The Overblown Rose: Chastity, Knowledge, and Skepticism in English Literature, 1595-1713

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

University of Virginia
November 2024

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But let the World confine, or enlarge Learning as they please, I care not; I do not regret the time I bestowed in its company, it having been my good Friend…
—Jane Barker, *Love Intrigues: or, the History of the Amours of Bosvil and Galesia*

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a literary history of intertwined developments in early modern English imaginings of chastity and skeptical philosophy. In the aftermath of the Reformation and amid rapid social changes, chastity accrued new meanings. The closure of monasteries, nascent capitalism's restructuring of family formation, and the medico-scientific debate over the existence of the hymen (and its efficacy as a marker of virginity) offer some examples of the social forces that revised conceptualizations of chastity. This dissertation highlights how writers in the period explore chastity to test the problem of other minds and to think through crises of the reliability of sense perception and knowledge-making, all of which were central concerns for the skeptical philosophy of the age. Deploying historicist methodologies and inspired by gender and sexuality studies, I offer readings of early modern philosophy by the likes of Michel de Montaigne, René Descartes, and John Locke alongside literature to underscore how chastity was contoured by developments to early modern skepticism. The dissertation begins with an analysis of the misreading of virginal bodies in Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595) and Thomas Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (c. 1613). The second chapter focuses on the anti-fruition subgenre of Cavalier poetry, centered on poems by Sir John Suckling (first printed in the 1640s), which debate the merits and demerits of abstinence with inconclusive results. The last chapter discusses Jane Barker's novel *Love Intrigues* (1713), detailing how her semi-autobiographical persona Galesia moved through disappointed love to celibacy. Barker's narrative demonstrates that the questions of hyperbolic skepticism raised in the seventeenth century are not resolved in the eighteenth, despite empiricist efforts to settle them.

Acknowledgments

I can no other answer make but thanks,
and thanks, and ever thanks.
—William Shakespeare*, Twelfth Night, or What You Will*

For their support throughout this dissertation process, especially amid the bewilderment of a pandemic and personal losses, I offer sincere thanks to my committee members Rebecca Rush, Clare Kinney, and Brad Pasanek. With her depths of reading knowledge across centuries and genres, responsive listening, and forward thinking, Rebecca encouraged me to build and maintain this project's forward momentum. Her insightful questions and comments helped the dissertation gain greater cohesion and force. Brad, with his characteristic good humor, book recommendations, and a bedrock of philosophical knowledge, helped me to clarify the project's epistemological parameters. I had the very good fortune of studying with Brad and Rebecca in seminars during my first year at the University of Virginia; beyond the dissertation itself, they have been my guides throughout the entire doctoral experience. While I only had the pleasure of meeting Clare midway through graduate school, she has been not just an exceptional teaching mentor but also a perceptive and quick reader with an eagle eye for detail and an encyclopedic understanding of medieval and Renaissance literature, all of which refined this dissertation. As the project neared completion, Amy Ogden graciously served as Dean's Representative, and I am grateful for her thoughtful support of my work.

From the University of Virginia's English Department I thank Elizabeth Fowler for her always timely advice and encouragement. Peter Baker, Susan Fraiman, Jennifer Greeson, Katharine Maus, and Cynthia Wall offered seminars in my early years of the program that pushed my thinking and engaged my interest in material both familiar and new. I am grateful to have studied with each of them. T. Kenny Fountain and Victor Luftig provided helpful

pedagogical instruction and assurance while I balanced teaching and researching, and they have my thanks. I would also like to thank the amazing English department administrators Colette Dabney, Randy Swift, and Sally Williams, who each helped ensure my progression throughout my degree program with care and attention to detail.

To Sherri Brown and the staff of the University of Virginia's Shannon Library and Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and Maryland's Montgomery County Public Library, I offer my thanks for the ways they made accessible and available the materials that enabled my dissertation's humble contributions to a broader scholarly conversation.

The solidarity of my friends and peers at the University of Virginia has kept me afloat. I offer deepest thanks to James Ascher, Sarah Berkowitz, Neal Curtis, Emma Langham Dove, Kelly Fleming, Tucker Kuman, John Modica, Bridget Reilly, Sarah Storti, Tracey Wang, and Courtney Watts for their friendship, feedback, and support during the dissertation process.

