism is played out. Every play that ends

¹⁷⁰ Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness*, 79.

with the reformation of a rake must be shadowed by the possibility of relapse, a possibility suggested by the relationship between Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* and Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*. For every wife who resists the temptation to punish her awful husband by cuckolding him, there is one who is tempted to or already has done so.

In *Love's Last Shift* (1696), Colley Cibber imagines the ultimate reform of one of these types of husbands in the form of wayward Loveless, who has abandoned his wife for the continent and all the sins he can afford there—for ten years. Believing his wife dead, having “broke her heart for the loss of [him],” Loveless returns to London.¹⁷¹ Loveless echoes the all too familiar sentiments of surfeit and variety as he contemplates his failed marriage to Amanda: “The world to me is a garden, stockt with all sorts of fruit, where the greatest pleasure we can take, is in the variety of tast [sic.]: but a wife is an eternal apple tree, after a pull or two you are sure to set your teeth on edge” (2). Further Loveless clarifies his stance without a metaphor and claims he was driven out of Amanda's arms because of the “staleness of her love” (3). Ultimately, Loveless does, in fact, invoke the concept of surfeit: “For all the consequence is, you loath what you surfeit on” (4).

Young Worthy, in attempting to remedy the breach between his friends Loveless and Amanda, speculates “Now I am confident 'twas more an affectation of being fashionably vicious, than any reasonable dislike, he cou'd either find in your mind or person: therefore cou'd you by some artifice, pass upon him as a new mistress, I am apt to believe you wou'd find none of the wonted coldness in his love, but a younger heat and fierce desire” (11). The language that Young Worthy uses to describe the lack of passion between the two (“the wonted coldness is his love” as opposed to “a younger heat and fierce passion”) is very much similar to the language of impotence and sexual deficiency we can see in many other cultural fora. The idea of artificially

¹⁷¹ Colley Cibber, *Love's Last Shift* (London, 1702), 1.

creating variety by presenting oneself as a new mistress echoes cultural beliefs about the stimulating effect of non-mainstream sexual activities, such as sado-masochism and various fetishes that are associated with debilitated sex drives elsewhere (the Mr. Norbert episode in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example). That he suggests a mild role-playing version of this strategy as a remedy indicates that Young Worthy has internalized many of these beliefs and that the sexual debility of a Mr. Norbert is, indeed, paralleled with the sexual distaste Loveless feels for Amanda.

In addition, Young Worthy's description of Loveless' disordered appetite as stemming from an "affection of being fashionably vicious" is important. Worthy seems to be dismissing Loveless' disinterest toward Amanda as a frivolous fashionable gesture; even if his utter abandonment of Amanda for ten years were not an indication, the manner of curing Loveless' disorder suggests that the issue is a deeper one than Worthy acknowledges. Whereas the stance Loveless takes is a fashionable one, it is not one he is capable of being reasoned out of—Young Worthy, after all, tries. And surely Amanda has made reformatory efforts in the past (Loveless mentions Amanda's efforts to reform him before he leaves for the Continent). Young Worthy's plan, and its subsequent success, reveal that Loveless' appetite must be retrained in order to unite him with Amanda. If, indeed, Loveless' neglect was a stance only (rather than stemming from a physical reality), Loveless would not so thoroughly be moved by Amanda's bedroom trick. Cibber stresses in the flurry of Loveless' reform in the final act that Amanda's virtue is the ultimate power that saves Loveless, but what goes unacknowledged is what goes before—the illusion of anonymous sex that forces Loveless to acknowledge that he can desire his wife. The physical manifestation of that desire (as evidenced by the night they spend together) is what lifts the blinders from Loveless' eyes and makes him capable of perceiving Amanda's virtue. Helga

Drougge comments of the relative ease with which Cibber seems to resolve the problems of the Loveless marriage:

More centrally, the basic situation of the play, that of a woman tied to a debauched husband, is one that does not look depressing and problematic only to a modern reader, but which looked exactly the same way to many of Cibber's contemporaries, as a result of various social pressures and changes in the role of women. That situation was strikingly and pessimistically treated in Southerne's unfunny comedy, *The Wive's Excuse* (1691) and later more amusingly, but with complete seriousness, by Vanbrugh in *The Provok'd Wife* (1697). Cibber, however, "shows" in *Love's Last Shift* that it is no problem really by having Amanda "prove" to Loveless that being a good husband is not merely his duty but also the most enjoyable condition possible to him, this combining all imaginable advantages. For Loveless' problem, that of having a polygamous inclination, is just a pseudo-problem, the audience learns: men really prefer their own wives, and really have more fun in bed with them than with other women, so there is actually no sacrifice involved in monogamy.¹⁷²

I would suggest that Cibber's commentary has far more to do with the role of men than the role of women. The play is, after all, about the reformation of the man and his appetites—the most important aspect of Amanda is, in fact, as Drougge herself points out, that she has not changed.

Loveless, when faced with the virtue of his long abandoned wife (and one must implicitly assume, the memories of the passion they had shared while she was in the guise of a strange woman), experiences an ecstatic reform in which he instantaneously rejects the errors of his past:

¹⁷² Helga Drougge, "Colley Cibber's 'Genteel Comedy': *Love's Last Shift* and *The Careless Husband*" *Studia Neophilologica* 54, no.1 (1982), 66.

Oh thou has rous'd me from my deep lethargy of vice! For hitherto my soul has been enslave'd to loose desires, to vain deluding follies, and shadoes of substantial bliss; but now I wake with joy to find my rapture real.—Thus let me kneel and pay my thanks to her, whose conquering virtue has a last subdu'd me. Here will I fix, thus prostrate, sigh my shame, and wash my crimes in never ceasing tears of penitence.¹⁷³

Almost all of what Loveless says here can take on a double meaning of spiritual awakening or sexual awakening. For the sake of propriety, perhaps, Cibber stresses the former but the latter is all too present. Certainly the “deep lethargy of vice” can have multiple meanings, but one can see how it can both apply to Loveless’ general state of being and his sexual reaction to his wife. The impetus for his reform is ostensibly Amanda’s virtue and forgiveness, but these two things are inextricably bound with the sexual proof that Amanda has provided to Loveless—that he can desire her if he can simply remove the onus of the beliefs that Young Worthy earlier refers to as an attempt to be “fashionably vicious.” If, in fact, the problem of the marriage between Amanda and Loveless really is simply a matter of the fizzling of passion, Loveless’ reformation at the end of the play is still tenuous. One might assume that keeping his sexual interest would require exponentially more creativity and effort as time goes on—an assumption that fuels the anxieties surrounding disordered appetites in texts like *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. Helga Drougge makes an important observation about the physicality of the scene that might help us to understand how the contemporary audience “bought” the reformation at the end and ultimately found it plausible and moving:

Some critics in the audience, according to Gildon, objected to this scene as being “founded on a very great improbability, viz. on Loveless’s not know his wife...yet the

¹⁷³ Cibber, *Love’s Last Shift*, 57.

beauty of the incident and the excellent moral that flows from it abundantly outweigh the fault.” Other sources, too, testify to the striking effect the beauty and moral of the scene had, though it should be noted that Thomas Davis’ well-known report about the first-night audience unanimously bursting into tears is far from contemporary. Certainly the moral can be said to “flow:” the reconciliation is long, emotional and exclamatory, with a gymnastic choreography of prostrations, kneeling and risings generated by his repentance and her “submissive eloquence.” First she kneels down while he stands “amazed,” then she falls in a swoon, he supports her, she rises, he “turns from her” (ashamed), she kneels again, he begs her to rise, he embraces her, she weeps, he kneels, she begs him to rise.¹⁷⁴

Diane Harris takes for face value Loveless’ complaints about the “staleness” of Amanda’s love; like a familiar stereotype we have available to us today, Amanda must become a woman who learns to bring the spice back into her marriage. That finding the “spice” also leads to a complete moral revolution in *Loveless* is what might trouble viewers. Harris finds the conversion convincing: “His conversion is sudden and absolute—but not implausible, for he continues to seek the same qualities in a woman: desire, passion, and fire. If the bed-trick has changed him, it is only by teaching him these qualities can be found in a wife.”¹⁷⁵ Harris suggests that the real lesson in the play is for Amanda and states that “Cibber sketched out a subversive image of the

¹⁷⁴ Drougge, “Colley Cibber’s ‘Genteel Comedy,’” 63-4. Aparna Gollapudi also suggests a possible explanation for the willingness of the audience to accept *Loveless*’s reformation; her argument suggests that the visual cues of *Loveless*’s changing appearance throughout the play (spanning from his slovenly appearance at his introduction in the play to his reformed appearance once he enters Amanda’s house). She claims, “In *Love’s Last Shift*, Cibber eschews persistent play between the external visual signifiers and inner worth, choosing instead to forge a specular field in which what you see is what you get” (6). “Seeing is Believing” Performing Reform in Colley Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift*” in *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, ed. Thomas Shoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau (Ann Arbor: Gale, 2008) 140: 1-21. Robert Hume is a counterpoint to these views and suggests that Cibber’s economic concerns caused him to “aim” at the “Ladies” by “pour[ing] on the emotional slush” (257). Commercial success or not, Hume refuses to acknowledge any aspect of production that might save the reformation from implausibility: “From a man who has abandoned his wife for ten years while he whored and gamed his way though his fortune, this is not very convincing” (257).

¹⁷⁵ Diane Harris, “‘Downy Lawns of Fruitful Bliss’: Marriage in Colley Cibber’s Original Comedies,” *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 12, no. 1 (1997): 43.

ideal wife. Against Restoration convention, Cibber sought to present marriage as a place where a man could find both emotional and sensual satisfaction. In pursuit of this aim, he was led to portray the model wife as a woman with the courage to transgress traditional boundaries of female behavior.”¹⁷⁶ Harris suggests, if not exactly using the term “appetite” that Amanda has to have her sexual appetite reordered. In particular, she suggests that Amanda must learn “that a virtuous woman can actively and energetically pursue what she wants—more, that she must do so if she is to find happiness.”¹⁷⁷ I would ultimately argue that the play suggests that what Loveless needs is a change in the way he conceives of his own sexual appetite and how that appetite fits within the realm of marriage. In focusing on the lessons entailed only for Amanda and other wives, Harris never delves into the deeper issues of the structures of feeling surrounding men’s experiences of marriage, issues that become more explicit in John Vanbrugh’s response to *Love’s Last Shift*, *The Relapse*.

The relationship of Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* and Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift* can at its simplest be characterized as a sequel that allowed audiences to follow up on the story of Amanda and Loveless. That simple relationship is complicated, however, by Vanbrugh’s cynical rejection of Loveless’ reform and what I would characterize as his parody of the language of reform and domestic bliss in the play’s first act. Further, the play allowed Cibber to reprise the role of Sir Novelty Fashion, and thus ultimately whatever the relationship between Cibber’s play and Vanbrugh’s, Cibber was intimately involved in the production of the latter. As with many of the plays that feature the reformation of a rake in the last scene, *Love’s Last Shift* must necessarily leave cynical audience members wondering how long such a reform could last. Vanbrugh’s sequel suggests that a reform like Loveless’ could only last as long as he was removed from the

¹⁷⁶ Harris, “Downy Lawns,” 43.

¹⁷⁷ Harris, “Downy Lawns,” 43.

temptations of London. The play opens with Loveless and Amanda sharing nearly sickeningly sweet domestic bliss; to an audience on the cusp of a movement toward sentimental comedy, this domestic bliss must have represented a mixed blessing—cloying those who appreciated the more cynical comedy of the Restoration but delighting those who could be described as the “early adopters” of sentimental comedy.

Berinthia, Amanda’s cousin and secretly Loveless’ lover, suggests the matter of cloying to Amanda, who is struggling to grasp why her husband has failed her yet again. Berinthia invokes the concept of surfeit: “Why there’s the mystery; you have been so bountiful, you have cloy’d him. Fond wives do their husbands, as barren wives do by their lap-dog; cram ‘em with sweet-meats till they spoil their stomachs.”¹⁷⁸ She offers what is perhaps one of the more cynical versions of the concept of marital surfeit between the two plays. In comparing the efforts of fond wives to please their husbands to those interactions between barren wives and lap dogs (whose desperation to please and coddle reveals a lack in themselves), Berinthia suggests that Amanda is the cause of her own marital distress.

In “‘The Deep Reserves of Man’: Anxiety in Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse*,” Helga Drougge suggests that Vanbrugh naturalizes the male sexual appetite I have identified here as problematic (and the source of these marital conflicts). She suggests that while Vanbrugh identifies female behavior (resistance and virtue) as constructed by society: “His male rakes are left whole and opaque, undeconstructed, in full possession of the masculine glamor given them by nature herself. Their predatory virility is valorized as independent of time and place: ‘I tell you, no Man worth having, is true to his Wife, or can be true to his Wife, or ever was, or ever will be so.’”¹⁷⁹ Whereas there may be some effort on Vanbrugh’s part to naturalize the wandering and fickle

¹⁷⁸ John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse* (London, 1696), 58.

¹⁷⁹ Helga Drougge, “‘The Deep Reserves of Man’: Anxiety in Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse*” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34, no. 3 (1994): 508.

appetites of men, such efforts do not necessarily diminish the possibility that he is simultaneously problematizing such tendencies. After all, if we can accept that Vanbrugh perceives feminine sexual behavior as constructed, one must assume that the construction is via societal norms and pressures contrary to the natural female tendencies. If feminine behavior is thus malleable, so too, we must assume is masculine behavior. Certainly the quote above does in a sense naturalize and valorize what I have otherwise identified as troubling behavior, but the quote above is also curiously divorced from the speaker, who turns out to be Berinthia. At this point in the play, Berinthia is fully aware of (and compliant with) Loveless's adulterous interests in her and is also being manipulated by Worthy to advance his cause with Amanda. Berinthia is hardly the character we might look to as a source of Vanbrugh's indirect discourse on fidelity.

The focus of the play is not really Loveless' relapse as the title might suggest—that occurs almost instantaneously (upon Loveless meeting Amanda's cousin, Berinthia) and is so unimportant to the play that Loveless himself disappears from the stage as soon as Amanda has had her suspicions confirmed. The bulk of the attention of the Loveless/Amanda storyline is paid to the destruction of Amanda's forgiving nature. Vanbrugh gives Amanda a spectacular speech in which her capacity for forgiveness is finally expended and she reflects upon the various problems with her marriage:

This poor relapse should only move my scorn.
'Tis true the roving flights on his unfinisht youth,
Had strong excuse, from the plea of nature;
Reason had thrown the reins loose on his neck,
And slipt him to unlimited desire.
If therefore he went wrong,

He had a claim to my forgiveness, and I did him right.

But since the years of manhood rein him in,

And reason, well digested into thought,

Has pointed out the course he ought to run,

If now he strays,

Twould be as weak and mean in me to pardon,

As it had been in him t'offend.¹⁸⁰

It is significant that Amanda casts Loveless' relapse not as a betrayal of her faith in him, but a failure of reason. His faithfulness to her is not something that their love for each other should ensure, but a "course" that "reason, well digested into thought, / Has pointed out" for him.

Ultimately through Amanda, Vanbrugh suggests that the stance Loveless and those husbands take and the actions it subsequently leads to are unreasonable. Defoe acknowledges the irrationality of marital disdain in *Conjugal Lewdness*. He comments on marital discord with his case study of a husband who would openly and constantly express his disdain for his wife. Defoe notes the wife's ability to tolerate his comments with patience but comments on one particular incident:

Putting one time very hard upon something in her behavior, which he pretended not to like, though really without cause; she coloured at his words, which shew'd she resented them, and was mov'd; but she immediately recovered her self, and keeping back all her resentment, she, with an inexpressible goodness in her face, and a smile, said to him, *my dear, you would like it in any body but your wife.*¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, 63-64.

¹⁸¹ Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness*, 74.

This pattern of behavior echoes (or perhaps, more accurately, is echoed by) the plays discussed in this chapter. The wife in Defoe's case is aware of the irrational disdain her husband has for her. Vanbrugh also casts Loveless' earlier neglect of Amanda as a matter of immaturity and faithfulness and contentment within marriage as an aspect of "manhood."

Amanda ultimately decides that the best route to punishing Loveless' unreasonable excess is to turn her attentions elsewhere:

But let him know,
My quivers not entirely empty yet,
I still have darts, and I can shoot 'em too;
They're not so blunt, but they can enter still:
The want's not in my power, but in my will.
Virtue's his friend; or, though another's heart,
I yet cou'd find the way to make his smart. (63-4)

Whereas Amanda comforts herself in contemplating the power left in the darts of her attraction, she does not hesitate to suggest that virtue will save Loveless from any real harm she can do him—despite the fact that Vanbrugh has created a situation in which Amanda is as justified in cheating as she might ever be.

Vanbrugh's treatment of Amanda encompasses the conflicting views of women's capacity for virtue. The audience's entire attention is engrossed not with whether or not Loveless' virtue will persist (that's a foregone conclusion from the first scene—or the title page), but with the spectacle of Amanda's virtue. The audience's gratification at the end of the play is associated with the triumph thereof. Vanbrugh seems unwilling to undo the virtue that Cibber invests in his Amanda, despite his cynical treatment of the pretended virtue of Loveless.

Vanbrugh, however, works to show that Amanda's virtue is nothing if not atypical. Indeed, Worthy ends up having to acknowledge the power of Amanda's virtue to inspire even him to give up his plans of seduction. Even here, though, Vanbrugh adds an element of cynicism; Amanda's virtue is described as virtually otherworldly: "Sure there's divinity about her...For what but now was the wild flame of love...the vile, gross desires of flesh and blood, is in a moment turn'd to adoration. The coarser appetite of nature's gone, and 'tis, methinks, the food of angels I require" (66). Although Amanda's virtue has the power to turn lust to seemingly asexual adoration, she must certainly be considered a rare case. In her extreme virtue, she becomes an anomaly in Vanbrugh's play. Certainly Berinthia's presence in the play suggests that all women's virtue is not as durable as Amanda's. In fact, the scene in which she yields to Loveless acts as a caricature of a seduction scene.

Worthy also calls attention to the premise of the play's commentary on reform. After marveling at the change that Amanda has wrought in him, he questions: "How long this influence may last, Heaven knows. But in this moment of my purity, I cou'd on her own terms, accept her heart" (66). James S. Malek counters the tendency of most critics to suggest an ironic reading of the Worthy's repentance:¹⁸² "It adds a comic dimension to a play that consistently recognizes 'the absurdity of eleventh-hour repentances.' Worthy's repentance is 'genuine' only insofar as Worthy takes it seriously, but even he is aware of its probable impermanence. That Vanbrugh takes it seriously is unlikely; had he written a sequel to *The Relapse*, it would surely depict Worthy's relapse."¹⁸³

¹⁸² Malek summarizes the general critical approach thusly: "Nearly all critics take Worthy's repentance seriously and assume that Vanbrugh takes it equally seriously, that he intends it as an antidote to the play's libertinism or as a view of love (variously termed sentimental, romantic, or common-sensical) which is placed in opposition to the cynicism of the comedy of manners. Worthy's conversion is usually viewed as a weakness in the play and is nearly always explained in terms of Vanbrugh's reflecting the 'reform spirit' of his age or his lacking courage in his convictions" (353). "Comic Irony in Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*" *CLA Journal* 26, no. 3 (1983): 353-361.

¹⁸³ Malek, "Comic Irony," 355.

In Chapter 1, I argue that adaptations of *The Country Wife* can be used to provide evidence of the shifting attitudes about cuckoldry as its treatment moves from Restoration comedy to sentimental comedy. Much the same thing occurs with a group of adaptations of *The Relapse*. Undeniably, both adaptors make changes that work to showcase the Lord Foppington character, which is rife with potential for satiric spectacle. I would like to argue, however, that other motivations must have inspired the authors' treatments of the Amanda and Loveless plot. Sentimental comedy relies on the plot device of moral epiphany and reformation—and thus the fact that a play that relies upon a cynical reading of the nature of dramatic reformation was revived and adapted should be surprising. That each adapter made significant changes should not be surprising.