To my community who during the lockdown and beyond cheered me on as I worked remotely – especially Merry, Bo, Dino, Rinata, Teo, Jove, and Nova Adelfio, Chris, Lydia, Christine, and Suzanne Antoniou, Lew and Eileen Barker, Dave and Jenna Greenstein, and Janet Hall and Walter Smith – I give my thanks.

I owe a debt of thanks, too, to the friends in the US and the UK who offered moral support at every turn: Janet Bering, Luca Borah, Sean Burns, Mia Cava, Taylor Davis, Matthew Dayton, Adam Detzner, Mark Edwards, Liam Elliott, Phyllis Fong, Christina Fox, Emily Glassford, Cody Gohl, Carina Guiterman, Holly Hathrell, Claire Jensen, Katherine Krile, Liz Luck, Harry R. McCarthy, Genevieve McGahey, Alex Miller, Dan Miller, Ketti Muschler, Tess Oram, Lily Oyler, Zoe Parker, Matt Pieri, Emily Rendek, Karl Robson, Tommy Rust, Boo

Schliep, Sara Butterfass Schliep, Jon Schuster, Kathryn Drzewiecki Schuster, Tom Sheehan, Sonya Subbayya Sutton, Maud Taber-Thomas, Bob Tallaksen, Kate Tallis, Emily Wahl, Abbie Weinberg, Nicole Winard, and Esther Osorio Whewell.

I would not be here without the encouragement of educators and mentors in a variety of literatures before I came to the University of Virginia. I especially thank Ros Ballaster, Ellen Boomer, David Cox, Janet Dewey, Deb Evans, Cheryl Faraone, Lis Fogt, Lauren Halvorsen, Adrien-Alice Hansel, the late Faye Kronisch, Marta Manrique-Gómez, Peter McCullough, Stefano Mula, Elizabeth Napier, David Price, Troy J. Prinkey, Emma Smith, Tiffany Stern, Marion Wells, Philip West, Heather Wolfe, and Henry Woudhuysen.

In addition to the thanks I owe my family, I offer profound appreciation to my parents Barbara and Tom; none of this would have been possible without them. As a toddler, I would ask them to read me books over and over with one simple word – "again!" – and they always complied with that request. In this first brush with literacy and at every stage of my education thereafter, they have fostered my passion for reading. Whether over phone calls from Charlottesville or during the Covid lockdown as we huddled at home, they very patiently listened to me whenever I enthused about the latest early modern work I encountered. They have given me both metaphorical and literal shelter from the storms of navigating graduate school, especially during the pandemic, living out some of Robert Frost's lines; they encapsulated the most generous aspects of both Warren's definition – "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in" – and Mary's – "I should have called it / Something you somehow haven't to deserve." Thanks is too small a word to convey my gratitude to them for not just their material support but also their unending care and love.

There remain a number of people who have passed away before this project began with whom I often wished I could have shared the journey: my grandmother Nancy Donald, my aforementioned teacher Faye Kronisch, and my next-door neighbor and friend Hadi Torabi. In the middle of writing this dissertation, I lost my two surviving biological grandparents, Patricia McConnell Kennedy and Steven Kennedy. While I wish I could share the end result with the two of them, their encouragement at the project's start helped to speed along its conclusion.

* * *

This dissertation was made possible by funding from the University of Virginia's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, including the Teaching Relief Fellowship, which gave me time in the spring of 2022 to devote to writing. The Rare Book School-University of Virginia Fellowship (2019-2020) helped me to hone paleographic skills and study manuscripts that formed the basis of this dissertation's first chapter. The University of Virginia's English Department generously funded travel to the American Society of Eighteenth Century Studies' 2019 and 2022 annual meetings, which enriched my understanding of the current landscape of eighteenth-century studies and gave me the opportunity to present work and connect with scholars. The Folger Shakespeare Library provided vital funding for the 2019 "Intersecting the Sexual" Symposium, a transformational event that provided the intellectual backing for this project. To each and all of these funding bodies I give my thanks.