John Lee's version, *The Man of Quality* (1776), which is labeled a "farce," is prefaced with an advertisement in which Lee, who is identified as the "editor" rather than the "author" suggests "if the play...had been free from exception, in point of stile and moral, he should never have presumed to curtail it; but a long observation of the good taste of the town confirmed his opinion, it was not so."¹⁸⁴ Lee makes no claims to have improved the text beyond his excision efforts: "he has, however, been careful to add no more than what seemed necessary to connect the plot; his sole aim being, to restore to a frequency of representation a piece of genuine humour, and to have his alterations thought not injurious but respectful to the memory of Sir John Vanbrugh" (n.p.). Whether Vanbrugh would find the result an honor or an injury to his legacy as writer remains to be seen; he would, perhaps, be alarmed that the entire Amanda and Loveless plot has been removed to create a play that revolved entirely upon the lesser plot of Lord Foppington and Young Fashion. Lee's editorial statements in the play's preface suggest that the excision of the entire Amanda and Loveless plot was based on moral rather than

¹⁸⁴ John Lee, *The Man of Quality* (London, 1776), n.p.

aesthetic reasoning. Lee's version seems to take the path of least resistance; instead of fixing a plot that involves adultery and a serious debate about whether male adultery and neglect justifies female adultery, Lee avoids the issue entirely.

The extent to which the play would have to be altered to contemporary tastes is revealed by the other adaptation. Whereas Lee, in fact, does leave the text that remains otherwise unchanged, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's approach to *A Trip to Scarborough* (1777) is significantly different. Sheridan chooses to leave Loveless and Amanda in the play, but the outcome of their plot line is significantly altered. Each contemplates the possibility of adultery, but in the end they go back to a contented conjugal state with no real conflict or confrontation. Berinthia, while still the target of Loveless' adulterous affections, is transformed into an unwilling participant in his seduction who uses their interactions as a way of reforming Loveless's wayward attitude toward his wife (she's not entirely selfless—she also hopes to make Townley jealous). Whereas I argue Vanbrugh's commentary on women's virtue is of a mixed nature—combining optimism tempered by cynicism, Sheridan's treatment of the same issue leads to a closed text that removes doubt about feminine virtue's durability as well as its necessity to reforming wayward male virtue.

Sheridan notably does nothing to reform Loveless' appetite (nor does he particularly comment upon it). Berinthia's methods, instead, rely on gentle reminders of Loveless's hypocrisy in assuming that Amanda possesses a limitless fund of patience and virtue while he attempts to stray almost immediately upon arriving in London:

Ber: Some husbands would be of another mind were he [Townley] at cards with their wives.

Love: And they'd be in the right on't too—but I dare trust mine.

Ber: Indeed!—And she, I doubt not, has the same confidence in you. Yet do you think she'd be content to come and find you here?

Love: 'Egad, as you say, that's true—then for fear she should come, hadn't we better go into the next room out of her way? (76).

The suggestion implicit to Berinthia's chastisement of Loveless is somewhat noteworthy; she assumes a mutual expectation of faithfulness and respect that is not particularly present in any of the other texts. This version of Berinthia does not rely on the received notion that a husband's appetite for his wife will naturally or inevitably decline into surfeit. Loveless clearly does not or will not understand the argument that Berinthia is making. His single-minded determination to seduce Berinthia leads him to hear only what he wishes—in this case, the desire to avoid getting caught by Amanda. Even as Loveless more persistently attempts to seduce Berinthia, she reminds him of the value of the wife he is attempting to forsake:

Ber: What more would you have me give to a married man?

Love: How doubly cruel to remind me of misfortunes!

Ber: A misfortune to be married to so charming a woman as Amanda! (81-2)

Berinthia, although still a temptation to Loveless, becomes another voice for virtue within the text.

Sheridan's Loveless has perhaps the least spectacular reformation of this chapter; the moment of Loveless's recuperation comes only when he sees evidence of Amanda's virtue (if we place this in the context of *Love's Last Shift*, we might say "again"). Townley attempts to get Amanda to yield by revealing Loveless's seduction of Berinthia (while they both listen) and Amanda naïvely questions the validity of his information:

Peace, Sir, I will not even listen to such slander—this is a poor device to work on my resentment, to listen to your insidious addresses. No, Sir; though Mr. Loveless may be capable of error, I am convinced I cannot be deceived so grossly in him, as to believe what you now report; and for Berinthia, you should have fixed on some more probable person for my rival, than she who is my relation, and my friend: for while I am myself free from guilt, I will never believe that love can beget injury, or confidence create ingratitude. (84)

It's noteworthy that Amanda is not so naïve to think her husband incapable of infidelity; she after all admits that he is not "[in]capable of error," but she refuses to believe that he is prone to so egregious an error as to seduce the woman who is her relation, friend, and houseguest. This aspect of her argument and our knowledge as the audience that that is, in fact, exactly what he has done makes Loveless's moral epiphany somewhat less significant: "Why then, sincerely, and honestly, Berinthia, there is something in my wife's conduct which strikes me so forcibly, that if it were not for shame, and the fear of hurting you in her opinion, I swear I would follow her, confess my error, and trust to her generosity for forgiveness" (86), Sheridan includes no scene between Amanda and Loveless after this. Perhaps no reconciliation is necessary as both Amanda and Loveless only flirted with the possibility of adultery. Does the treatment of *The Relapse* in the latter half of the eighteenth century suggest that marriage has gotten easier? Or that men's sexual appetites were generally reformed and less problematic? I would suggest that those beliefs are not likely—unhappy marriages continue to be portrayed on the stage even at this point in the century. What seems to have changed is the theater's willingness to debate the justification for adultery.

The Relapse is not the only case of Vanbrugh engaging with these problems of marriage. Whereas *The Relapse* questions the possibility and resilience of reform, in *The Provok'd Wife*, Vanbrugh imagines the misery that accompanies virulent dislike rather than neglect. Sir John Brute represents, perhaps, the most troubling of examples of this kind of husband. His frustration in his marriage is vented through alcoholism and violence (and generally, as his name indicates, brutish behavior). Sir John expresses his feeling of surfeit for his wife in the first lines of the play: "What cloying meat is love, when matrimony's the sauce to it!—Two years marriage has debauch'd my five senses. Every thing I see, every thing I hear, every thing I feel, every thing I smell, and every thing I taste, methinks, has wife in't. ...My lady is a young lady, a fine lady, a witty lady, a virtuous lady—and yet I hate her."¹⁸⁵ Sir John's discussion of surfeit reaches new levels of disgust (Sir Oliver, for example, is disgusted at the possibility of sex with his wife, but never expresses hatred in the vehement terms of Sir John). Sir John's disordered appetite goes beyond surfeit to something else altogether; rather than being sick of his wife, his wife has made him sick of life. She has "debauch'd" all five of his senses—a fact he stresses by naming each one—and has thus contaminated his entire experience of life.

Whereas the previous plays have predicated the women's marital dissatisfaction on a lack of affection (and thus a lack of sex), Vanbrugh confronts the reader and viewer with a far less appealing option in *The Provok'd Wife* (1697); he replaces sexual neglect with a form of sadistic sexual attention. At the beginning of Act V, Sir John is perhaps his most brutish when he appears home drunken and dirty and attempts to seduce Lady Brute into his bed. Sharply contrasted with the loving arguments Constant has made to her, Sir John (who is covered in blood and other filth) exclaims after mussing his wife, "So, now you being as dirty and as nasty as myself, we may go pig together" (61). We realize that the only reason he is making sexual

¹⁸⁵ John Vanbrugh, *The Provok'd Wife* (London, [1710]), 5.

advances toward her is that he knows the state he is in disgusts her: “I see it goes damnably against your stomach—and therefore—kiss me again” (61). All of the neglected wives of the plays might long for some sort of sexual reconciliation with their husbands, but Vanbrugh’s suggestion of the disgust involved in that possibility without a larger reformation of the marriage itself is troubling.

Unlike, for example, *The Relapse*, in which the audience’s attention is kept on whether or not Amelia’s patience and virtue will run out before the end of the play—thus leaving her susceptible to the advances of Worthy, *The Provok’d Wife* has the moment of broken patience come during Lady Brute’s first appearance on the stage: “I think I have a right to alarm this surly brute of mine; but if I know my heart, it will never let me go so far as to injure him” (7). Again, we have a wife whose neglect by her husband will tempt her to lose her virtue, but who believes she will be able to resist at the last moment. Vanbrugh goes so far as to have Lady Brute meet Constant in a private garden and suggests that were it not for an interruption, her virtue would have been sorely tempted if not completely destroyed. Vanbrugh ultimately does not suggest a resolution to the Brutes’ problem. Sir John cannot be said to be reformed and Lady Brute has not managed to cuckold her husband but certainly has the potential to do so in the future. In fact, Vanbrugh seems to introduce a brand new conflict, Heartfree’s supposed attempt at bigamy and the speedy revelation that the accusations are false, a development that serves to distract from the irresolution of the conflict between the Brutes.

Vanbrugh’s play is also noteworthy in that it links rather explicitly the hard drinking of the husband with his disgust for his wife. For Sir John (and as we have seen Sir Oliver and as we will see Mr. Sullen), drinking is an escape from the oppression he (thinks he) experiences in the domestic sphere. The drinking is not explicitly linked in *The Provok’d Wife* with impotence; in

fact, Sir John's drunkenest moment coincides with when he torments his wife with the possibility of intercourse. Instead, the drinking is a way in which the men render themselves unattractive to their wives. In a sense, the performance of drunkenness on the stage by husbands is a way of signaling the deep dissatisfaction and the troubling results associated with marital impotence.

Drunken husbands seem to be both the cause and effect of unhappy marriages. The distinction between the two is hard to make as the plays in which they appear expose the audience to their extreme drunkenness in medias res. Perhaps the obscure origins of the drinking are significant in and of themselves. Excessive drinking is associated with a homosocial male culture; after marriage it seems to function as a form of resistance to the confining effects of the heterosocial world of marriage. The audience cannot be certain if the drinking represents a refusal to conform to the ordered sober domestic sphere of married life or a rejection thereof—a form of escape from its realities. Eliza Haywood, in *The Husband* (1756), comments on the effects of drinking on marriage. She rejects those who might be labeled true “drunkards” or “sots” from consideration: “persons of this character I look upon as incorrigible, but by the hand of Heaven, and not to be reclaim'd without miracle.”¹⁸⁶ Quite probably the likes of Sir Oliver (Courtall describes his behavior thusly: “Now is Sir Oliver secure, for he dares not go home till he's quite drunk, and then he grows valiant, insults and defies his sweet lady, for which with prayers and tears he's forced to feign a bitter repentance the next morning” [II. i. 6-9]), Sir John, and Mr. Sullen (below) fall into this category of incorrigibility. Of those who overindulge only occasionally Haywood says:

Nothing is more apt to excite disgust in a woman of delicacy, than to see the man she loves, transform'd like one of Circe's swine; I would have every husband avoid the presence of his wife while he is in a state which will not only render him contemptible to

¹⁸⁶ Eliza Haywood, *The Husband* (London, 1756), 35.

her at that time, but the remembrance of may also utterly erase all the affection and respect she before had for him. (36)

Haywood's suggestion that the drunken state renders the husband unfit for his wife's presence is perhaps important to the depiction of the husbands in the drama, and suggestive of what their drunkenness might signify to the audience. Not only does the homosocial world of drinking provide a haven for the husbands from the perceived burdens of their wives, but it also provides an excuse for avoiding their presence.

George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) features a character who echoes in many ways Sir John Brute—Mr. Sullen. Alienated from his wife, and thus his home, Sullen seeks out solace not in the arms of another woman, but in the homosocial comforts of the pub. Sullen might most accurately be characterized by his absence in the play; most of the action occurs while he is off stage and he only stumbles in hungover to fight with Mrs. Sullen occasionally. In fact, the one opportunity for Sullen to explain his unhappiness—a moment in which Mrs. Sullen confronts him with the question, “What is the reason, sir, that you use me thus inhumanely,” Sullen lets the opportunity pass without comment and yells for his manservant.

Unlike the other plays in this section, there is not explicit or implicit comment by Mr. Sullen on the surfeits of marriage, but the after effects are still implied in Mrs. Sullen's description of her husband's drunken return to their bedchamber:

He came home this morning at his usual hour of four, waken'd me out of a sweet dream of something else, by tumbling over the tea-table, which he broke all to pieces, after his man and he had rowl'd about the room like sick passengers in a storm, he comes flounce into bed, dead as a salmon into a fishmonger's basket; his feet cold as ice, his breath hot as a furnace, and his hands and his face as greasy as his flannel night-cap.—Oh

matrimony!—He tosses up the clothes with a barbarous swing over his shoulders, disorders the whole oeconomy of my bed, leaves me half naked, and my night’s comfort is the tuneable serenade of that wakeful nightingale, his nose—O the pleasure of counting the melancholy clock by a snoring husband!¹⁸⁷

Although there is no overt discussion of sexual frustration on the part of Mrs. Sullen, the lack of sex between the two is encoded in her description of Mr. Sullen’s drunken homecoming. The bumbling lack of coordination and the comparison to “sick passengers in a storm” and a “dead...salmon” all suggest a deep lack of sexual interest and ability. It is perhaps no coincidence that Mrs. Sullen comments that her husband has disordered “the whole oeconomy of her bed.”¹⁸⁸ Mrs. Sullen’s bed (which she takes possession of in her speech) is rumped and she is left half naked not because of Mr. Sullen’s amorous attentions, but his drunken barbarity. Mrs. Sullen further suggests an aspect of marital impotence being associated with her husband’s drinking when she refers to Mr. Sullen as “my lethargick sotish husband” (14). The pairing of “lethargick” (a word often invoked in discussions of failed sexual performance) and “sotish” (a word associated with drinking) suggests that the two states are hopelessly intertwined in Mrs. Sullen’s mind. Mrs. Sullen’s frustration is also signaled when she refers to herself and Mr. Sullen as a couple with the image of “a living soul coupled to a dead body” (112). The resolution of the

¹⁸⁷ George Farquhar, *The Beaux Stratagem* (London, 1707), 11.

¹⁸⁸ With the beliefs about the seemingly finite amount of sexual performance the average man has available to him (referred to sometimes as the “spermatic economy”), it should be no surprise that Mrs. Sullen uses the term “oeconomy” when discussing the disturbance of her marriage. In other plays Mrs. Sullen’s peers use the same concept to discuss the “wasting” of the marital economy outside of the home (“waste,” of course, being a euphemism for ejaculation.). Mrs. Dotterel (*The Picture*) comments: “I see where my dues are paid. A brute! To starve his poor laeful wife at home, the better to cram his unnatural minx in private: but ‘tis the way of ‘em all. Husbands soon surfeit upon their lawful pleasures. At first they are all sweet, and sugar, and honey, and do wonders, to be sure. But that false fire soon vanishes in smoke, and then they get to squandering abroad, and we poor wives don’t know how to come by our own” (13). Lady Cockwood (*She Would if She Could*) throws her husband’s efforts outside the home in his face and claims that he “waste[s] that poor stock of comfort which I should have at home, upon those your ravenous cormorants below. (III.iii332-335).

Sullens' conflict is separation initiated by Mrs. Sullen's brother. The separation is almost immediately preceded by a kind of anti-proviso scene in which the Sullens' account for all of the differences between them that lead to their incompatibility in the first place. Again, although Mrs. Sullen is sorely tempted to cheat on her husband with the charming Archer, she does not manage to cuckold Mr. Sullen within the action of the play. The ending of the play leaves the possibility for further interaction between the two open.

No single woman manages to cuckold her husband in these plays, although there is no lack of willing candidates. Several of the plays leave the lingering possibility of the wife's virtue to eventually lapse at some point in the future beyond the confines of the play. If the culture is questioning men and their sexual appetites, the related question for women is just how much abuse they can be expected to tolerate. Perhaps no other play uses this question as a central concern to a greater extent than *The Wives Excuse* (1691). *The Wives Excuse*, as the play's title suggests, revolves around a debate as to whether a husband's bad behavior and negligence excuses the wife's behavior in kind. In this case, Mr. Friendall has quickly lost interest (he has been marriage "not a quarter of a year" and he has "known enough of her, not to care for her already").¹⁸⁹ Conforming to the formula of these husbands, he neglects his wife in order to pursue extramarital affairs and relies on his faith in her virtue to avoid a similar fate at her hands. Friendall is so confident in his wife's virtue that he encourages his friend Lovemore to ply her with "a little gallantry" to distract her from his own wandering. He goes so far as to chide Lovemore for his failures in wooing Mrs. Friendall:

I would have you very frequent in your visits, and very obliging to my wife: Now and then, to carry on our pleasure the better, for an amusement of so, you may say a civil thing to her. For every woman, you know, loves to have a civil thing said to her

¹⁸⁹ Thomas Southerne, *The Wives Excuse* (London, 1726), 3.

sometimes; but then you must be very cautious in the expression; if she should in the least apprehend that you had a design upon her, 'twoud raise the devil in one part of the family, and lay him in another, perhaps, where I have a mind to employ him. (12)

What follows within the play is a series of insults to Mrs. Friendall, each of which seem to provide more justification for her to forsake her husband and disregard her virtue and his honor.

Central to this argument is that Mrs. Friendall's humiliation is fairly public. When Friendall insults his wife by refusing to walk home with her from the park, Mrs. Teazall comments:

Why, how have the men, at this rate, the impudence to think the women should not cuckold 'em! If I had such a husband, as old as I am, o' my conscience, I believe, I shou'd use him as he deserv'd; but that's some comfort, use him as you please, no body will think you wrong him; and let me tell you, 'tis a great thing to have the town on one's side... You have given him fair warning, if he won't take it, he must answer himself for all the miscarriages you can be guilty of in your conduct hereafter. (39)

Mrs. Friendall is constantly reassured that she has the benefit of public opinion of her side, that Mr. Friendall's bad behavior has yielded her what amounts to *carte blanche* in terms of her own sexual behavior. Mrs. Friendall does not take advantage of this proffered opportunity to commit adultery—although such a decision would have been a noteworthy exception to the rule of these plays. What is noteworthy is the manner in which Southerne chooses to resolve the conflict.

Although Mrs. Friendall has tolerated several humiliations with patience, finally catching Friendall in an embrace with another woman in her own home breaks her patience. Whereas the play tempts its audience to question whether or not Mrs. Friendall's virtue will withstand the temptations of Lovewell and her peers, both of which attempt to justify her cuckolding of her husband, what ultimately breaks is not Mrs. Friendall's virtue, but her patience:

Mr. Friendall, I'm sorry you thought it necessary to your pleasure, to make me a witness of my ill usage. You know I can, and have past many things, some women would think wrongs, as such resent 'em, and return them too: But you can tell how I've behaved myself...The unjust world, let what will be the cause of our complaint (as there is cause sufficient still at home) condemn us to a slavery for life: and if by separation we get free, then all our husband's faults are laid on us: this hard condition of a woman's fate, I've often weigh'd, therefore resolv'd to bear: and I have born; O! What have I not born? But patience tires with such oppressing wrongs, when they come home to triumph over me; and tell the town how much I am despis'd. (75)

Mrs. Friendall serves as a fantasy figure who will suffer almost anything without sacrificing her honor for revenge's sake. She is a woman who for the sake of her own perceived honor will suffer the oppression of the sexual double standard. As McLaren has stated and Defoe has warned, the potential for male sexual neglect to leave women's sexual appetites ungoverned haunts these texts, yet no examples of these rampant appetites exist in these plays. When the women do make the vague attempt to cuckold their husbands, circumstances interfere in the fulfillment of their plans. This trend cannot be based in the culture's unshakeable faith in women's virtue; it's not as if all women on the stage are chaste—or even all wives. The lack of success and the persistence of the women's virtue thus seem significant. Why would these authors acknowledge the potential effect on women but refuse to allow that potential to come to fruition? Perhaps, despite the fact that the failure of women's virtue would provide evidence for the deleterious effects of men's attitudes toward marriage, it would simultaneously take attention away from the failures of the men. Ultimately enacting the fall of the wives would diminish the

reformatory focus on masculine sexual appetite by suggesting a universal unruliness of sexual appetite that transcends gender.

In *Broken Lives, Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857*, Lawrence Stone suggests that the period in which the plays of the chapters were written was one particularly fraught with cynicism about the state of marriage: “It should be noted that, in the period between about 1680 and 1720, the country, both high and low, seems to have lost its moral moorings. Story after story, whether about the making or breaking of marriage, provide evidence of an abnormally cynical, mercenary, and predatory ruthlessness about human relationships, which is deeply offensive to modern sensibilities.”¹⁹⁰ Certainly we can see these anxieties surrounding marriage being expressed in the plays of this chapter. I have attempted to complicate the cynicism surrounding marriage with an additional set of anxieties concerning men’s sexual appetites and performance.

Concerns over marriage do not stop, of course, in 1720. Marriage is the subject of innumerable plays throughout the drama of the eighteenth-century. The rise of sentimental comedy creates an entirely new set of conventions for discourse on marriage. In addition, male sexual appetite certainly does not cease to be a concern after the short time period I have chosen to focus on here. Increasingly throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, masturbation becomes the subject of near frantic anxiety and is surrounded by a confluence of different cultural commentaries. Ultimately the husbands of this chapter serve as an interesting counterpoint to those of the previous chapter. After all, the husbands there can be characterized by destructive jealousy whereas the husbands of this chapter are, more often than not, examples of a destructive lack of jealousy in the form of neglect and disinterest. That these

¹⁹⁰ Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 27-28.

two types can coexist in the same theaters and sometimes on the same stage indicates a general despair at finding a happy middle ground within the confines of the average marriage.

Chapter 3

“The Warm Touch of Her Lips will be an Antidote to [T]his Cold Poison”:¹⁹¹ The Performance of Unequal Marriage in the Long Eighteenth Century

The previous two chapters of this dissertation have revealed that marriage for men was fraught with a variety of sexual obstacles to navigate. Many of the obstacles are created by realities over which men had little viable control—in particular cuckoldry and impotence. Cultural beliefs about these situations work to make the man complicit where, realistically, often little complicity could exist. Attitudes surrounding cuckolds, for example, are sustained by the belief that the cuckolds make decisions or display weaknesses that encourage their wives’ infidelity. To them, impotence was not an unfortunate physiological or psychological condition, but the outcome of consistent, debilitating lifestyle decisions. The incidences of marital impotence I discuss in Chapter 2 complicate the system of blame to reveal a more lucid (if more insurmountable) understanding of the problems surrounding marriage.

¹⁹¹ Hannah Cowley, *The School for Greybeards* (London, 1786), 12. Coldness associated with old age is a conceit used repeatedly throughout the texts in this chapter to convey sexual lethargy. Certainly poor circulation in old age could be one of the reasons this association exists. Another, more interesting, possibility—especially with the invocation of youth as an antidote to the “cold poison” of age—is the Biblical story of David and Abishag (1Kings1:3-25); she was a beautiful young virgin brought to David to share her body heat with him. Although David took her as a wife, the *Bible* clearly states that he did not “know” her. One might assume it was because he found himself, at that point, to be impotent. If the repeated invocation of images of coldness and ice throughout the dramas below is any indication, authors who may be referring to this story have clearly adapted it to their own purposes in indicating (to varying levels of explicitness) that the latter day David’s desperately want to “know” their unwilling Abishags.

The marriage of older men to younger women continues this trend of complication. Representations of these marriages, which I will refer to as “unequal marriages,”¹⁹² engage not only with sexual politics but also with the problematic economic motivations for non-companionate marriages. More explicitly than the other representations included in this dissertation, cultural treatments of unequal marriage acknowledge the confluence of concerns that overshadowed marriage at this time.

Unequal marriage is consistently represented as perhaps the most vivid indictment of non-companionate marriage. Cuckolds were colloquially referred to as monsters (figured by their bearing stag’s horns), but older men who sought out and married markedly younger women were nearly universally derided as monstrous; this monstrosity moves beyond the figurative to be bolstered by the revulsion they create in those who encounter them. The potential monstrosity of the unequal marriage is multivalent. The decrepit older man (described implicitly or explicitly as cadaverous) is repulsive when paired with the young and beautiful woman. Often the older man is assumed to be impotent and yet simultaneously lecherous (several men in unequal matches seek out younger women as a remedy to their flagging sexual abilities). This combination of impotent lechery is repulsive, especially in situations that cause the audience to have to imagine, if only on a subconscious level, the coupling of the old and infirm body with the young and vivacious body. The older man is also a fool who will make a monster (as cuckolds were called) of himself in his unfounded overconfidence in his ability to satisfy a significantly younger wife. Some men realize the untenable situations they are creating for themselves and go to inhuman lengths to overcome this obstacle and avoid what it perceived as their wives’ inevitable wandering.

¹⁹² “Unequal marriage,” as Defoe, for example, defines it can encompass many different types of inequality: religion, temperament, wealth/class, etc. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the term to describe marriages in which a significant difference in age exists with the husband as the elder of the pair.

In general, the aged were a target of derision for much of the time period in question.¹⁹³ Elisabeth Mignon identifies the comedy of manners as having a particularly derisive attitude toward the aged: “The autumnal face of a lady past her rambling days, the palsies of a dotard are subjects for fun and raillery. The laughter of the young characters is most gay when the same old men and women have recourse to camouflage to hide their defects. For the aged dissemblers there is no escape from the supercilious glance of the fashionable gallants and belles.”¹⁹⁴ Although anyone familiar with Elizabethan (and older) drama will recognize that generational tensions are not unique to this particular time period or genre, Mignon argues that there is a quality to the derision of this period that separates it from that of the earlier comparable drama: “This conflict, with the inevitable victory of the young and gay, is not particular to the Restoration comedy of manners. It is as old as comedy itself. But the battles are more intense, they occur more frequently, their repercussions in language and character are wider in the plays written in the last forty years of the seventeenth century.”¹⁹⁵ In a comparison to the conventions of Elizabethan drama in terms of its treatment of aged figures, Mignon points out the mitigating effect of the common use of foils; derisive images of old age were often accompanied by an “amiable, even and admirable, aged figure.”¹⁹⁶ As with many critical attempts to explain the tangible differences between Elizabethan and Carolean drama, Mignon finds the source of the new tensions as an effect of the cultural tumult of the Restoration and the events thereafter: “This unflagging abuse of human antiquity in comedy from 1660 to 1700 is a corollary of revolt, a postwar reaction against a constricting morality and a social standard which no longer carried

¹⁹³ Simon Dickie, for example, mentions the popularity of humor about the elderly and infirm in “Hilarity and Pitilessness in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humor,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37, no. 1 (2003): 1-22.

¹⁹⁴ Elisabeth Mignon, *Crabbed Age and Youth: The Old Men and Women in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* (Durham: Duke UP, 1947), 3.

¹⁹⁵ Mignon, *Crabbed Age and Youth*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ Mignon, *Crabbed Age and Youth*, 10.

force. The writers of the Restoration period reflect a new generation in the process of flagellating their predecessors, men who were out of tune with the spirit of the new age.”¹⁹⁷

In particular, however, old bachelors were an uncomfortable demographic for the culture. Their continued freedom outside the bounds of marriage was considered suspicious, problematic, and potentially disruptive. As we will see, although some sources urge old bachelors to marry, marriage for older men was also a fraught issue as it leads to the question of who would an appropriate match for these men. Marriage has commonly been seen as a tool for bringing unruly male behavior under control; men who persist outside the calming influence of marriage are sexually and morally suspect as they grow older. Old bachelors are often cast as sexually lascivious, if not outright perverse (having sexual desires that cannot be fulfilled within the sanctified bounds of marriage).¹⁹⁸ Of course, as we have seen in Chapter 2, this phenomenon could be a factor of age rather than general inclination. The example of Antonio from *Venice Preserv'd* (discussed below) leaves either option as a possibility.

The products of unbridled sexuality are as troubling as the sexuality itself. Old bachelors cannot have legitimate children and thus ultimately disrupt the normal passage of property and continuation of bloodlines. While illegitimate children could be legally recognized, such a situation could hardly be as satisfactory as having legitimate children. Old bachelors were also assumed to have persisted the unmarried state in the hopes of making the most of their youthful capacity for debauchery. Not only is this strategy problematic in that it increases the amount of time men spent in public without the supposed check of marriage on their destructive sexual appetites, but it also creates another suspicion about older men who persist unmarried—they

¹⁹⁷ Mignon, *Crabbed Age and Youth*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ As with Chapter two, I discuss perversity from the perspective of dominant eighteenth century beliefs about “healthy” (acceptable) and “unhealthy” (unacceptable) sexuality. I use the word perversity in terms of that definition rather than as an indication of my own beliefs about sexuality.

have waited so long and debauched themselves so thoroughly that they have rendered themselves impotent or virtually so (of course, there was also always the specter of disease).

Rather than focus on the unrepentant old bachelor, who makes no attempt even in later life to marry, I would like to turn most of my attention to the old bachelor who marries or attempts to marry a significantly younger woman. The conflicts these men create with their choices are more often enacted upon the stage than the conflicts of men who persist unmarried. In much the same way that formulaic portrayals of marriage in chapter two helped to capture one aspect of the marriage problem, the enactment and reenactment of this kind of marriage is important because it captures many of the frustrations that surround marriage at this time. We can certainly see this kind of treatment of the topic of unequal marriage in many of the comedies (which will be, as in other chapters, the focus of my attention). Changes in this formula prove to be significant in that they suggest shifting perceptions of marriage.

Although there are some fine studies of experiences of old age in Britain in the eighteenth century, and as a result of feminist interests in portrayals of women, some fine studies of the representation of older women on the stage and in other forms of media, there are few comparable studies of men.¹⁹⁹ As with the other male figures in this dissertation, I must suspect that they have been dismissed as too formulaic for critical interest, as stock characters used for the purpose of easy laughs. On the contrary, I would like to suggest that these figures are a worthwhile object of consideration and that they are important to understanding the expectations of sexual satisfaction within and without companionate marriage.

I have asserted above that the suspicions about old bachelors are twofold. I would like to include here a relatively brief discussion of men who persist in the unmarried state and

¹⁹⁹ For the former, see Susannah R. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) for the latter, see Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

ultimately devote the majority of my attentions to the men who attempt to marry at later stages in life. Whereas the single older men can be lumped into a category with single older women in that they are generally the targets of ridicule, older men are distinguished from older women in the drama by attempting to marry; there are very few examples of older women who attempt marriage. There are, of course, older women who attempt to arrange intrigues with younger men, but these are generally not with the ultimate goal of marriage. One of the possible explanations for this trend is that many of these older women are, in fact, widows rather than spinsters; a trope in the culture was the concept of the merry widow released from the burdens of marriage by her husband's death and reluctant to yoke herself permanently to another man. While they may hope to find sexual fulfillment with younger men, they have gained economic and social (sexual) freedom through their widowhood that would be curtailed by remarriage.

A man's choice to remain unmarried is a complex moral, social, and legal decision.²⁰⁰ Many of these concerns are encompassed within *An Address to the Gentlemen under the Denomination of Old Bachelors* (1757).²⁰¹ Miss Cassandra makes some fairly predictable references to Biblical exhortations to marry, but more revealing are the assumptions the author makes about the behavior of the bachelors and the dire consequences thereof. The author assumes that bachelors remain unmarried to pursue "debauch" uninterrupted: "You can court Bacchus, that Deity will assist you, and give vigour to the soul" (6). The author reveals the assumption that sexual freedom is what tempts bachelors away from matrimony and suggests that the fickle male sexual appetite is to blame:

Thus as you call it, give a loose to love. Thus you ramble up and down the earth in pursuit of pleasure, but never find her paths. This lady you turn off; that you discard, take

²⁰⁰ Certainly men must often have been unwillingly excluded from the marriage market, even if not as often as women. There seems to be less acknowledgement of the matter as an unfortunate reality than as a choice

²⁰¹ Miss Cassandra, *An Address to the Gentlemen under the Denomination of Old Bachelors* (London, 1757).

worse in their place, prove constant to none; nay if your fortune permit, keep a little seraglio, and fancy yourself a little Turk, take a full swig of all that Venus and Bacchus can afford you, till you take a leap in the dark, leave your remaining estate to some distant heir, which he enjoys by hereditary right, fill the Foundling Hospital, with prattling infants, whose physiognomy bespeaks they were not ignobly born. So much of the father remains in them that the innocent seems as though not made for servile offices. (5-6)

Miss Cassandra's rant contains references to several presumed consequences of long term bachelorhood: the list of ladies suggests a trail of ruined women, the comment about leaving the "remaining estate" to a "distant heir" suggest two important consequences—the movement of wealth from the estates of the upper classes to the lower class providers of debauch and its accoutrement (e.g. pub owners, tailors, prostitutes, cardsharps, and all those who stand to benefit from the unheeded squandering of family fortune) and the disruption of inheritance, which leads to the necessity of finding a distant heir. This last concern is also figured by the "prattling infants" who not only suffer because they are illegitimate (and thus alienated from their rightful inheritance) but also because they have (as Cassandra assumes) been created from stock that will not allow them to exist comfortably in the working world ("service offices") that will be the only one open to them. Miss Cassandra's catalog of consequences thus undermines any attempt to argue that the bachelor's decision to remain unmarried affects no one but himself; Cassandra creates a fairly dire set of consequences that captures the suffering that ripples outward from unrepentant bachelorhood.

Turning from her vigorous indictment of the bachelor lifestyle, however, Miss Cassandra begins to advertise the pleasures of marriage. She suggests that the bachelor's search for pleasure is an aimless "rambling" one that fails to find the true paths of pleasure. Whereas persistent

bachelorhood yields nothing but disruption not only to the bachelor's life but to the society around him, marriage offers comfort that the author assumes the bachelor seeks, but fails to find, in his restless debauchery:

I would ask you, which is most agreeable, when not in public company; alone in the day, and alone in the night; alone in going abroad, and alone in returning home; giving room to busy corroding cares to be your companions, or in company, at the abovementioned times, with an agreeable lady, that makes it the business of her life, to perform the duty of an affectionate, kind, tender and indulgent wife, instead of black and gloomy thought, which cannot fail to accompany you, for your attachment to irregular life? In order to remove any thing so disagreeable, divest yourself of the character of old bachelor. (10)

Romantics are likely to shudder at Miss Cassandra's construction of the wife, who seems to be a combination of nursemaid and court jester. Cynics will likely point out that Miss Cassandra has not made a compelling argument for the change in character that marriage seems capable of creating in the repentant bachelor. Certainly the plays of Chapter 2 suggest that marriage does not automatically yield this repentance. Similarly, the plays that appear later in this chapter suggests that the old bachelors' decision to marry would not automatically yield connubial bliss. There is enough evidence from every form of cultural media to prove that the belief in the transformative powers of marriage was tenuous at best in long eighteenth-century England.

Inconveniently, Miss Cassandra makes no commentary on the appropriate choice of wife for men old enough to be described as "old bachelors." Miss Cassandra assumes that marrying will solve the problems caused by persistent bachelorhood, but marrying at this late stage can and did cause conflicts in and of itself. Even more suspect than men who persist in bachelorhood are men who wait to attempt to marry in their later years, because these men, more often than not

(at least in the cultural imagination), choose a significantly younger women as their intended bride.

Unsurprisingly, Daniel Defoe comments in *Conjugal Lewdness* (1727) on the issue of “Unequal, unsuitable, and preposterous marriages, and the unhappy consequences of them.”²⁰² Among these unequal marriages, Defoe numbers those of disparate ages. Of unequal marriages (which include unequal years, quality, estates, tempers, and principles of religion [227]) in general, Defoe suggests that although they do not absolutely doom the couple to misery, in the worst cases the factors can contribute to the worst kind of marriage: to “interrupt the felicity of life, make matrimony a kind of damnation, the House of Bedlam, and the conversation of Hell, a state of strife, rage, fury, and eternal contention” (214).

Defoe’s hopes for marriage—the presumable goal of his lengthy commentary—is to guide readers into marriages whose fruition is elevated beyond a simple absence of misery or tolerance by both parties to a state of “social comfort” (214). Unequal marriages add obstacles to unions that are already fraught with potential conflict. Defoe uses a rather vivid image to characterize the fates of those in unequal marriages: “To marry two persons together that are of contrary dispositions, unsuitable tempters, disproportioned years, and the like, is like the way of punishing malefactors in Persia, viz. tying the living body to a dead corpse, till the rotting carcass poisoned the living, and they rotted together” (216). This imagery is particularly fitting for the marriage of unequal years, which is often imagined as the yoking of a young body to a decrepit one.

One of Defoe’s criteria for judging a marriage is its modesty, which is, it seems a function of its ability to produce children. The first case he describes is that of a significantly older woman and a younger man. He suggests (having, conveniently enough, excluded the need

²⁰² Daniel Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness*, (London, 1727), 213.

for physical safety or monetary want as motivations in his hypothetical example) that the only reason the woman desires to marry the a younger man is for sexual fulfillment, which he concludes is a case of “matrimonial whoredom.” His treatment of the older woman marrying lasts for nearly eight whole pages (including an extensive dialogue). He then turns to the case of an older man and states:

When an old man of seventy or eighty marries a young girl of twenty, we have generally some game among the common people about it. But here there may not be so much room for scandal, because it has often happened, that men have had children at a very great age; and there may be extraordinary reasons for them to desire children; as particularly for the enjoying of estates, to which they have no heirs. But be the reason what they will, the thing is unquestioned because lawful, and the having of children is possible; so that the great end and reason of matrimony is not destroyed. (239)

Defoe, for all his previous commentary that procreation is not the only end of marriage, seems capable of judging the marriage of disproportionate ages only from the perspective of this one criterion. He has, in his previous chapter of general inequality, made the results of unequal marriage about the failure to achieve harmony and satisfaction—the creation of misery within the domestic sphere—and yet he is surprisingly blind to the potential for misery that the marriage of disproportionate age has.

Defoe’s harsh treatment of older women seeking marriage and his relatively benevolent treatment of older men in the same situation is noteworthy; the drama (as well as other forms of literature) generally ignores older women who seek marriage in favor of vociferous commentary against marriages between older men and younger women; this commentary acts as a warning of great unhappiness for one or both parties. The author of *Cupid’s Decoy: Or, the Fatal Snare*.

Shewing the Miserable condition most men are under in the State of matrimony [1730] warns of many of the possible circumstances that cause the “miserable condition” (including proud and imperious wives, unfaithful wives, scolds, etc.). Within a rather vividly entitled chapter, “Shewing that an Old Man’s Marrying a Young Woman, is much the same as Washing a Blackmoor White, with some Instances of the Follies and Miseries attending such Marriages,” the author discourages the practice of unequal marriage. The author does warn young men about burying young wives and marrying widows, but his attitude is more along the lines of “out of the frying pan of matrimony and into the fire of another marriage” than any real indictment of the choice of marrying widows. In other words, that particular example relies on a general disgust with marriage itself, rather than the vivid examples of misery I discuss below. The one noteworthy aspect of the author’s treatment of the widows is the fact that he shares Defoe’s assumptions that widows marry for the fulfillment of their sexual appetites: “When Widows meet with young Flesh, they cherish it, because it renews their Strength and Vigour; and there is nothing more noisome or prejudicial to a young Man’s Health than a Lascivious, Draining old Wife.”²⁰³ Whereas the young man must concern himself with the succubi-like desires of older women, the older man who marries a young woman commits “a most horrid crime against nature, and so far unpardonable, that it ought to be punish’d by all the reprisals youth and beauty can make in its own” (76). The author thus, in an instance that stands out in a text whose misogyny is constant, indicates that a man who makes such faulty choices deserves the fate that seems inevitable. The author invokes many of the commonplaces that will become apparent in my discussion of texts below. The husband becomes unreasonably attached to the young woman (cherishing her youth and beauty): he “turns idolater” (52). His idolatry expresses itself through

²⁰³ *Cupid’s Decoy: Or, the Fatal Snare. Shewing the Miserable Condition Most Men are Under in the State of Matrimony* (London, [1730]), 76.

economic means: “She has silks, gold watch, and other fineries” (52). And finally, he cannot hope to satisfy his young wife sexually and she feels justified in straying:

She pretends a mighty affection for her aged spouse, and goes to bed to him, with abundance of love, though in truth, she values him no more than the devil does holy-water. Being in bed together, she takes in her arms, his icy limbs, and contents herself with endeavoring to unthaw ‘em, ‘till the blood at last begins to find some motion, and circulate; which his lechery would fain be doing what nature deny’d him: Not short and sweet are the pleasures she draws from him at this time, but nauseous and tiresome are the dregs of his old age; so that in a little while she shakes off the piece of earthen ware, who soon chills and freezes into ice again. (53)

In the particular anecdote from which the above comment comes, the young wife is eventually caught in the midst of her adultery and boldly justifies herself: “He had his desserts, since his old fumbling carcass was of no use to a woman, whose youth and charms were no ways fitting for such an icy constitution as his” (56). (This description might be considered kind when compared to a later anecdote that contains the following: “the chill and nauseous embraces of his old carcass, whose bones rattled [sic.] in his skin, like beans in a bladder” (57)).