Introduction

Margaret Blagge had a problem. A young noblewoman serving in the Restoration court who was noted for her piety, Blagge faced a difficult choice of which future she should pursue out of two starkly different options. Margaret could either commit herself to lead a single life of religious devotion, or marry Sidney Godolphin, the first Earl of Godolphin, whom she had begun courting in 1667.[1] She wrote to her good friend and mentor John Evelyn in the early 1670s to give voice to her dilemma:

> I know not what to determine; sometymes I think one thing, sometymes another; one day I fancy noe life soe pure as the vnmarryed, another day I think it less exemplarye, and that the marryed life has more oppertunity of exerciseing Charity; and then againe, that 'tis full of solicitude and worldyness, soe as what I shall doe, I know not.[2]

In her letter, Blagge tangles herself in temporalities and conjunctive clauses. She lays out her oscillating thoughts and commitments, alternately envisioning the celibate life as most pious, and then marriage as the height of Christian purity and love, across moments and days.[3] She shuttles between imagined futures with a man and years of devout, single living, weighing the consequences for herself and her potential husband-to-be: "He can live without a wife willingly, butt without me he is vnwilling to live, soe as if I doe not marry he is not in danger of sinn." Yet, she goes on to pray, "if I or he or both should repent, O Lord and Governor of my life, leave me not to my selfe, to the Counsell of my whole heart, butt send me wisdome."[4] Blagge fears

[1] Frances Harris, *Transformations of Love: The Friendship of John Evelyn and Margaret Godolphin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 120.
[2] John Evelyn, *The Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, ed. Henry Wilberforce (London: William Pickering, 1847), 68.
[3] Blagge uses the term "Charity," which, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* explicates, is Christian love translated from the "*caritas* of the Vulgate, as a frequent rendering of ἀγάπη [i.e., agape] in New Testament Greek." The multiple applications of this term encompass "God's love to man," "man's love of God and his neighbour, commanded as the fulfilling of the Law, Matthew xxii. 37,39," and particularly "the Christian love of one's fellow human beings; Christian benignity of disposition expressing itself in Christ-like conduct: one of the 'three Christian graces', fully described by St. Paul, 1 Corinthians xiii." *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "charity (n.)," September 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3068262751.
[4] Evelyn, *The Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, 68.

making a misguided choice and Godolphin's possible lapse into the dangers of unchastity if he did not marry Blagge (the only woman he could even consider marrying). She could have remained single, if trends at the uppermost echelons of society in the late seventeenth century can serve as indicators for the aristocracy at large.[5] But then Blagge would be leaving behind a man she had grown to love. As a witness to Blagge's prayer, Evelyn watches her spiritual drama unfold while she confronts life-changing choices.

If Blagge had been born even two hundred years prior to the actual year of her birth, 1652, her path may have been clearer. As the younger daughter of a prominent noble family who held deep religious commitments, Blagge could have been an excellent candidate for taking religious orders in an English Catholic convent prior to the Reformation. Yet instead she was born in a moment when the avenues for entry into England's abbeys had been shuttered for over one hundred years. The dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1541 altered the English landscape both literally and figuratively.[6] Monastic spaces either crumbled or traded hands from orders of nuns and monks to wealthy courtiers looking to settle themselves in grand homes; the establishment of the Church of England and attendant religious reforms began to take hold; and the centuries-old tradition of the English convent was soon lost to time. From its height in the mid-fourteenth century, the number of nuns in England fell from 3,500 to 1,900 by 1534. By 1540, "the number of nuns who were dispossessed was approximately 1,600."[7] Thus the number of nuns had shrunk from figures in the three thousands to mere hundreds in approximately a century. The collapse of the monastic way of life had been vertiginous.

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[5] Roughly twenty per cent of the daughters of peers did not marry between 1675-1724. See Sara Heller Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 167.
[6] Of the aftermath of the dissolution, see G. R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991), esp. 149-50.
[7] Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London: University College London Press, 1998), 85.