The author completes his discussion by allowing one of the young wives (again, caught in the act of adultery) a surprisingly stirring speech:

Tell me no more, ye whining cants, and pretended religious men, that Matches are made in Heaven, to make us miserable here on Earth: That parents have a right to poise the affections of their children proportionable to the bags in the scale: and that a wither’d and rotten carcass, eaten up with gout and old-age, can come within the verge of youth and beauty, and not strike a killing damp to all its charms: No, no, ‘tis a crime the divine

powers never indulg'd, but a mercenary and damnable sin, in the parents, who thus sacrifice their daughters. And yet alas! This is my case, link'd to an old impotent husband, who has nothing at heart but his muck, nor any thing to recommend him that's agreeable, but his wealth. Well, then, his wealth I am marry'd to, and that shall atone for his impotency (58).

This final comment highlights the presumed mercenary nature of the unequal marriage—at its worst the older husband buys his young wife's body with his wealth and she implicitly accepts his wealth to tolerate him. Whereas Defoe allows for the possible seemliness of these marriages (including his example that allows for an age disparity of as much as fifty to sixty years), clearly there are examples that counter his indulgence. The authors often preempt the allowance for procreation that Defoe relies upon by insinuating that the men are impotent (or virtually so) even when their stated purpose is to create an heir. The authors stress the possibility for “matrimonial whoredom” by portraying the husbands' (even if useless) lascivious anticipation of enjoying their young wives' bodies. Beyond any consideration of modesty, the authors stress the fundamental revulsion the young women feel at the anticipation of the same sexual union. Defoe's assertion that the derision about the older male's unequal marriage is limited only to the “common” people is either highly optimistic or misguided; the repetitive commentary about the matter in all forms of literature and other cultural media suggests this was not, in fact, the case.

As I have mentioned above, at the heart of many of the iterations of unequal marriage that grip the cultural imagination is the revulsion associated with the sexual juxtaposition of the older man and the young woman. This is the particular element that is central to the unequal marriage formula, and as in Chapter 2, calls attention to problematic male sexual appetites. To suggest that these old men provide a corollary to the men of Chapter 2 might seem too

convenient; perhaps, for example, these men are problematic for any number of reasons other than troubling sexual appetites. Sexual appetite is constantly, however, commented upon in conjunction with these characters (with few exceptions). The conflicts caused by the older husband stem from many of the same assumptions that are revealed in my discussion of marital impotence. The miserable, impotent married man is actually a counterpart of the old bachelor (whether he chooses to marry or not); they are the perceived results of two different strategies when faced with the marriage problem. The former has acceded to the fundamental cultural demand to marry but becomes the victim of assumptions about marriage and men's sexual appetites. The latter postpones (or ultimately avoids) marriage in order to exercise his sexual appetite outside of the boundaries of marriage but finds an all new form of misery in being derided as a grotesque example of sexual appetite. The persistent old bachelor becomes a caricature in that his existence becomes defined by his sexual appetite even as his sexual powers flag. Cleland's Mr. Crofts and Rochester's Disabled Debauchee are icons of this group of men. The men I primarily focus on in this chapter, those who seek marriage late in life with younger women, represent a different strategy that is presented as equally problematic. Whereas the Mr. Crofts of the culture's imagination seem to affect only the shadow world of covert sexuality (he seeks sexual fulfillment with prostitutes, after all, and not through marriage), the old bachelors who seek marriage turn their grotesque sexual attentions to young women who should be, because they have remained virtuous and channeled their sexual energy into marriage, saved from the kinds of discomfort that are portrayed as a result of these unequal marriages. Individually these characters might simply be figures of fun, but in combination they reveal a deep frustration with the place of masculine sexuality in marriage. There seems to be no right answer for men whose sexual appetites are simultaneously naturalized and yet problematized.

That two such very different forms of masculinity create the same conflicts bespeaks the frustration that must have simultaneously surrounded attempts at constructing masculine identity and constructing concepts of successful marriage (and of course, the place where these two meet, constructing masculine identity within and contra marriage).

The focus on sexual appetite is particularly stark when contrasted with investigations of unequal marriage in the nineteenth century. Although not entirely applicable to the eighteenth-century texts that appear in this dissertation, Esther Godfrey's work is helpful to understand some of the assumptions and attitudes about these marriages. In *The January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, Godfrey asserts:

January-May marriages are a literary commonplace in the period because they are a social one. One explanation for this phenomenon is economic: in the rising middle class, men often struggled well into their thirties to accrue sufficient means to support a wife and family. But intergenerational marriages were choices, not necessities... Though many January-May marriages were second marriages for widowers, men did not marry young women because of a lack of same-aged partners.²⁰⁴

In the eighteenth-century plays that follow, the economic causation of delayed marriage is generally not acknowledged. Almost all of the men featured in them seem to have had the economic means to marry for some time; the persistent focus (of the plays and other texts) on the sexual appetites and performances of the old bachelors suggests that whereas is reality men who married late might have done so because of economic restraint, such reality if not the reason that captured the culture's imagination. Certainly it is not a factor, for example, of Miss Cassandra's or Defoe's considerations of the phenomenon.

²⁰⁴ Esther Godfrey, *The January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New York: St. Martin's, 2009), 2.

Godfrey introduces the issue of power in discussing other scholars' responses to the January-May marriage. She, for example, cites Dianne Sadoff's assertions about Dickens' *Bleak House*: "[She] emphasizes the powerlessness and complacency of the young wife and laments her experiences within the confines of society and marriage."²⁰⁵ Godfrey is reluctant to accept that the January-May marriage was universally disempowering for the young women involved:

I do not claim that Sadoff and Hardy are wrong in their assessments of these types of marriages. Certainly Esther, Dorothea, Zoe, and other young brides sometimes feel 'horror and misery' directly related to the generational gaps dividing the spouses that they never expected in their engagements. Yet the distribution of power in these marriages is not unidirectional, and nineteenth-century authors do not use January-May marriages as a blanket method of oppression or liberation in their critiques of gender.²⁰⁶

She states, "I do not restrict the girl bride to the position of victim. These marriages often reveal complex systems of control, and age marks one way that authors redistribute authority between husbands and wives."²⁰⁷ Whereas power seems to be a pressing concern in the treatment unequal marriage receives in the nineteenth century, sexuality, however, seems to be the more pressing concern for eighteenth-century representations. I do not mean to suggest that sexuality is not a concern in the later treatments, or even that sexuality is not a matter that is entangled within discussions of power. The representations of unequal marriage in the eighteenth century are simply, in general, more explicitly sexual than later iterations.

Godfrey ultimately suggests that "These January-May marriages operate through a parodic display of excess—excess age and youth, impotency and desire, masculinity and

²⁰⁵ Godfrey, *The January-May Marriage*, 2.

²⁰⁶ Godfrey, *The January-May Marriage*, 5.

²⁰⁷ Godfrey, *The January-May Marriage*, 5.

femininity, power and powerlessness, ugliness and beauty.”²⁰⁸ That this kind of marriage is parodic—especially in many instances upon the eighteenth-century stage—is inarguable. Its very parodic nature seems an excuse to dismiss it as generally culturally insignificant, however, this type of marriage becomes a site for debate about the nature of marriage and what each member’s expectations and motivations should be. The parodic excess evoked by Godfrey is suggested repeatedly in the medical advice concerning old age and sexual performance throughout the eighteenth century. A not insignificant portion of the medical advice writing available in the eighteenth-century consisted of advice for avoiding the maladies associated with age or of regimens meant to prevent them. Oddly little advice is available for those already experiencing those maladies—those without the presence of mind to take the preventative measures advised (moderation in diet and drinking, exercise, sex, etc.) seem to be considered a lost cause.

Unsurprisingly, there is a great deal of repetition in these sources about the causes of impaired sexual appetite and the effects of the excessive indulgence of such appetites in youth. Cleland, in his *Institutes of Health*, suggests that he is basing his advice upon his own personal experience. In *A guide to old age, or a cure for the indiscretions of youth* [1759], William Brodum M.D., however, identifies the source of popular wisdom as classical medicine. Both sources suggest that sexual dysfunction later in life is clearly an outcome of poor decision-making earlier in life; Brodum, however, includes a terrifying list of consequences to overindulgence that goes beyond anything Cleland purports to have experienced. Young people who have abused their constitutions:

Become frail, effeminate, benumbed, lazy stupid, and incapable of any action. Their bodies are bent from debility, and their legs are swelled from the same cause, and unable to perform their usual functions; they have an utter distaste for the festive scenes of life,

²⁰⁸ Godfrey, *The January-May Marriage*, 7.

and for everything of business are totally incapacitated; many also, observes this accurate historian, become paralytic. The stomach is disordered, all the whole frame is weakened, paleness, universal decay, and emaciation succeed.²⁰⁹

Brodum further develops the symptoms and suggests the cyclical nature of the abuse:

Besides, the more the strainers of the body are drained, the more humour they draw to them from the other parts, and the juices being thus conveyed to the genitals, the other parts are impoverished. Hence it is, that from excessive venery arise lassitude, weakness, numbness, a feeble gait, head aches, convulsions of the senses, but especially the sight, and dullness of hearing, an idiot look, a feverish circulation of blood, exsiccation, leanness, a consumption of lungs and back; and want of all masculine powers. (9)

There are some particularly noteworthy aspects of these descriptions. The first is their sheer diversity; the consequences of overindulgence are widespread and encompass almost every system of the body. Almost any bodily discomfort can, because of this diversity, be linked to a taxation of the constitution through the excessive use of the body's "seminal liquor." In fact, the potential for sexual overindulgence to become a catch-all cause of ailments is clear here. I have already noted that impotence was clearly a medical and moral concern (as the medical consequences stem from immoral abuses of the sexual constitution); the descriptions above further complicate the matter by listing several consequences that externally mark the body of the sufferer: effeminacy (sometimes linked with a lack of the masculine marker of a developed musculature), bent bodies, swollen legs, a feeble gait, and perhaps the most humorous, "an idiot

²⁰⁹ William Brodum, *A guide to old age, or a cure for the indiscretions of youth* (London, [1795]), 8-9. Angus McLaren suggests in *Impotence: A Cultural History* that significant shifts toward scientific and physiological explanations of impotence occurred in the eighteenth-century (77-78). Whereas these opinions were emergent, there are many examples of opinions that align with Brodum's throughout the century. In fact, the late publication date of his suggests their continued prevalence. G Archibald Douglas suggests in *The Nature and Causes of Impotence in Men and Barrenness in Women, Explained* (1758) that while overindulgence in sex can cause impotence, there are physiological difficulties that exist beyond those causes (21). His represents an emergent opinion on the matter that differs from classical medicine.

look.” Just as physiognomy suggested that one’s character was written upon the structure of one’s face, these descriptions suggest that one’s sexual character was written on the body. The last aspect I would like to call attention to is that many of these consequences seem to prematurely age the young—they experience many of the same physical consequences that are stereotypically seen as part of the aging process. As we will see, many of the men included in the discussions of literature below seem to be exceptionally old or decrepit for their age.

The pernicious habit of overindulgence is just that—pernicious. Lascivious impulses, once given in to, fuel a destructive cycle of desire, excitation, and release that drain the constitution. Each round of the cycle, of course, carries with it the possibility of moving one step closer to the debilitating symptoms previously listed:

These evils are increased, and become incurable by reason of a perpetual itch for pleasure, which nevertheless the inclinations of the mind, as well as the passions of the body, still desire ardently; from whence it follows, as before observed, that they have obscene dreams in sleep, and the prone parts, upon every slight occasion, have an ineffectual tendency to stiffen, and the quantity of replaced semen will be discharged from the relaxed cells...by the slightest efforts. Thus it is, that these excesses bring such perdition upon the flower of our youth. (43)

Ultimately overindulgence is suggested to be (in rare cases) potentially fatal. Brodum mentions a case observed by Boerhaave in which, “a man...died the very first time he copulated with a woman, the spasm being so violent, that it brought on a general palsy” (43). Presumably this young man had already taxed his system with excessive solitary venery. The sexual taxation of the constitution is a belief relied upon by one young wife below who hopes to kill her much older husband with caresses. John Hill, in *The old man’s guide to health and longer life: with rules for*

diet, exercise, and physic (1760), reinforces this belief is his one of the rare examples of medical advice directed towards old men (rather than preventative regimens for the younger men). In a chapter entitled “The Passions,” Hill suggests:

Of all passions let the old man avoid a foolish fondness for women. This never will solicit him, for nature knows her own time, and the appetite decays with the power: but if he solicits that which he cannot enjoy, he will disturb his constitution more than by any other means whatever: and while he is shortening his life; and robbing the poor remainder he allows of peace; he will be only making himself the ridicule of those who seem to favour his vain and ineffectual desires.²¹⁰

Of course, these learned medical opinions on the dangers of excessive venery conveniently work to place restraints on male sexual appetites. Lest the dangers of venery lead to the suggestion that abstinence is the only method for self-preservation, Brodum suggests, “Let no man think me an enemy to the rational pleasures, the intermingled bliss of sexual delights; such as, for the wisest purposes, the Almighty Parent has created out bodies, mutually to give and receive, and has destined us universally to possess” (4). Brodum shares many of the assumptions revealed in my discussion of Defoe in Chapter 2; both sources suggest (presumably working from a philosophy expressed as early as Paul in 1 Corinthians 7) that marriage should yield mutual sexual satisfaction. The possibility for mutual satisfaction is one of the troubling failures of the unequal marriage. As we will see, the older men involved in these marriages choose young women as a provocative to ensure their sexual performance (the efficacy of which is constantly questioned). The potential for satisfaction for the women is, in turn, almost always ignored by the older men—unless it is portrayed as a source of anxiety that mars their enjoyment of the marriage.

²¹⁰ John Hill, *The old man’s guide to health and longer life: with rules for diet, exercise, and physic* (Dublin, 1760), 25.

Most of the men who marry late in life are portrayed as decrepit and/or impotent. These descriptors—in particular the first—could be seen as a natural aspect of aging, but an alternate interpretation is that these descriptions are accessing the commonly held beliefs about excessive sexual indulgence. These men, by waiting for so long to marry (and presumably not guarding themselves from excess venery in the meantime), make the enjoyment of “rational pleasure” with their young wives impossible (and from their perspective, undesirable). Their state as a target for derision is based on a twofold form of problematic sexual appetite: the first is the excessive appetite that leads them to spend their youth and middle age outside of the boundaries of rational pleasure in marriage, the second is the continuing sexual appetite that stands in stark contrast to diminished sexual ability (a result of the former).

Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* (1682) introduces many of the common elements of the unequal marriage formula in the relationship between the senator Antonio and the courtesan Aquilina.²¹¹ In fact, the tragedy makes the connection between sexual impotence and the aversion of the young woman explicit in ways that the comedies in the discussion to follow do not. In particular, the connection of the age inequality of the relationship and prostitution is particularly revelatory. In *Venice Preserv'd*, Otway suggests the necessity of monetary encouragement to make the aged male body palatable to a young woman.

Aquilina herself acknowledges that Antonio's money and power provide him access to her: “I loath and scorn that fool thou mean'st, as much/ Or more than thou can'st; But the Beast

²¹¹ Antonio is a site of some debate for scholars working with *Venice Preserv'd*; many assert that he is an important key to unlocking the latent political commentary of the play and its connection to contemporary England. I choose here to deal with him as a more general commentary on older men and their power in society. For alternate readings, see: Ronald Berman, “Nature in *Venice Preserv'd*,” *ELH* 36, no. 3 (1969): 529-543; Harry M. Solomon, “The Rhetoric of ‘Redressing Grievances’: Court Propaganda as the Hermeneutical Key to *Venice Preserv'd*” *ELH* 53, no. 2 (1986): 289-310; Phillip Harth, “Political Interpretations of *Venice Preserv'd*” *Modern Philology* 85, no. 4 (1988): 45-62.

has gold/ that makes him necessary: Power too” (II.i.11-13). Antonio’s gold may provide the incentive for Aquilina to acquiesce to Antonio’s attentions, but she does not do so willingly:

Why can’st thou think that wretch
E’re fill’d thy Aquilina’s arms with pleasure?
Think’st thou, because I sometimes give him leave
To foyle himself at what he is unfit for;
Because I force myself to endure and suffer him,
Think’st thou I love him? No, by all the joys
Thou ever gav’st me, his presence is my penance;
The worst thing an old man can be’s a lover,
A meer Memento More [sic.] to poor woman.
I never lay by his decrepit side,
But all night I ponder’d on my grave” (II.i.19-30).

Aquilina finds Antonio repellant—that much is clear. What remains not entirely certain is whether or not Aquilina’s revulsion is simply a matter of Antonio’s age or is amplified by his sexual inadequacy (he “foyle[s] himself at what he is fit for”). Many of these sentiments will be repeated by the young women in the comedies, but in far more subtle terms. Aquilina, in her role as a courtesan (rather than an innocent young woman), has enough sexual and worldly knowledge to comment on the disgust she feels for Antonio in explicit terms.

With a great deal of exposition characterizing him as powerful and influential, Antonio is finally allowed to appear and he makes a relatively pathetic figure to contemplate:

Nacky, Nacky, Nacky—how dost do my Nacky? Hurry durry. I am come little Nacky;
past eleven a clock, a late hour; time in all conscience to go to bed Nacky—Nacky did I

say? Ay Nacky; Aquilina, lina, lina, quilina, quilina, quilina, Aquilina, Naquilina, Naquilina, Acky, Acky, Nacky, Nacky, Queen Nacky—come let's to bed—you Fubbs, you Pugg you—you little Puss—Purree Tuzzey—I am a Senator (III.i.14-23).

Antonio's entrance stands in ironic contrast with what the audience knows about him; the wealthy and powerful senator speaks in nonsense and pet names.

What follows is a disturbing process during which Aquilina's patience is bought with a bag of gold and in which the sexual proclivities of the senator are exposed as somewhat unusual. Antonio manages to pretend that he is a bull: "Bellows like a bull, and drives her about" (479), he asks Aquilina to spit in his face: "Ah toad, toad, toad, toad! Spit in my face a little Nacky—spit in my face prithee, spit in my face, never so little: spit but a little bit—spit, spit, spit, spit when you are bid I say; do, prithee spit—now, now, now, spit: what you won't spit, will you?" (III.i.97-103), he responds to Aquilina's bewildered refusal to spit in his face by suggesting that he will role-play being a dog: "I'll give thee this t'other purse to let me be a dog—and to use me like a dog a little" (III.106-107), and ultimately when he "misbehaves" as a dog, he craves Aquilina to kick him: "kick harder—harder yet, bough Waugh Waugh, Waugh, bough" (III.i.122-123). The audience is invited to revel in the humiliation Antonio asks for behind closed doors, which provides a glaring disjunction with his power in the outside world. Antonio is persistently the only comedic aspect of an otherwise very serious tragedy. Even when the serious aspects of the plot overlap with him, Otway cannot seem to resist reminding the audience of his private foibles. In a later scene, Aquilina, incensed by the capture and planned execution of Pierre, confronts Antonio with a dagger. As Antonio begs at her feet, he becomes distracted by the possibility she will kick him: "Now if she would but kick a little bit, one kick...I doe, by

these dear fragrant foots and little toes, sweet as, e e e Nacky nacky Nacky...Nothing but untie thy shoe-string a little faith and troth, that's all, that's all, as I hope to live" (V.i.214-221).

Although impotence certainly cannot be openly played upon the stage, there are some ways in which the drama takes the cultural beliefs about impotence and uses them to telegraph a commentary on the character's sexual abilities. Aquilina suggests repeatedly in anger that Antonio is, in fact, impotent, but in this scene Antonio telegraphs it clearly in his actions (as they would be interpreted by a contemporary audience). Elisabeth Mignon observes that one characteristic of aged men was their speech patterns. She points to the precedent set by *Man of the Mode's* Old Bellair: "Old Bellair represents the first use of the device of an individual language, of a speech oddity to signify senility; his is based on repetition."²¹² I would suggest that Antonio's speech patterns do not necessarily suggest senility in this case (his public persona does not suggest senility) but infantilization and a kind of forced intimacy with the reluctant Aquilina. This infantilization is further rendered more grotesque within the context of Antonio's perverse desires. This trend continues with other figures of this type over several decades and seems to be a theater convention that telegraphs impotence on multiple levels—a lack of masculine power and sexual ability.

These scenes contain fairly graphic performances of sexual fetish and sado-masochism on the stage. Despite the power that Antonio claims with his statement, "I am a senator," he craves being demeaned by Aquilina. Whereas today, we might consider these desires to be a fairly normal construction of sexual identity, as we have seen in Chapter 2, these types of desires were seen as indicative of impaired sexual appetites—an assumption confirmed by Aquilina's rejection of Antonio as "impotent" in her fiery speech rebuking him and expressing her disgust.

²¹² Mignon, *Crabbed Age and Youth*, 42. This kind of individual speech pattern is often associated with sexually inadequate men or disempowered men—see *Venice Preserv'd*, *A Wife Well Managed*, *The Basset Table*, etc.

This scene so exhausts Aquilina's patience that she can no longer dissemble her disgust for Antonio: "I hate you, detest you, loath you, I am weary of you, sick of you—hang you, you are an old, silly, impertinent, impotent, solicitous coxcomb, crazy in your head, and lazy in your body, love to be meddling with every thing, and if you had not money, you are good for nothing" (III.i.35-42).

The length of the Nicky Nacky scene and the graphic detail in which the sexual proclivities of Antonio are displayed suggests that something more important than comic relief is occurring. Antonio as a wealthy man has two forms of power at his disposal in his interaction with Aquilina: his money and his sexual prowess. The latter is seriously undermined by his desire to be physically abused and his desire to be dominated through role-playing (if not simply by his age). The former proves useless as well; Antonio attempts to buy Aquilina's compliance, but she resists even after the money materializes (a particularly insulting form of resistance, we must presume, when interacting with a prostitute). This resistance is paralleled by the resistance exhibited by the young (potential) wives of the comedies that were roughly contemporary to *Venice Preserv'd*. The parallel is more closely established with the older men's flaunting of wealth and their seeming clear understanding of the money as an exchange for the willingness of the young women to yoke themselves to the older men.

In "Otway's Tragic Muse Debauched: Sensuality in *Venice Preserv'd*," William H. McBurney notes the parallels that I have suggested between Aquilina's relationship with Antonio and the wives of the unequal marriages: "Despite her disguise as a rampant Greek courtesan, Aquilina is obviously a London lady of quality. Her conversation, like that of Pierre, is modish in its attempts at wit and raillery, and she echoes a long succession of discontented young wives of

Restoration comedy in her attitude toward Antonio.”²¹³ McBurney’s observation is meant to support the connection he hopes to draw between Otway’s tragedy and earlier comedy, but the general connection between the scene and the conventions of comedy related to unequal marriages is not unremarkable. If Aquilina is repulsed by her significantly older lover, then we might easily assume that proper young women—pursuing marriage and not prostitution—would be equally (if not more so) repulsed. Otway clearly indicates that Aquilina’s submission (as short-lived as it is) is purchased and even then reluctantly given. The men of the unequal marriages plays often attempt to overcome reluctance in the same manner as Antonio; they throw money and gifts at the problem. This is a rather literal version of “matrimonial whoredom” not broached by Defoe. These men have no other advantage over younger men than their economic power. The economic aspect of the unequal match—the fact that older men use economic leverage to make themselves appealing and that this leverage is conceptually linked with prostitution—remains relatively unchanged in the plays in this chapter and over a large expanse of time.

Certainly the institution of marriage at this time was fundamentally an economic one; economic concerns arose in the exchange of dowries, the negotiation of settlements, the allocation of pin money, etc. The persistent commentary about the monetary exchange involved in unequal marriage goes above and beyond that found in “normal” marriages. I would suggest that this persistent commentary is a way of indicating an underlying discomfort with the bargain being made in unequal marriage and a way of heightening the sexual distaste involved in the

²¹³ William H. McBurney, “Otway’s Tragic Muse Debauched: Sensuality in *Venice Preserv’d*,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 58, no. 3 (1959), 385. McBurney also comments on the fate of the Nicky-Nacky Scenes: “Early stripped of the Nicky-Nacky scenes and the anticlerical elements, the tragedy was constantly refined according to the tastes of successive audiences and the fortes of various actors. Stage versions became less gross, indecorous lines were deleted” (380).

process that might otherwise have not been subject to explicit and detailed commentary. Few of the comedies contain anything as explicit as the sexual denunciation in *Venice Preserv'd*.

To highlight the level of restraint shown in the comedies I will discuss below, I would also like provide a novelistic context. The novels allow for a level of access to the psychology of the characters that the drama's limited system of asides and soliloquies does not provide. The commentary on unequal marriage suggested by this greater development of the characters' thoughts and motivations reveals far more attention to the level of sexual dysfunction and dissatisfaction involved in the construction of the unequal marriage formula. Certainly the novels access shared beliefs about unequal marriage and men's sexuality that we must assume informed theater audiences; they must have accessed these beliefs to fill the gaps of what is left unsaid on the stage.

The first novel is the anonymous *Adventures of Melinda* (1749), which features the marriage of Melinda to the much older Lorenzo.²¹⁴ Melinda is initially resistant to the match (despite having no real viable options of marriage amongst her peers of comparable age). Her father, friends, and acquaintances eventually push her toward the union. They suggest that the gamble of suffering her husband's presence is entirely worth the eventual gains:

Her friends and acquaintances...assured her that if a lady of her youth and sprightliness managed matters rightly after wedlock, that the old gentleman's fondness would soon bring him from the wedding sheets to a winding one; and that the more she caressed him,

²¹⁴ Lorenzo is, in fact, a widower. He has married once before for wealth and seeks to marry for "love" with Melinda. He is, however, treated for all intents and purposes as an "old bachelor" within the text. His choice of the significantly younger Melinda qualifies him for the derisive formula despite any mitigation having married before might offer.

the sooner she should find herself an opulent widow, instead of the miserable wife that she imagined herself going to be.²¹⁵

The stance of the friends and acquaintances suggest that they are basing their advice on the commonly held scientific and medical beliefs I have outlined above. Lorenzo's constitutional powers, already impaired by the many years he has spent unmarried, will be no match for Melinda's own youthful constitution. Young women's sexual appetites, seen as dangerously acquisitive in other fora (consider, for example, the warning about the widows' sexual appetites above), are in this case tantamount to a death sentence for the older man. The representation of this assumption here seems to suggest that women were assumed to have relied upon the potentially fatal outcome of their sexual energies to fortify their wills as they entered into unequal marriage. That Melinda does, in fact, use these beliefs as a guiding principle suggests that the author's commentary on this kind of marriage is aimed at the wife as well:

The disagreeable thoughts of passing her youth in the arms of such an old lump of impotency as was Lorenzo; whose superannuated caresses she abhorred in her soul, nor would have endured them, only in hopes that they would contribute to hasten his end. For which reason she was continually, when at home, sitting on his knee, stroaking his cheek, kissing, tickling of him, and using all other provocatives, in order to make him believe that he was not above thirty; and indeed, it would have made her life much easier, if she could have found any motives to have persuaded herself so.---Thus they were continually cooing and bulling when together; and she would often protest, that he had not so much as a grey hair in his head; which she might very well assure him of, as it was bald all over. (17)

²¹⁵*The Adventures of Melinda* (London, 1749), 14-15.

Melinda deceptively fawns over her husband in an attempt to hasten his demise. This particular set of behaviors represents perhaps the most cynical incarnation of the younger wife. In this case, the naturalness of her abhorrence toward her husband suggests that the only explanation for willing sexual interaction on the part of the wife in an unequal marriage is inspired by hopes of swift demise. As troubling as Melinda's behavior is, however, the author's appraisal of the causes of her heartlessness is important—it certainly does not stem entirely from some fault inherent to her or other women. If Melinda becomes monstrous in her willingness to enact a subtle form of sexual homicide (a term I use partially in jest), it is in direct relationship to the monstrosity of the appetite that Lorenzo is attempting to fulfill. The feigned nature of her attentions to Lorenzo is so transparent and exaggerated (she suggests for example that he has no gray hair, when in fact, he has no hair at all), that the more outrageous aspect of these interactions is, perhaps, that Lorenzo is ostensibly delusional enough to accept them as natural outpourings of affection from his wife. Everyone but Lorenzo knows that Melinda's attentions are motivated by other concerns than spousal affection. That Melinda's family and friends suggest she plan on her ability to commit sexual homicide and that such a presumption seems justified to all involved (except Lorenzo, of course, who is oblivious) suggests the level of derision associated with the older husband.

Melinda's efforts to this end are not as swiftly effective as her friends and acquaintances suggested:

Almost a twelvemonth passed on, (a tedious time to a wife in her situation!) and yet not the least view of his being nearer to make her happy in becoming a widow, than she could expect from him as a wife. But, however as he promised before marriage to make her mistress of all his fortune, and to maintain her in the greatest splendor, she took care

to remind him of it, and he accordingly kept his word with her, by purchasing the richest furniture, jewels, and equipage, that could be bought for her use, and daily presenting her with the most precious nick-nacks and bagatelles that could be procured. All these favors, kindnesses, and magnificent living, could not satisfy the heart of Melinda, which was continually wishing for widowhood. (16)

Whereas other texts suggest that the danger of unequal marriage is the temptation for the young woman to cuckold her husband, in this case, Melinda's sexual and marital frustrations are transfigured to excessive spending (she also, later in the text, develops a significant and debilitating gambling habit). Although Lorenzo has married Melinda for "love," his consistent monetary indulgence of Melinda suggests a relationship more in the line of keeping a mistress. While not as explicit as Antonio's exchange with Aquilina, the readers must clearly see this behavior as falling within a similar heuristic. Similar to Aquilina's response, however, the economic encouragement (in Melinda's case a noteworthy amount of economic power within the marriage) is still not enough to assuage her repulsion toward her husband.

Ten years later in *The Countess of Dellwyn* (1759), Sarah Fielding provides an assertive commentary on the nature of unequal marriages. Lord Dellwyn, the older husband, fairly aggressively pursues his young wife—going so far, for example, as to orchestrate a rival to his affections to push her to accept his offers. Fielding, however, reassures the readers that such aggression is the only kind he is capable of. She describes him thus:

His lordship was in his grand climacteric, laboring under the complication of diseases, the melancholy effect of a luxurious and intemperate manner of wasting the joyous spring, the pleasant bloom, of life. By the assistance of attendants Lord Dellwyn was moved from his bed into a chair, or rather a machine, so artfully contrived, that he could

vary his postures, either lay himself almost at length, or sit upright, as his various pains required: this very machine, invented for the assistance of imbecility, but its adornments sufficiently indicating that the grandeur of its owner was on no account to be forgot.²¹⁶

While Lord Dellwyn is aged, Fielding places much of the blame for his feebleness on his own decisions; despite being past his “grand climacteric,”²¹⁷ the damage to his constitution is associated with “the melancholy effect of a luxurious and intemperate manner of wasting the joyous spring, the pleasant bloom, of life.” Fielding is accessing the commonly held assumptions about man’s ability to fritter away his constitutional powers through excessive indulgence. Certainly, in waiting to this late stage in his life, Lord Dellwyn has wasted the “pleasant bloom, of life” in another manner; that period would have been the most ideal for a happy marriage of mutual enjoyment. Lord Dellwyn’s manner of thinking about marriage at this time echoes in a noteworthy manner Miss Cassandra’s claims about the powers of marriage; having squandered the majority of his life in the pursuit of unsatisfying false pleasure, he believes “that to live soberly, with a virtuous young wife, might possibly render him more solid happiness than he had ever hitherto enjoyed” (18-19). Fielding does not suggest that his inclinations in this respect are incorrect, but that his choice of wife for these pursuits was inappropriate.

Fielding’s description indicates impotence in several ways. The first, of course, is the one mentioned above—that Dellwyn suffers under the “complication of diseases” from his youthful indiscretions. Certainly these words could refer to any number of diseases (gout, nervous disorders, etc), but most certainly, as we have seen in Chapter 2, they were commonly associated with impotence. Further, the melding of his body with the chair/machine indicates his

²¹⁶ Sarah Fielding, *The Countess of Dellwyn* (London, 1759), 2.

²¹⁷ Past the generally accepted age of 63, according to the *OED*, s.v. “Climacteric” accessed April 6, 2010.

inability to so much as move without assistance. Adorned in order to “sufficiently indicat[e] that the grandeur of its owner was on no account to be forgot,” the chair is a signifier of Dellwyn’s physical impotence, but also of his wealth. The association is almost certainly not a coincidence as we have seen earlier in this discussion.

Fielding is delicate enough to avoid commenting on Dellwyn’s sexual performance outright, but the absence of her commentary on the matter is almost as significant as any explicit comment on her part. In her description of the wedding day, Fielding creates a blazon of physical decrepitude with which the reader must forever associate the groom. Dellwyn drops the wedding ring not once, but three times, and “Had his lordship received no assistance, his purposed marriage had been absolutely baffled” (6). Whereas he can receive assistance in the symbolic action of creating the marriage, no such assistance, the reader must acknowledge, will be forthcoming in the far more strenuous action of consummating the wedding. Further, the groom is described with a “mouth vacated by the inhabitants, its teeth” from which issues a voice “resolving itself into the kind of sharp treble; a harsher, and at the same time, a less intelligible, sound.” In addition to Dellwyn’s feminized (and surely grating) voice, the blazon is completed with the image of Dellwyn’s “withered hand” (6). Fielding tastefully skips in the narrative action from the events of the wedding day back to the nature of the courtship between the two and ultimately to several months into the marriage. Certainly it is not simply a perverse mind that must notice that no comment is ever made about the wedding night, but Fielding has, with all the images of the chair/machine and the blazon of Dellwyn’s decrepitude, given the reader all he or she needs to know about that particular event (or lack thereof).

Although Fielding does avoid commenting overtly on the implications on sexual attraction that such a marriage might have, she does include a comment on youth’s natural

aversion to the attentions of the old: “he seized her hand, and kissed it, with an imitation of youthful warmth...and the lady’s hand, like the sensitive plant, spontaneously shrunk back to avoid his touch” (73). The uncontrollable naturalness of the response is indicated through Fielding’s use of the image of “spontaneously” reacting “sensitive plant.” The suggestion that [the wife’s] aversion is natural, but overcome by the arguments of her own and her father’s avarice is an element common to the prose narratives. Recall, for example, *Cupid Decoy’s* impassioned young wife whose speech railed against the sins of parents and a society that encourage these unions and Melinda’s friends, family, and acquaintances’ macabre reassurance that her youth will cause her husband’s demise. Much like Melinda, at first “Miss Lucum absolutely refused the honour intended her. Lord Dellwyn was highly disagreeable in her sight; and she chose rather to submit to any state of life, than to shine in the highest sphere on such terms; she called it prostitution and heroically defied all such temptations” (30). Miss Lucum’s ability to see the connection between her proposed marriage and prostitution is an important, although largely ignored, insight on her part. Before she ultimately decides to take the Count of Dellwyn as her husband once a rival (her cousin Lady Fanny) is introduced, her father (who believes that he will benefit greatly from the match) threatens to throw her out of his house for her refusal, thus making her decision not entirely her own (31).

If all marriage at the time shares unsavory parallels to prostitution in its tendency to commodify and exchange women’s bodies, the marriage of unequal ages is more flagrantly so. The authors stress this component by naturalizing the revulsion the young women feel toward the older bodies of their husbands as well as the over cataloging of the exchange of wealth that occurs:

The day was appointed for her wedding. During the intermediate space, Miss Lucum was under the most perfect intoxication of vanity: cloaths were bought, new equipages were ordered, new schemes of grandeur passed in continual succession in her mind, even Lord Dellwyn, for that small portion of time, became agreeable; for he seldom approached her, without securing himself a favourable reception by some dazzling present. (77)

The wording of the above suggests that Lord Dellwyn is conscious of the monetary exchange involved in his unequal marriage. The structure of the book creates noteworthy tensions; Fielding has superimposed this image of the catalog of Miss Lucum's pecuniary fantasy of the wedding preparations with the actual wedding (and its blazon of Lord Dellwyn's decrepitude). In eschewing any real discussion of the sexual realities of the unequal marriage, Fielding calls our attention to the other forms of misery the marriage entails.

Fielding provides descriptions of the marriage that are echoes of the misery that Defoe suggests must be a possible outcome for unequal marriage. Lady Dellwyn finds herself literally sickened by the frustrations of her marriage and the stress of having to hide her "natural" revulsion toward her husband:

Lady Dellwyn had now brought herself into a state, in which she was in a manner under an obligation to live a lye; not only her language, but every look, every gesture, must indicate some falsehood: she had not been instructed young enough in this sort of commerce, to have the advantage of custom to lighten such an insupportable burthen; it was to her lively imagination more than an Herculean labour: She fainted under the heavy load, and consumed away almost to a skeleton. (94-95)

Although nearly all of the texts in this chapter take into consideration (to varying degrees) the personal happiness of the young women, Fielding expands upon these concerns by associating

illness with the unhappiness involved with unequal marriage. Fielding's version of this illness remarkably literalizes Defoe's image of the dead body bound to the living.

These two novels ultimately make explicit many of the assumptions that remain implicit in the plays; they lay bare the codified "knowledge" that informs but is unspoken (to varying degrees) in the plays. Altogether, the context of the medical advice genre, *Venice Preserv'd*, and the novels reveal a system of beliefs that deeply problematize old bachelor's sexual appetites and the ways in which young women are implicated and affected by those appetites.

As a transition to the comedies, it would, perhaps, be useful to return to a play I have already discussed in Chapter 1, *The London Cuckolds* (1681), with a particular goal of investigating the Wiseacre marriage in more detail. Wiseacre is "near fifty" and Peggy is "But fourteen" (5). Wiseacre's compatriots are amused with his choice of brides; Doodle is the only one who expresses dismay at their disproportionate ages. He suggests, "But a discreet woman of thirty had been more suitable for you" and further protests, "Doubtless an old man will be very agreeable to a young woman" (7). Even though Doodle is the only one throughout the play who expresses any concern for the experience of the young woman saddled with a significantly older husband, he provides an important reminder to the audience to consider the young woman's future suffering as it attempts to understand the lengths to which Wiseacre has gone to yield Peggy both ignorant and docile. The audience may pity Peggy simply on the merit of being married to a man so vastly her elder, but Ravenscroft has ensured the audience will react with derision when Wiseacre explains the plan he enacted in creating his wife:

That I might be sure not to be troubled with a witty wife, I made a choice of a girl of four years of age, one that had no signs of a pregnant wit, her father and mother were none of the wisest; they dying, left this child to the care of her aunt, a good honest decay'd

gentlewoman, but a little soft too; her portion they recommended to my hands, to be improv'd for her use; I plac'd the aunt and child in the country, at a lone house instructed her to breed her up in all honesty and simplicity imaginable; never to let her play amongst boys or girls, or have any conversation with any body but herself; and now being bred to my own humour, and moulded to my turn, I am going to reap the fruits of my long care and trouble; for this is she I design for my wife. (8)

Of all the plays I will discuss in this chapter, *The London Cuckolds*, most exaggerates the desperation that inspires the older husband in his choice of a younger wife. The extent of his planning suggests an extraordinary level of anxiety on Wiseacre's part. On some level Wiseacre tries to suggest that all of this effort is meant to create a wife who will remain faithful for lack of any knowledge about options otherwise, but a closer inspection of Wiseacre's character suggests a deep-seated anxiety about sexual performance.

Wiseacre's response to Doodle's mild statement of concern for the disparity in their ages introduces the issue of sexual performance:

I have consider'd that point too, and am convinced an old man can never love an old woman, that's for certain—age is a sore decayer, and renders men backward in their duty; therefore I marry a woman so young, that she may be a temptation to when I am old. You may talk of ambercaudles, chocolate, and jelly broths, but they are nothing compared to youth and beauty; a young woman is the only provocative for old age, I say (5-6).

Wiseacre speaks of marrying a young woman in mercenary terms; she is an investment in his future provocation—an attempt to undermine the grip of old age on flagging sexual powers.

Moreover, the investment involved is one from which the young woman does not benefit.

Wiseacre sees the choice of a young wife as a strategy to fulfill his marital “duty”—but it is a

duty that a young wife is unlikely to want him to fulfill, and one that, as the context I have constructed reveals, he will still (despite the provocatives of youth) be unable to fulfill. What is noteworthy about this strategy is that Wiseacre does not currently see himself as needing this provocation—it is an investment in the future. The plot of the play, however, suggests that he is none too amorous even at this point in his life. As we will see, Wiseacre is backward in his duty the very first night of his marriage. On his wedding night he leaves Peggy alone guarding his nightcap; he introduces this task as the “duty of a wife,” but the audience must surely notice that Wiseacre does not, in fact, take advantage of the “real” duty of a wife; he would rather pursue business than consummate his marriage.

A conversation between Doodle and Wiseacre about the precocious sexual knowledge of young women in their culture suggests another motivation for the extraordinary lengths to which Wiseacre has gone to in rearing Peggy: “Girls now at sixteen are as knowing as Matrons were formerly of sixty, I tell you in these days they understand *Aristotle’s Problems* at twelve years of age” (9). The distaste that Wiseacre displays for young women who have sexual experience and/or sexual knowledge suggest that Peggy’s rearing was aimed not only at keeping her physically innocent but intellectually innocent. That Wiseacre mentions *Aristotle’s Problems* which is a reference to a group of sex manuals available in the eighteenth century emphasizes his discomfort with Peggy having any sexual knowledge.²¹⁸ It is perhaps no coincidence that *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* offers this advice on unequal marriage: “When an old doting fellow

²¹⁸ *Aristotle’s Problems* is, in fact, *Aristotle’s Book of Problems* (London, [1706]). This book is, however, not entirely devoted to matters of sexuality. Wiseacre is more likely referring to *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* (which is entirely devoted to matters of “generation”) or any number of other midwifery manuals or guides to generation attributed to Aristotle that were popular. Peter Wagner provides an excellent discussion of how these texts function as borderline scientific/medical advice and erotica in “The Discourse on Sex—or Sex as Discourse: Eighteenth-Century Medical and Paramedical Erotica” in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Oxford: Manchester UP, 1987).

married a young virgin in the prime of her youth and vigour, who, whilst he vainly strives to please her, is thereby wedded to his grave” (50).

When it comes time for Wiseacre to show Peggy the duty of a wife, the lengths of his desperations are again emphasized. He tells her:

I have not time to instruct you to night in the whole duty of a wife, because business calls me away—I will therefore only inform you at present what the duty of a wife is to her husband at night, which is to watch while he is a sleep, and be his guard whilst he takes his rest... That duty, Peggy, is to be done in this manner;—here, put on this fine gilt cap and feather—so, now take this lance in your hand—so, now let me see you walk two or three turns about the room.—so—now this are you to do most of the night....And this respect must you show in my absence; for though I shall not be here present to night, yet upon my pillow do I here leave my night-cap, which is the emblem of me your husband; and you must show all duty and reverence to that night-cap as if it were myself. (74-75)

Wiseacre suggests that this iteration of wifely duty will save him from worrying during the day because Peggy will be too exhausted to get into mischief: “Keep a woman from sleep at night, and you secure her from temptation all day, for then she’ll be drowsy and lying upon her bed, whilst others are gadding about, and giving occasion, of not seeking themselves” (88). Doodle himself acknowledges the discomfort with which we should greet this lesson: “I think it a great deal of cruelty in you so to torment a poor innocent” (88). That Doodle chooses to describe the behavior as “cruel” is potentially significant; cruelty was, after all, a basis for divorce. In fact, Elizabeth Foyster provides an incidence of cruelty from the separation for cruelty case of Lady Boleter and her husband Sir Oliver (1672) that includes instances of behavior that put into context Doodle’s assertion that Wiseacre’s expectations of Peggy constitute “cruelty.” Although

certainly not the most blatant instances of cruelty in Lady Ann's reports, she includes references to Sir Oliver's demands of what Foyster characterizes as "demeaning and nonsensical tasks."

One of these "nonsensical tasks" was to "stand by his bed and watch over him all night." In Lady Ann's case, the cruelty of the demand was exacerbated by the fact that "on one occasion she was pregnant and was only permitted to wear a smock."²¹⁹

Although we cannot assume that the audience would have been familiar with this particular case, the context does provide an important frame for interpreting Wiseacre's actions and Doodle's comment. Wiseacre's plan is clearly meant to be humorous—it is part of the pervasive physical humor of the play. Simultaneously, however, it is a display of Wiseacre's willingness to unreasonably apply his conjugal power over Peggy and her chastity. It is a telling commentary on the anxieties associated with the unequal marriage that Wiseacre and his compatriots are often portrayed as being driven by their insecurities to unreasonable and troubling extremes. Whether the lesson was comic or indeed meant to be cruel, the fact that this lesson is the first Wiseacre teaches Peggy calls into question his amorous inclinations in the first place. It is Ramble who ultimately teaches Peggy her other duty—causing anxiety for Wiseacre, who is unlikely to pursue the same duty with the vigor and skill of the younger man. Peggy herself offers the commentary that suggests Wiseacre has cause for anxiety: "But he taught me a better duty than that you shewed me a great deal...It was ten times a better duty than that you taught me...After he taught me my lesson two or three times, I fell fast asleep" (92). Wiseacre's dismay at being cuckolded is not entirely based in the fact that another man has had sex with his wife, but more particularly that another (younger, more vigorous man) has had better sex with his wife than he can ever hope to manage. Wiseacre has, after all, gone to great lengths to

²¹⁹ Elizabeth Foyster, "Male Honour, Social Control and Wife Beating in Late Stuart England" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Sixth Series) (1996), 6: 217.

circumscribe his wife's knowledge of the world; in ensuring that his wife has had absolutely no knowledge (intellectual or firsthand) of sex, he also potentially limits her ability to judge his sexual performance.

The audience must imagine at the end of the play what Wiseacre's life will be like now that he has saddled himself (more accurately—created for himself) a wife such as Peggy. Surely, Wiseacre's marriage is a perfect example of unequal marriage as described by Defoe in almost every sense. Wiseacre has purposely molded a woman who is vastly his inferior in age and intellect, and the results anticipate the domestic hell that Defoe suggests is the result of such incommensurability. This is an important aspect of most of the plays in the networks of unequal marriage drama; whereas the older husbands (or attempted husbands) are almost always the target of satire, the authors nonetheless show the potential for misery for both parties. The source of the young wives' (or fiancés') unhappiness is obvious. The older husband's unhappiness (or potential unhappiness) is less obvious, but no less prevalent. The older husbands' last years, in which he intends to be comforted by his young wife, will be marred by anxiety—always sexual and sometimes economic. This play and *The Country Wife* lack the economic aspect; they are devoid of the economic bargaining present in many of the unequal marriages I have discussed thus far (and will discuss below). As distasteful as the economic bargaining might be, its absence in these plays suggests an even more extreme form of victimhood for Peggy and Margery. Their husband's strategy of choosing them and confining them leaves them no possibility of enjoying the cold comfort of monetary indulgence their peers in unequal marriage often negotiate.

A similar fate awaits *The Country Wife's* Pinchwife whose Margery is becoming awakened to the potential of life for a young and beautiful woman in London while simultaneously realizing the unfortunate situation she has married into. Margery's marriage and

its problems (mainly her dawning dissatisfaction) are left unresolved at the end of the play. While Alithea and Harcourt are entering into their happy union, Margery is simultaneously realizing what her naïveté made her incapable of before. Margery's last words in the play, as she is delivered from Horner to Pinchwife suggests the dawning end of her naïveté; she says "I must be a country wife still too I find, for I can't like a city one, be rid of my musty husband and doe what I list" (221). Superficially Margery seems to be accepting of her ill-fated union with Pinchwife, but the actions of the play call into question the sincerity of her resignation. Margery has already, without much training in the way of city wives (only a matter of a day has passed since her arrival to the city) managed to do exactly what she worries she will not be able to do—she has, in fact (at least momentarily) rid herself of her husband in orchestrating the assignation she just completed with Horner. The Pinchwife marriage is predicated on many of the same strategies as the Wiseacre marriage: ignorance, isolation, etc. Certainly Pinchwife does not go to the same extreme lengths as Wiseacre, but as his name suggest he adds an element of violence that is not present in *The London Cuckolds*.

Both *The London Cuckolds* and *The Country Wife* lack a resolution to the unhappiness both parties suffer within unequal marriage. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, both men are cuckolded with varying levels of publicity. Wiseacre's peers are also cuckolded, but while their wives work to diminish some of their humiliation, Peggy cannot produce even the flimsiest of excuses to comfort her husband and provide him with plausible deniability. As I have shown, in my earlier discussion, Pinchwife gets the cold comfort of an explanation that he seems not quite capable of accepting. Both Margery and Peggy experience sexual escapades that their respective husbands are almost certainly incapable of matching. This particular iteration of the unequal marriage formula in drama suggests no real possibility of a happy resolution once the unequal

marriage exists. The last in this group, *The Padlock* (1768), introduces the only outcome that doesn't lead to misery—an outcome in which the unequal marriage is ultimately avoided.

A last play of this type, which involves a noteworthy level of surveillance and isolation, is *The Padlock*.²²⁰ Don Diego's plan of isolation, as figured by the padlock of the title, is not as sexualized as *Wiseacre's* or *Pinchwife's* but certainly places him within the same formula. Leonora (like Margery and Peggy) is, perhaps, too innocent to mourn the possibility of having a significantly older husband. Instead, she mourns the freedom she has lost in being "protected" by Don Diego. Don Diego reminds her of the humble situation he has saved her from: "When you came hither, you were taken from a mean little house, ill situated, and worse furnished; you have no servants, and were obliged with your mother, to do the work yourself;" Leonora responds, "Yes, but when we had done, I could look out at [sic.] window, or go a walking in the fields" (4) and later describes her lack of freedom with predictable imagery: "A sparrow is happier in the fields than a gold-finch in a cage" (6). Leonora's resistance to her loss of freedom is compounded by what we must assume is her natural revulsion to her future husband's disparate age: "There is something makes me mighty uneasy. While he was talking to me, I thought I never saw anything look so ugly in my life" (6). Leonora is portrayed as too innocent to speak of her revulsion in sexual terms.

Unlike *Pinchwife* and *Wiseacre*, Don Diego is allowed to realize the error of his ways and bow out of his unequal marriage gracefully: "No, child, I only am to blame, who should have consider'd that sixteen and sixty agree ill together. But, tho' I was too old to be wise, I am not too old to learn; and so, I say, send for a smith directly, beat all the grates from my windows,

²²⁰ Peter A. Tasch explains the origins of the play from the Cervantes novel, *El Celoso Extremeno* and discusses the tremendous success the play experiences primarily from Didbin's performance of Mungo and the popularity of the music he composed in *The Dramatic Cobbler: The Life and Works of Isaac Bickerstaff* (Bucknell UP: Lewisburg, 1971).

take the locks from my doors, let egress and regress be given freely” (30). Don Diego not only acknowledges that he is an inappropriate husband for Leonora but also ultimately facilitates Leonora’s wedding to a young man with his own wealth. Don Diego’s sudden self-awareness and remedying of behavior is noteworthy in that most other plays that extricate young women from the unequal marriage require deception in order for the young woman to be saved. That Diego, upon reflection, realizes the error of his ways is a significant departure from other incarnations of this figure. Further, Diego is not the villain that many of the other older men are characterized as. In particular, he goes through no extraordinary lengths of manipulation or deception to isolate his chosen bride. (Barring, of course, the deal he makes with her parents to keep her in his house as a trial run—which, considering the lengths that others go to—is mild.) There is some insinuation that Diego is impotent—he is trusted to keep Leonora, a beautiful, young, and one must assume tempting, young lady in his house without any supervision from her family or a representative thereof. This plan can be interpreted, of course, in a number of ways: a quirk in Spanish behavior, the naiveté of Leonora’s poor parents, etc, but an audience accustomed to men of all ages pursuing women in their presence must have been surprised by the asexuality of the interactions between Don Diego and Leonora. Whatever his sexual capacity, Don Diego is not described as decrepit, despite Leonora’s one comment that she finds him “ugly.” He is, further, not characterized as senile. Ultimately, as would be expected of sentimental drama, the satire of the earlier plays’ treatments of the older man is softened to suggest that Diego’s plan and subsequent actions are a form of temporary weakness of judgment rather than stemming from a deeply immoral character. It is perhaps noteworthy that the only man capable of seeing the error of his ways is one who does not allow his sexual appetite to drive his actions. Although Don Diego isolates Leonora there is nothing particularly lascivious

about his actions or demeanor. If we consider a comparison between Don Diego and *The London Cuckolds*' Wiseacre, the mildness of the satire of the former becomes clear. Whereas Don Diego and Wiseacre both practice a form of confinement and surveillance to control access to the women in question, Wiseacre goes to far greater lengths to ensure Peggy's devotion to him. Although these lengths are meant to be comical, they are also deeply disturbing. The sentimental comedy version of lessons for older men allow for the older man to reform his wayward beliefs about marriage without humiliation.

The resolution of *The Padlock*, in which Leonora is paired with a husband who is her equal in age, allows for a transition to another group of plays that utilize this plot device as a way to resolve the issues of the unequal marriage: Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686) and Hannah Cowley's adaptation of *The Lucky Chance*, *The School for Greybeards* (1786). Separated by a century, the plays contain significantly different treatments of the unequal marriage and its relationship to the problematic sexual appetites of older men.

Both plays repeat the trope of prostitution I have discussed with the novels. This trope is noticeably absent from *The London Cuckolds* and *The Country Wife*, as might be expected for plays involving women who are too naïve to know the leverage their youth and beauty offer them in monetary matters. I do not mean to suggest that the young brides of Behn's and Cowley's plays seek the monetary reimbursement with any kind of avidity. Rather, the exchange of wealth is a function of the young women being worldly enough to understand the dire marital situation in which they find themselves. *The Lucky Chance*'s Sir Feeble fairly overtly attempts to purchase Letitia's love with jewels: "Look here my little Puskin, here's fine play-things for its nown little coxcomb...get ye gone—get ye gone, and off with these Saint Martine's trumpery, these play-house glass baubles, this necklaze, and these pendants and all these false weare, ods

bobs I'll have no counterfeit geer about thee, not I" (88). When Letitia resists these overtures and suggests that she doesn't merit such expenditures, Sir Feeble counters that she can repay him in intimacy: "More of your love, and less of your ceremony—give the old fool a hearty buss and pay him that way" (88). Whereas Don Diego couches his offers in an illusion of charity, Sir Feeble makes the marriage clearly a function of exchange.²²¹ His wealth is a means for purchasing not simply Letitia's consent to marry, but also her willing participation in marital intimacy. Where Diego's overtures cause a vague sense of unease for Leonora, Sir Feeble's prompt one of Letitia's only clear statements of disgust at the prospect of Sir Feeble as her lover: "heavens what a nautious thing is an old man turn'd lover" (88). Leonora clearly understands the nature of the exchange that Sir Feeble is attempting to make with her. If we imagine the staging of this scene, the process of Sir Feeble desperately adorning Leonora's body with evidence of his wealth must certainly have worked to exaggerate the difference between his decrepit body and the beauty of Letitia's young body. Rather than buy Letitia's compliance, this scene offers numerous opportunities for her to signal her revulsion in response to Sir Feeble's overtures.

Cowley's adaptation,²²² *The School for Greybeards*, follows much the same pattern of bartering. When Gasper is presented with Antonia's melancholy anticipation of their marriage he responds defensively: "Tell her how happy she is? You should say d'ye see ma'am what a fine house you are mistress of?—D'ye see ma'am how many servants are at your commands?—and

²²¹ S. S. Gammanpila explores Behn's combination of economic and sexual behavior: "Here young gallants and old mercantilists represent contrasting financial value systems: sexual and economic profligacy and potency in the young, and hoarding and impotence in the old men" (17). "Impotence and Mercantilist Behavior in Aphra Behn's City Comedies," in *Aphra Behn (1640-1689): Le Modèle Européen*, ed. Mary Ann O'Donnell and Bernard Dhuicq, (Paris: Bilingua, 2005): 17-24. Certainly the treatment of the mercantile characters—which goes beyond Behn and can be found in other, similar comedies—must have been a response to the economic developments the society was undergoing, but I believe it is also a way of telegraphing their sexual inadequacy by relying on the assumption that older men, in order to acquire their wealth had sacrificed the years of their lives to business rather than domestic pleasure. The pursuit of wealth replaces the pursuit of conjugal satisfaction until it is too late.

²²² For a general discussion of Cowley's adaptation of *The Lucky Chance*, see Jane Spencer, "Adapting Aphra Behn: Hannah Cowley's *A School for Greybeards* and *The Lucky Chance*," *Women's Writing: The Elizabethan to Victorian Period* 2, no. 3 (1995): 221-34.

this rich casket of jewels ma'am, which my master presents to you—how many ladies will envy you these jewels!" (7) He repeats this theme later in the play when faced with the melancholy Antonia herself: "Come deary, cheer up, cheer up! What all these trinkets, and rich laces, and finery, not brighten ye? Had you married a young fellow, he'd have made you no such presents—his money would have been lavish'd on his mistresses—I'll keep no mistresses; no naught women shall seduce thy nown old man" (14). As the young women's reluctance to enter into the marriage becomes more intense, the bartering on the old husband's part becomes more vociferous even in the face of outright reluctance. Gasper's promise to eschew keeping a mistress is ironic because he hardly has the potential to satisfy his young wife, let alone making additional demands upon his constitution. This comment clearly places the old husband in conversation with the neglectful husbands of Chapter 2. Don Gasper is suggesting that his type of husband, impaired and desperate, is the only way to guarantee a husband's undivided, if feeble, attention.

Ultimately the two plays remove the young women from the grasp of their older would-be husbands. The difference a century makes is that Cowley allows Gasper to lose his wife with some dignity and a modicum of relief. Sir Feeble relishes the prospect of his wedding night with disturbing anticipation. His first words in the play literally wax poetic on the matter:

But when bright Phoebus does retire,
To Thetis' bed to quench his fire,
And do the thing we need not name,
We mortals by his influence do the same.
Then the blushing Maid lays by
Her simpering, and her modesty;

And round the lover clasps and twines

Like ivy, or the circling vines. (203)

Letitia's response (for this exchange has occurred in front of her) is "I die but to imagine it, wou'd I were dead indeed" (203). "To die," of course, is a euphemism for the moment of orgasm, but in this case (so rare in exchanges between men and women in the comedies) that double-meaning is clearly not intended by Letitia. If anything the absolute absence of such connotations would call attention to the disgust Letitia is expressing. Letitia notably states this openly to the audience and all gathered although it is a sentiment we might expect to see expressed in an aside. Behn offers a response from Sir Feeble that ultimately removes any possibility of him maintaining his dignity (and creates a parallel with Otway's Antonio): "Hah—hum—how's this? Tears upon the wedding day? Why, Why—you baggage, you, ye little ting, fools-face—away, you rogue, you're naughty, you're naughty [patting and playing, following her]. Look—look—look now, —Buss it—buss it—buss it—and Friends, did'ums, did'ums, beat its none silly Baby—away, you little hussy, away, and pledge me" (203). Sir Feeble's comment about Letitia's tears (which clue us into her stage action in the absence of a stage direction) make his speech even more grotesque, because he persists in soliciting physical intimacy ("Buss it—buss it") even when confronted with the clear evidence (her tears) of Letitia's resistance to the marriage. There are clear parallels with Antonio's nonsensical baby language and sexualization. It is, to say the least, a bizarre response on Sir Feeble's part to Letitia's dismay.

The action of the play concerning Sir Feeble's plotline revolves around creating obstacles to the consummation; Sir Feeble humiliates himself throughout the process. The most noteworthy example (other than the ones already discussed) is his attempt to scare away Letitia's attendants; he "Throws open his gown, they [the attendants] run all away, he locks the door"

(228). This is apparently one of the aspects of the play that audience's found troublingly "low," but it's a telling action for Behn to dictate.²²³ On some level, we must attribute the attendant's decision to flee from shock, but a far more suitable assumption is that we are to conclude that what Feeble reveals in opening his gown is not only shocking, but revolting. That this is the strategy Feeble chooses to deploy (again in his desperation to consummate the marriage with Letitia) is revealing of a level of self-awareness on Feeble's part that makes him simultaneously an appropriate target for derision and pity. Ultimately when Sir Feeble loses Letitia to his young rival, he weeps on stage and states, "Yes, for I shall sleep now, I shall lie alone" (275).

Cowley's adaptation softens the harshness of the treatment her older would-be husband receives. Don Gasper is somewhat reluctant to marry; at the very least, he has a justification that goes beyond the lascivious. Don Gasper states his main motivation for marrying is because his grown son refuses to: "Hang me, if I would have married; but families must be kept up; and nothing can persuade the young dog into the trammels—He'd rather turn monk than turn to matrimony" (8). Far from displaying the enthusiasm of Sir Feeble, Don Gasper expresses some anxiety about the union, especially after conversing with Don Alexis (who himself has chosen to marry a younger woman and attempts to dissuade Don Gasper with evidence from his own unhappy and anxious experience):

By Saint Jeffery that old fellow has made me feel chilly upon the business! What brought him here to throw cold water upon all my ardors, and all the pretty little loves were springing up, and warming the Lapland region about my heart. In one's wintry age those

²²³ Nancy Copeland discusses the production of this scene: "According to Behn, her critics 'Cry, That Mr. Leigh opens his Night Gown, when he comes into the Bride-chamber...' Behn professed ignorance—'if he do, [it] is a jest of his own making, and which I never saw'—while asking, if 'he has his Claoths on underneath...where is the Indecency?' (216; lines 51-54). The published text makes her denial of responsibility suspect: not only does a stage direction indicate that Sir Feeble 'Throws open his Gown', but the dialogue of the preceding scene includes a statement of his intention '...I'll throw open my Gown to fright away the Women, and jump into her Arms'" (3.1.82-93, 106). *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women's Comedy and the Theatre* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

flames require to be cherish'd, and not—Gad I'll go to little Tony—the baggage has never yet given me one kiss; the warm touch of her lips will be an antidote to his cold poison, or I'm—. (12)

This speech contains the one overt mention of Don Gasper's sexual abilities within the play, and the doubt that is expressed comes from his own awareness of his flagging "ardor." Don Gasper relies on the received wisdom that his young wife will be an "antidote" to the effects of his "wintry age," but the fact that his speech is cut off by his exit from the scene ("Or I'm—") simultaneously introduces curiosity as to what would have finished the statement and doubt about the efficacy of the antidote he has prescribed himself.

Even when Don Gasper is the target of the practical joke that interrupts the conclusion of his nuptials, he maintains a level of dignity that would be unimaginable in a character like Sir Feeble. At the end of the play, when Don Gasper is deprived of his wife, he comments, "Why to say truth, if it were not that at present I feel a little awkward, and don't know very well which way to look.—As to your contract I might perhaps dispute its powers, but as here is a stroke or two of mine, which may be, I shan't be sorry to have drop'd, e'en go to church I'gad's name" (74). Following the pattern that is evident in the shift in representations from the Pinchwife/Wiseacre character type to the Don Diego type, the shift from Sir Feeble to Don Gasper suggests a softening of commentary on sexuality and of satire in general. We might assume that this shift is entirely due to the effect of sentimentality upon the stage, and I do not intend to dismiss this aspect of theater reality. Certainly the representation of a lascivious old fool like Sir Feeble on the stage would probably have caused some raised eyebrows (if not a stronger response) a century later.

Not every older husband is a villain or a pervert; sometimes the point of the play seems to be a warning to men about the misery they will bring on themselves, a possibility already suggested by *The School for Greybeards*. This is, of course, not to say that there is no humor had at the old men's expense, but they simultaneously seem to be characters with whom we can sympathize. William Congreve creates in *The Double Dealer* (1694) the pathetic example of Sir Paul Plyant, a doting father to his marriage-aged daughter and a more conspicuously doting husband whose wife has taken all domestic power from him. In contrast with the husbands (and would-be husbands) who imprison their wives, Sir Paul's idolatry has thoroughly emasculated him—to the extreme of leaving him swaddled in bed like a baby, immobilized so he cannot trouble Lady Plyant's sleep with his unwanted sexual advances. Mellifont tells one version of Sir Paul's plight:

He creeps in at the Bed's Feet like a gull'd Bassa that has marry'd a Relation of the Grand Signior's and that Night [his wedding anniversary] he has his Arms at Liberty. Did she not tell you at what a Distance she keeps him? He has confess'd to me that but at certain times, that is I suppose when she apprehends being with Child, he never has the Privilege of using the Familiarity of a Husband with his Wife. He was once given to scrambling with his Hands and sprawling in his Sleep; and ever since she has him swaddled up in Blankets, and his Hands and Feet swath'd down, and so put to Bed; and there he lies with a great Beard, like a Russian Bear upon a drift of Snow. (26-27)

Sir Paul himself (when he rightfully believes that his wife is attempting to cuckold him) describes his wife's treatment of him:

Have I for this [to be cuckolded] been pinion'd Night after Night for three Years past?
Have I been swath'd in Blankets 'till I have been even depriv'd of Motion, and render'd

uncapable of using the common Benefits of Nature? Have I approach'd the Marriage Bed with Reverence as to a sacred Shrine, and deny'd my self the Enjoyment of lawful Domestick Pleasures to preserve its Purity, and must I now find it polluted by foreign Iniquity? (44-45).

In a play full of characters who deceive and betray, Sir Paul may be pathetic, but he is seemingly not worthy of scorn. Given the lengths to which Lady Plyant has gone to incapacitate him, one might expect Sir Paul to be a particularly lecherous example of his kind. He is not. He speaks respectfully of his wife and the greatest tragedy he sees in the arrangement of their conjugal affairs in the extreme unlikelihood of it producing a son. We can, perhaps, accept these sentiments as sincere, because Sir Paul reiterates them in his discourse with his daughter, from whom he deeply desires grandchildren (in particular, a grandson).

Congreve never develops the conflict surrounding the Plyant marriage enough to warrant any kind of action that could be described as a resolution. While everyone knows that Lady Plyant's claim to virtue is, at least somewhat, questionable (she never actually commits adultery), Sir Paul remains comfortably deluded. Congreve makes no attempt at solving the deep sexual incompatibility that exists between the two. The last commentary on that matter comes from Lady Plyant who punishes Sir Paul's attempt to have one of their mutual acquaintances talk her into warmer relations with a further restriction of his movement in bed:

LP: Did you so, Presumption! Well, remember this, your right Hand shall be swath'd down again at Night—And I thought to have always allow'd you that Liberty.

Sir Paul: Nay but Madam, I shall offend again if you do not allow me that to reach—

LP: Drink the less you Sot, and do't before you come to Bed (45).

I am not convinced that this is not a covert reference to masturbation that Congreve makes respectable by shifting the right hand's activity to drinking. It is significant that Sir Paul seems to join the drunken husbands of Chapter 2. Rather than being portrayed as impotent, Sir Paul seems to drink to suppress his (seemingly normal) sexual inclinations toward his wife.

Congreve's approach to his play suggest a resistance to the old bachelor form in suggesting that the old bachelor, in the hands of an unscrupulous woman, is vulnerable and creates more misery for himself than he might anticipate. Sir Paul is a relatively unique iteration of the unequal marriage formula in that he follows the beliefs outlined by the likes of Defoe. He is the most optimistic version of the old bachelor formula. His marriage seems not to be based in a perverse form of lechery, but a late in life desire for an heir. Sir Plyant is made particularly sympathetic because of his benevolent relationship with his daughter. Throughout the play, Congreve offers no real commentary or complaint from Lady Plyant about her marriage, although she seems to enjoy the domestic tyranny she has enacted.

A similar, although less sympathetic, example is provided by John Gay in *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717). The play is perhaps best known for its satire of female playwrights in the character of Phoebe Clinkett, but it also contains a commentary on unequal marriage in the union between Mrs. Townley and Fossile (surely so named simultaneously for his interest in natural curiosities and his own age). Fossile is certainly more aware of the anxiety (particularly of the sexual variety) inherent to his position as a much older husband:

What business have I in the Bed-chamber, when the Symptoms of Age are upon me? Yet hold, this is the famous Corroborative of Crollius; in this Vial are included the Sons and Daughters. Oh, for a Draught of Aqua Magnanimatatis for a Vehicle! Fifty Drops of

Liquid Laudanum for her Dose would but just put us upon a Par. Laudanum would settle... her Animal Spirits, and prevent her being too watchful. (3)

The title of the play highlights how quickly Fossile has come to regret his decision to marry the significantly younger Townley. Just as quickly, Fossile's sexual anxiety leads him to consider the ridiculous extremes of behavior associated with his compatriots in unequal marriage; in this case, Fossile considers the best combination of drugs to make the consummation with his new young wife successful. He considers a sexual stimulant for himself and a sedative (fifty drops of Laudanum) for his wife.

Even when driven to these extremes, Fossile is somewhat aware of the follies to which his situation could drive him. After he receives a humorously large and varied series of letters from his new wife's paramours, he faces the kind of conundrum inherent to the discovery scenes of cuckolds (Chapter 1): "Shall I turn her out of doors, and proclaim my Infamy; or lock her up, and bear my Misfortunes? Lock her up!" and concludes: "Impossible. One may shut up Volatile Spirits, pen up the Air, confine Bears, Lyons and Tygers, nay, keep even your Gold: But a Wanton Wife who can keep?" (7) Fossile thus comments on the futility of his peers' action in attempting to virtually imprison their younger wives to protect their virtue. Of course, Fossile's rejection of imprisonment is not based on reason or goodwill, but rather on a fatalistic cynicism about women (that any woman who has her heart set on cheating will find a way).

These elements are certainly not particularly noteworthy in the grand scheme of the unequal marriage formula. What is noteworthy, however, is the resolution that Gay offers. Lady Townley is carted off because her real husband has returned from his three-year stint at sea and demands her back. In her wake she leaves an illegitimate child that is clearly hers but through the

vagaries of the legal system (another target of Gay's satire) is attributed to Fossile. He decides that he will keep the child despite having no possibility of having fathered him:

Fossile thou didst want Posterity: Here behold thou hast it. A Wife thou didst not want; Thou hast none. But thou art caressing a Child that is not thy own. What then? A Thousand and a Thousand Husbands are doing the same Thing this very Instant; and the Knowledge of Truth is desirable, and makes thy Case the better. What signifies whether a Man beget his Child or not? How ridiculous is the Act it self, said the great Emperor Antonious! I now look upon my self as a Roman Citizen; It is better that the Father should adopt the Child, than the Wife should adopt the Father. (80).

I would not suggest that the ultimate message of *Three Hours after Marriage* is one supporting adoption in place of unequal marriage. Rather the resolution suggests that the possibility of accepting another man's child as one's own (undesirable to say the least) was more desirable than an unequal marriage with a manipulative woman. Again, Fossile relies on fundamentally cynical beliefs about women—in this case their perceived propensity for producing and passing off illegitimate children—to comfort himself with the failure of his attempt at unequal marriage.

These two plays suggest an understanding of the unequal marriage (as I have suggested above) as a union rife with the potential for bilateral misery. They also suggest an alternative representation of the younger wives not as victims (as is the case of Peggy, Margery, Leonora, Letitia, and Antonia) but as morally suspect women willing to take advantage of men who have made the mistake of waiting until late in life to produce heirs. These two plays counter the other group by suggesting the vulnerability of older men on the marriage market.

Both *The Double Dealer* and *Three Hours After Marriage* represent a departure from the established formula of unequal marriage in that they suggest that unequal marriage can be

disempowering and deleterious to the old bachelor rather than the young wife. Richard Brinsley Sheridan's foray into the phenomenon suggests wider reaching consequences while seriously considering (in contrast with the other iterations of the formula) the possibility for unequal marriage to succeed. Whereas Sheridan still relies on many of the common aspects of the formula, his creation of an unequal marriage does not comfortably fit within any of the groups of texts in this chapter. There are two particularly noteworthy aspects of Sheridan's treatment of unequal marriage: his removal of the conflict from the realm of the sexual into the realm of the economic and his suggestion that reconciliation is possible.

Peter Teazle, the old bachelor of *The School for Scandal* (1777) is a much more sympathetic form of the older husband type than any of the previous iterations. John Loftis comments on the nature of Sir Peter's character when he states:

Sheridan is tolerant of deviations from prudent behavior as the seventeenth-century dramatists were not. In the marriage of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, we encounter a relationship—an elderly but rich man married to a beautiful young woman who had accepted him to escape an obscure and impoverished life—that is reminiscent of earlier comedy. It has some similarity to the relationship between Mr. Fondlewife and Leitita in Congreve's *The Old Bachelor* or even to that between Mr. Pinchwife and Margery in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*... Unlike Sheridan, the seventeenth-century dramatists were uniformly severe in their satirical handling of an old man's folly in aspiring to marriage with a young girl. Sir Peter seems destined for the cuckoldry that actually befalls Fondlewife and Pinchwife. Yet the event is otherwise, and it is a measure of the distance between Sheridan and the earlier comedy.²²⁴

²²⁴ John Loftis, *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977), 98.

Certainly the change in the character is bound up with the time in which he was produced—Peter Teazle is the much softened (i.e. more sentimental) version of the type who contemplates the errors of his decision with his first appearance in the play. He muses:

When an old batchelor marries a young wife, what is he to expect?—'Tis now about six months since my Lady Teazle made me the happiest of men—and I have been the most miserable dog ever since.—We tifted a little going to church, and fairly quarreled before the bells were done ringing. I was more than once nearly choaked with gall during the honey moon, and lost ever satisfaction in life, before my friends had done wishing me joy.—And yet, I chose with caution a girl bred wholly in the country, who had never known luxury beyond one silk gown or dissipation beyond the annual gala of a race ball.—Yet, now she plays her part in all the extravagant fopperies of the town, with as good a grace as if she has never seen a bush, or a grass plot out of Grosvenor Square.—I am sneered at by all my acquaintance—paragraphed in the news-papers—she dissipates my fortune, and contradicts all my humours—and yet, the worst of it is, I doubt I love her, or I should never bear all this—but I am determined never to be weak enough to let her know it—No! no! no! (15-16).

Teazle's soliloquy on his marriage is important for many reasons. Whereas both Peggy Wiseacre and Margery Pinchwife lack the resources to make their husbands miserable on purpose, Lady Teazle freely takes advantage of her new found place in life. "Takes advantage" is an apt description of what is occurring within the Teazle marriage; whereas the Wiseacre and Pinchwife marriages are structured in such a way that the husbands have almost all of the power, Lady Teazle has managed to wrest the power from her husband. This power imbalance is suggested in the last half of Sir Peter's speech; Lady Teazle's ability to freely take part in the "extravagant

fopperies of the town,” to cause Sir Peter’s acquaintance to sneer at him,²²⁵ to have him “paragraphed in news-papers,” to “dissipate” his fortune, and ultimately (on a more personal level) contradict his humors suggests a deeply disproportionate level of power in the relationship, with Lady Teazle in the advantage.

Lady Teazle confirms the power discrepancy in her interactions with Sir Peter, who protests her behavior and to whom she responds, “Very well, Sir Peter, you may bear it or not, just as you please; but I know I ought to have my own way in every thing, and what’s more, I will.” (18) Although she founds her disobedience on the nature of the city wife who doesn’t do “as she is bid after her marriage,” her rejection of Sir Peter’s authority is paired with an invocation of the difference in their ages: “If you wanted me to be obedient, you should have adopted me, and not married me---I’m sure you were old enough” (19). Certainly there are plenty of stories in which women use their position as wives to dominate their husbands and take advantage of (squander) their wealth, but Lady Teazle understands her behavior as part of (and justified by) their unequal marriage contract. Lady Teazle invokes the now formulaic offers of wealth the older man makes to the younger woman and suggests to Sir Peter that her current behavior is simply the fulfillment of the bargain he made: “Don’t you remember when you used to walk with me under the elms, and tell me stories of what a gallant you were in your youth, and asked me if I could like an old fellow, who could deny me nothing” (39). Lady Teazle takes a clichéd element of romantic rhetoric and makes her understanding of them literal. She understands the persuasion she underwent as the object of an older man’s attention as a literal

²²⁵ Sir Peter’s acquaintances are not the only ones who sneer. James Thomson calls Sir Peter “whiney” and the representative of “stuffy moralism” within the play (and deems Maria “tedious”) (93). “Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, and Aggression,” *Comparative Drama* 42, no. 1(2008). Robert Hogan calls both Sir Peter and his wife “rather filler than types” (279), although to be fair, his article is an attempt to recover *The Rivals* from its relative obscurity in the shadow of *The School for Scandal*. “Plot, Character, and Language in Sheridan,” in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan: Change and Continuity in the English and European Dramatic Tradition*, ed. A. R. Braumuller and J. C. Culman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986): 274-285.

contract in which Sir Peter relinquished his power—his ability to deny her anything—in exchange for her consent to marry.

Sheridan partially mitigates her use of what we might call the unequal marriage prerogative by clarifying within the play that Lady Teazle's intentional antagonism of Sir Peter is partially motivated by the desire to ensure her economic well-being. At the heart of the conflict, it seems, is money. Sir Peter has refused for the first six months of their marriage to make a settlement for Lady Teazle. He reveals to Joseph Surface while Lady Teazle is ensconced behind a screen that he has, in light of their latest quarrel, drawn up the deeds that will provide for her quite generously after his death as well as pin money to live upon (56). Unlike the excessive expenditures of the old bachelors who attempt to buy the affections of their young wives in the plays or of the young wives in the novels, the types of economic arrangements demanded by Lady Teazle and made by Sir Peter are standard parts of marriage negotiations. Once she is revealed from behind the screen, Lady Teazle rejects Surface's attempts to cover for her and admits that she had come to be wooed by him and that she had, in fact, contemplated cuckolding Sir Peter. She goes on to say, "The tenderness you expressed for me, when I am certain you did not know I was within hearing, has penetrated so deep into my soul, that could I have escaped the mortification of this discovery, my future life should have convinced you of my sincere repentance" (72).

A return to the conversation that Lady Teazle has overheard reveals that short of the discussion of the settlement, there is nothing of the "tenderness" that she claims to have brought about her repentance (Sir Peter elsewhere, as in his introductory soliloquy, admitted loving his wife, but he does not do so in this scene). Sir Peter has told Joseph that he suspects she has formed an attachment, that she is squandering his fortune, and that he fears what will happen if

he makes the former public (returning again to the idea of being “paragraphed in the newspapers” and being the subject of ballads). The only thing that could, in fact, constitute the sentiment of “tenderness” is Sir Peter’s admittance that he has completed the settlements without Lady Teazle’s knowledge. This submission to her economic demands seems to be the only catalyst available to inspire her repentance. Certainly the disjunction between what Lady Teazle seems to have heard and what the audience has, in fact, heard could be explained by sloppy writing, but more importantly could be seen as undermining the reconciliation between the Teazle’s. Whereas Sir Peter admits to loving his wife several times throughout the play, no same admission from Lady Teazle manages to seal the reconciliation between the two. Loftis seems to characterize the screen scene and reconciliation in economic terms as well, but decides to read the change in Lady Teazle as a form of sentimental awakening: “Saved by accident from compromising herself, she overhears Sir Peter explaining the generous provisions he has made for her financial security; and like many another character of the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition she is brought by this experience of magnanimity to an understanding of her folly and to a resolution to amend her conduct.”²²⁶

B. S. Pathania, in attempting to clear the play of charges of sentimentality suggests that the resolution of the play resists the “raptures of repentance” associated with Sentimental comedy:

To be sure, *The School for Scandal* ends with the reconciliation of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. But reconciliation between husband and wife is by no means peculiar to sentimental comedy. Marriages, reunions and reconciliations have always been the common stuff of comedy. The true sentimental comedy usually ends in an unadulterated wave of repentance, forgiveness and harmony. But Sheridan makes no attempt to treat the

²²⁶ Loftis, *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England*, 99.

spectator to raptures of repentance. In fact, Lady Sneerwell's parting shot directed at Lady Teazle ("May your husband live these fifty years!") gives a rather ironic twist to the reconciliation of the Teazle's. In the theatre Lady Sneerwell's sally is likely to be greeted with a great roar of laughter.²²⁷

The School for Scandal is one of the plays that Godfrey spends some time discussing in her overview of pre-nineteenth century January-May marriages in British literature. She claims that the play presents "a conservative agenda through the January-May motif. The play appears to challenge masculine authority by commenting on the husband's ill-conceived plan to wed a younger wife, but the play concludes with a restoration of traditional gender roles."²²⁸ Godfrey characterizes Lady Teazle's behavior as: "Refusing the submission, respect, and obedience expected of wives, [she] assumes the command and rights of a self-governing individual."²²⁹ Whereas the latter is most certainly true, the readers and audience must wonder to what extent Lady Teazle has reformed and thus how solidly traditional gender roles have been restored. Godfrey characterizes the screen scene thusly:

This is an especially self-sacrificial scene, and since the abnegation of self is a traditional mark of feminine virtue, Sir Peter here accepts his new position within the marriage as wife, leaving Lady Teazle to exercise the sexual and financial freedoms normally enjoyed by a husband. Ultimately Sir Peter accepts the penalty associated with the January-May marriage, and resigns himself to his sentence; after all, as he explains, "the crime carries the punishment along with it" (2.2.113-114). (27)

I would rather suggest that Lady Teazle does not, by taking the power she believes is her due through the unequal marriage contract, make Sir Peter into a wife, but instead radically

²²⁷ B. S. Pathania, "The School for Scandal: A Reevaluation," *Journal of the Department of English* (1981).

²²⁸ Godfrey, *January-May Marriage*, 26.

²²⁹ Godfrey, *January-May Marriage*, 27.

reimagines her own role as wife. To suggest a role reversal is to undermine the significance of what Lady Teazle has accomplished. She has not overturned or rejected the system, but rather taken advantage of the system. Godfrey suggests that the moment of reconciliation is one in which order is restored to the gender roles: “Sir Peter reclaims his masculine position and his wife, declaring happily, ‘We may yet be the happiest couple in the country’ (5.3.326-27).”²³⁰ Importantly, the play never allows the consummation of Lady Teazle’s extramarital exploits, and this nod to sexual etiquette contributes to the play’s efforts to reinstall conventional gender roles in the final act.”²³¹

Godfrey focuses her attentions almost entirely on the sexual component of the marriage,²³² which any one knowledgeable with the drama would likely find unsurprising and largely appropriate (that is the route I have chosen, after all, in the two chapters that come before this one). Almost all of the literary treatments of unequal marriage call attention to the process of monetary exchange older husbands (to varying degrees of explicitness) offer in order to make their impaired sexuality palatable to the younger wife. In most cases, the wife resists the exchange, preferring rather an equal partner than monetary benefit. The Teazle marriage departs from almost every pattern the other marriages (or would-be marriages) have established in these matters. Sheridan focuses our attention on the economics of the Teazle marriage rather than the

²³⁰ Loftis calls our attention to the epilogue written by Colman to be spoken in the character of Lady Teazle: “Colman turns to the aspect of the play that is most vulnerable to criticism: Sheridan’s failure to confront realistically the incompatibility of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. Colman follows the familiar convention of permitting a character to regret a repentance which promises dull domesticity: ‘And yet I might deplore/ That gay dream of dissipation o’er;/ And say, ye fair, was ever lively Wife./ Born with a genius for the highest Life/ Like me, untimely blasted in her bloom./ Like me condemn’d to such a dismal doom?’...Sheridan’s depiction of Lady Teazle’s repentance and Charles’s triumph are alike vulnerable to the charges of those critics who find in the play an over-reliance on a benign and supervising providence to ensure the happiness of benevolent or reclaimable characters. Like other Georgian dramatists Sheridan assumes a sanctity in the marriage bond which inhibits an examination of sexual passions.” (88)

²³¹ Godfrey, *January-May Marriage*, 28-9.

²³² She claims that, “Much of this power still arises from the sustained conviction that older husbands cannot please their young wives sexually, and that the young wife has the ability, if not the right, to make her husband a fool in the eyes of society though infidelity” (27)

sexuality. Unlike many of the other examples of literature in this chapter that do comment on the sexuality of relationships of unequal age, there seems to be no real indication of Sir Peter's sexual inability in the play. Lady Teazle's disgruntlement within her marriage is located purely within the economic sphere.²³³ Godfrey is correct in pointing out that Lady Teazle has not managed to transgress the boundaries of her marriage, but this failure only calls more attention to her economic victory. The comparison of unequal marriage to prostitution is particularly telling in this case—for whatever male fantasies might exist about the prostitute's motives—they remain monetary. The sexual conflict of the Teazles may distract from the monetary, but any resolution that occurs is through the redistribution of wealth. Susan Staves acknowledges the economic tensions between the Teazles: “Richard Brinsley Sheridan in *The School for Scandal* (1777) realistically enough makes Sir Peter Teazle's failure to settle any pin money or separate estate on Lady Teazle a bone of contention between them; then, in the famous scene of the fourth act, he has Sir Peter appear with the drafts of two deeds, one giving Lady Teazle property after his death, the other giving her ‘eight hundred a year independent’ while he lives.”²³⁴ Lady Teazle may be “reformed” into the traditional female position, but such a reformation occurs only after she has assured herself of her own monetary well-being.

J.R. de J. Jackson in his “The Importance of Witty Dialogue in *The School for Scandal*” bases some of his argument on an investigation of the manuscripts that represent early iterations

²³³ Margot Finn, in her discussion about the laws of coverture suggests that one source of power for women both in their marriages and upon separation from their husbands was the “law of necessities” which allowed women to create debt in their husbands' names in order to maintain a household appropriate to their station. “Women, Consumption and Coverture in England, c. 1760-1860” *The Historical Journal*, 39, no. 3 (1996): 703-722. Whereas Lady Teazle does not explicitly invoke the law of necessities, she sees the expenditures of her lifestyle as a London lady as justified by her husband's station. She refers to them as “little elegant expenses” associated with (or demanded by) the reputation of a “woman of taste” (14,15). That Lady Teazle is implicitly invoking the law of necessities as a mean of spending (squandering) her husband's wealth and gaining leverage in their relationship should call the audience's attention away from the nominal sexual intrigue she is involved in and to the economic strategies she is employing.

²³⁴ Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Cambridge: Harvard UP), 1990, 133.

of *The School for Scandal* that were combined to create the play that was ultimately performed. He argues that the overall effect of the revision process led to a significantly more polished (witty and polite) dialogue. Christian Deelman suggests one reason for this polishing—to fit the roles to the particular actors who would portray Sir Peter and Lady Teazle (Thomas King and Frances Abington, respectively).²³⁵ One significant instance of change is exhibited in the interactions between Sir Peter and his wife. He reproduces one telling exchange:

Lady: Why then the Truth is I was heartily tired of all those agreeable Recreations you have so well remember'd—& having a spirit to spend and enjoy a Fortune I was determined to marry the first Fool I could meet with.--&pray what induced you to fix on me...

Sir P: O your youth and personal accomplishment to be sure—

Lady T: To say truth your Age would have been an insuperable objection—But as I prudently consider'd that as a maid I was then so anxious to be wife—I might even [as] a wife wish as much to be a widow...

Sir P: If I were to die what would you do

Lady T: Countermand my new Brocade—

Sir P: You might have [been a] maid still but for me—

²³⁵ Christian Deelman, "The Original Cast of *School for Scandal*," *Review of English Studies* 13:51 (1962), 257. One critic said of King in old man roles: "King, whose acting left a taste on the palate, sharp and sweet like a quince; with an old, hard, rough, withered face, like a John-apple, puckered up into a thousand wrinkles; with shrewd hints and tart replies; 'with nods and becks and wreathed smiles;' who was the real amorous, wheedling, of hasty, choleric, peremptory old man in Sir Peter Teazle and Sir A. Absolute" (261). Or Abington, Deelman says, "Lady Teazle was the greatest success of Mrs. Abington's long career. She played down the rustic element, which was first brought out by Mrs. Jordan; on the other hand, she was an expert at playing fine ladies who were so by accident rather than birth" (261)

Lady T: Well you made me a Wife—for which I am much obliged to you if you have a mind to make me more grateful still make me a widow—(I, 6-7).²³⁶

Of the final version of this exchange, Jackson comments, “The couple sound more like people of fashion than before, not because they are being more polite, but because their manner of speaking has acquired an elegant cadence and a pretty turn of phrase.”²³⁷ Jackson is certainly right in that the language itself is more polished—and given the casting of Abington, his conclusion is logical—but the sentiments expressed are arguably also more polished. What the Lady Teazle of *The School for Scandal* manages to at least make somewhat playful, her counterpart in “Sir Peter Teazle” is harsh and cold.

This dialogue actually contains several important changes from the final version. Lady Teazle elaborates on the motivations of her choice of Sir Peter (or rather his fortune) in a way that she avoids in the later version; the later version shifts attentions from Lady Teazle’s motivations to the bargain Sir Peter has initiated in his wooing of her and her understanding thereof. Whereas Sir Peter expresses real feelings of love for Lady Teazle in the later version (so much so that he masochistically states that he even loves her when she is fighting with him), here Sir Peter’s affections are lukewarm at best and expressed as an admiration for Lady Teazle’s “youth and personal accomplishments.” Sheridan’s shift to sincere statements of regard for Lady Teazle represent a break with the formula that makes the final version of Sir Peter a more sympathetic figure; the previous version’s diminution of Lady Teazle to youth and accomplishment (which we could take to mean traditional feminine skills, but which seems more likely a somewhat polite euphemism for beauty) would have aligned him more clearly with his predecessors who wish to own the youth and beauty of their young wives.

²³⁶ J. R. de J. Jackson, “The Importance of Witty Dialogue in *The School for Scandal*,” *Modern Language Notes* 76, no. 7 (1961), 604.

²³⁷ Jackson, “Witty Dialogue,” 605.

I would like to suggest that what is important about the shift I have identified is not just that women are portrayed as victimizers rather than victims, but the perception of what is at stake. When the women are portrayed as the victims of the unequal marriage, there is little at stake other than their personal happiness.²³⁸ At the most, there is the understanding (as in Behn's play) that they will be tempted to or will cuckold their husbands with the predictable consequences. Even these consequences (which I have already discussed in Chapter 1) are not particularly wide-reaching beyond the harmony of the individual household. Sir Peter Teazle, however, imagines a set of consequences that are both personal and potentially societal. In a way, the old bachelor's decision to marry a significantly younger woman is as potentially destructive as Miss Cassandra's imagining of the consequences of persistent and unrestrained bachelorhood. Ultimately, Sir Peter's loss of power is suggested to have real consequences. Beyond his loss of reputation (which he imagines repeatedly), Sir Peter faces the destruction of his estate. In addition, his failure to control his wife has led to her participation in a social circle that the whole play works to construct as creating widespread negative effects in the society.

Angus McLaren characterizes the comedic sub-genre of cit-cuckolding comedy as a kind of cultural fantasy: "Exploiting young men's fantasies of cuckolding their superiors, a string of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century plays presented the young gallant as seducer and the nouveau riche husband as fumbler who because of impotence, stupidity, or inattentiveness, could not control his wife."²³⁹ Although there is an undeniable level of fantasy fulfillment to the plays featuring old fumlars, there are also clearly elements that seriously mourn the state of marriage at this time—a state that led to the possibility of marriages such as the ones that occur (or almost

²³⁸ I do not mean to dismiss personal happiness as unimportant, but simply wish to compare it to the stakes that appear on a larger scale for the men.

²³⁹ McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History*, 69.

occur) in this chapter. Whereas some of the cit-cuckolding plays do, in fact, rely on the vindictive delight of watching the old fumbler suffer the fate of cuckoldry, there are too many fumlbers who are aware of the error of their decisions (Sir Peter) or who express relief at being released from their potential marriages (Fossile) to suggest that all of the attention the old fumlbers receive is entirely punitive. Unequal marriage, in a way, represents the fruition of the worst aspects of marriage and expectations about men and their sexual appetites. Although it's not entirely explicit, the likes of a Pinchwife or Wiseacre, for example, are victims of the cultures' beliefs about male sexuality. Their victimhood is overshadowed, of course, by their own villainous behavior towards their wives—and that's what captures our attention. Their villainy makes the older husbands who are treated with some sympathy all the more noteworthy. Perhaps, more important to this discussion is not deciding who is a victim or a villain, but realizing that the unequal marriage is, yet again, an example of marriage in which no one really wins. This is perhaps the thread that holds together all of the types of marriages that I have discussed in these three chapters. No matter who has marginally more power or freedom, these marriages almost always lead to bilateral misery.

Conclusion

It seems that upon the stage, there was little hope when it comes to men and marriage (and thus, in turn, for marriage in general). Read enough marriage plays from the eighteenth century, and there's a sense of the cyclical nature of the networks of representations of marriage. Generally they're about the machinations necessary to avoid "bad" marriages and make "good" marriages or the schadenfreude of watching "bad" marriages get worse (sometimes to be reformed with varying levels of credibility). And sometimes both. It could not have escaped the audience members or readers of these plays that the very "good" marriages that are made at the ends of some comedies must necessarily be the basis for the same "bad" marriages they delighted in watching in others. If, as in Chapter 2, a happy couple can devolve into misery in a matter of three months or less, how celebratory can the classic marriage resolution of a comedy be?

Try to think of a happily married couple in a long eighteenth-century comedy (excluding those nascent marriages formed at the end of the plays). Returning to concepts from the introduction of this dissertation, we can use the terms of Misty G. Anderson, who uses "comic closure" and "comic events" to discuss the treatment of marriage in the comedies. Happy marriages are only, it seems, the stuff of comic closure and not part of comic events. Certainly, happy marriages do not make gripping plot material or provide many opportunities for laughs. This might disqualify them from being placed in the forefront of the comic plot, but their

absence even in the lesser plots of comedy is significant. I would perhaps suggest that the absence of happy marriage in the comedy of the eighteenth century (with the exception, as I have said above, in the position of comic closure) was not simply because happy marriage wasn't funny, but because the drama could not remove itself from the oppressive cultural awareness of the many obstacles (economic, social, sexual, legal) to happy marriage.

Eighteenth-century culture was one that yearned for moderation. To some extent, the vast majority of advice about any number of lifestyle decisions boiled down to moderation. Many of the conflicts I have investigated in the foregoing chapters take part in the ongoing struggle to find a middleground. The culture of cuckoldry, for example, is one that relies on the extremes of excess and deficiency. Women who cuckold their husbands have excessive sexual desires. The men who become cuckolds have deficient masculine powers to control their wives. Cuckold-makers are assumed to have voracious sexual appetites that lead them to pursue other men's wives, no matter the consequences (Horner is the icon for such behaviors). The anxieties of the culture of cuckoldry lead, in turn, to excessive behavior by the husbands (consider the likes of Pinchwife and Wiseacre). The same culture that valorizes the figure of the libertine and his seemingly boundless sexual appetites simultaneously revels in laughing at the impotent old men who have frittered away their limited sexual powers. (One might wonder, for example, if Horner will one day turn into a Mr. Crofts or Sir Feeble?). The men of Chapter 1 take part in a culture of excessive jealousy, whereas the men of Chapter 2 are lamentably deficient of the same emotion. The whole discussion of Chapter 2 relies on the central term of "surfeit," a term whose multivalency in and of itself is suggestive of the culture's struggle with excess. The men of Chapter 3 are, based on the cultural assumptions that underlie their representation, the results of a masculine strategy to make the most of the masculine prerogative for sexual freedom outside of

marriage; they are failures because they have taken this strategy too far and have depleted their limited resources.

The men of this dissertation exist in a labyrinth of nearly impossible expectations surrounding their sexuality and behavior within marriage. Their wives, in turn, suffer with them in that labyrinth. For every nearly impossible demand upon and subsequent failure of men (to, for example, exhibit the perfect amount of jealousy), there are women who suffer corollary conflicts (within the matter of jealousy, the extremes of virtual imprisonment and constant surveillance on the one hand, and heartbreaking and frustrating neglect on the other). In each chapter, I have shown a shift in the treatment of each formulaic figure (in general, toward a more sympathetic treatment of the figure in question or a construction of the role as a victim of some cultural force). In Chapter 1, cuckolds begin to reject blame for the actions of others (unfaithful wives and their lovers). In Chapter 2, I suggest that men portray themselves as oppressed by the construction of masculine sexual appetites and proclivities. In chapter 3, the potential for older men to become victims (rather than victimizers) of young women on the marriage market is suggested in plays like *The Double Dealer*, *Three Hours after Marriage*, and *The School for Scandal*. As each shift occurs (whether toward more sympathy or a construction of victimhood), more pressure is placed on women. The release of patriarchal pressures on men, more often than not, is predicated on creating additional pressure on women. Cuckolds shifting blame away from themselves shift blame onto their whorish wives (increasing scrutiny of and despair about female sexuality). The men who claim marital impotence shift blame from themselves to a “surfeit,” and the real matter of scrutiny (as I suggest above) for the culture is not whether the conflict of surfeit can be solved, but the tenacity of female patience and virtue—the only thing the playwrights suggest can save their wayward husbands. The shift from victimizer to victim for the

old bachelor relies on a parallel shift for their young wives from naïve victim to power hungry manipulators.

Ultimately what this dissertation suggests is that a unilateral (from the perspective of women) approach toward the marriage problem during the eighteenth century suppresses at least part of the rich network of pressures that each married couple must have experienced at the time. The male figures in this dissertation are only the beginning of the possibilities for expanding our understanding of the constructions of masculinity and femininity within marriage. The sheer volume of the repetition of negativity about marriage can, perhaps, lead to the uncritical dismissal of such negativity—as has been the case with the formulaic figures I have chosen here—as commonplaces not worthy of critical investigation. Clearly the network of repressive beliefs about men, sexuality, and marriage led to tangible outcomes in the culture's perception of marriage: a series of reactions and resistances on the part of men that affected the legal, social, and sexual realities of men, women, their families, and the culture at large.

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²⁴² “It now was ent’ring on the usual hour”

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