However, in the seventeenth century, a young woman of means certainly could have established herself in Europe, entering into a Catholic convent there. While this path required certain resources, it was not an untrod one: "from the late sixteenth century a number of religious communities were founded on the continent by English patrons and by 1642 at least 300 Englishwomen had joined these institutions."[8] With the requisite finances secured and the ability to travel, a woman could equip herself to pursue devout celibacy abroad. Blagge certainly had some financial resources, though these were tied up with her court service. And while she had spent part of her childhood in France in the exiled court of the Catholic Queen Mother Henrietta Maria, Blagge's religious leanings remained aligned firmly with Protestantism rather than Catholicism.[9] Aside from these questions of the possibility, or even plausibility, of Blagge pursuing a celibate convent life, there remained another exceptional circumstance – not money, not opportunity, not conviction; rather, Blagge was in love. Ultimately, she would go on to marry Godolphin in 1675. Several years later, on September 3, 1678, Margaret gave birth to their son, Francis, who would later assume the title of second Earl of Godolphin. Within a week of Francis' birth, Margaret died of a postpartum infection after tremendous suffering.[10] Mourning for his friend's sudden, devastating, and brutal death, Evelyn composed in manuscript her biography, *The Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, to memorialize her life and encourage an example of piety in others. Sidney Godolphin never remarried and died thirty-four years after his wife Margaret's demise.

The case of Margaret Blagge Godolphin sets the scene for this dissertation's exploration of chastity from the late sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries in two crucial ways.

[8] Eales, *Women in Early Modern England*, 87.
[9] As Evelyn reports, while in France "our young Saint would not only not be perswaded to [go to mass], but asserted her better faith with…readiness and constancy." *The Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, 8.
[10] Harris, *Transformations of Love*, 27.

First, Margaret's struggle illustrates that the contest between devoting one's life to chastity or entering into marriage lasted well after the immediate moment of the Protestant Reformation in England when the options for a monastic celibate way of life had shrunk.[11] What is more, even some Catholic authors in the era of Reformation supported marriage over celibacy. Theodora Jankowski helpfully cites humanists Juan Luis Vives and Desiderius Erasmus' writings as evidence of the ways that "patriarchalism that grew out of proto-capitalism and the anticlericalism that grew out of reformist thought were responsible for restricting life opportunities for…women of all sects."[12] All in all, the economic imperative of marriage amid the rise of nascent capitalism, she argues (and Silvia Federici would concur), inflected discourses on virginity as much as doctrinal disputes.[13] Even a century after perhaps England's most famous virgin Queen Elizabeth's marriage prospects roiled Parliament and her advisors amid the Reformation moment, Blagge still found herself debating the value of marriage or the celibate life.[14] Of course Blagge was not afforded the status of queen, with its extraordinary

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[11] For a general overview of ancient cultural precepts on virginity and anthropological insight into how virginity first came into being as a concept, see Hanne Blank, *Virgin: The Untouched History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), esp. 3-31. For a sample of sources on the ancient and medieval contexts that informed the Catholic ideal of celibacy that Reformation theology contested, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1990). Katherine Churchill offers a thorough review of medieval virginity studies and the ways that virginity complicates a gender binary in her analysis of Old French hagiographic literature in "Relational Virginity and Nonbinary Gender: *La Vie De Sainte Euphrosine* and *La Vie De Saint Alexis*," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 50, no. 2 (June 2024): 139-58 (see esp. 139-47). For the purposes of this dissertation's blended literary-historical work, Theodora Jankowski offers a helpful summary of the Roman Catholic discourse on virginity in *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 31-74.

[12] Jankowski specifically explores Vives' 1524 *De institution feminae christianae* (On the education of Christian women) and several of Erasmus' works, including "The Defense of the Declamation of Marriage," "On the Christian Widow," "Manifest Lies," "On Disdaining the World," *The Enchiridion*, "The Wooer and the Maiden." See *Pure Resistance*, 83-90. For the quote above, see Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 90.

[13] Federici connects rising early modern capitalism with the devaluation of chastity, the promotion of marriage and reproduction in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*, rev. ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2014), 86-91.

[14] In 1576, about a hundred years before Blagge and Godolphin eventually married, Elizabeth declared to Parliament "if I were a milkmaid with a pail on mine arm, whereby my private person might be little set by, I would not forsake

responsibilities and powers that made the ramifications of marriage as much political as personal. However, I use the example of Elizabeth to demonstrate that the questions about the merits and demerits of marriage that remained vexed throughout her reign pervaded long after she died, up through Blagge's days.

Second, the fact that John Evelyn and Margaret's platonic friendship became an object of titillating speculation demonstrates how much chastity has been and remains an object of skepticism. In the 1940s, W.G. Hiscock of Christ Church College, Oxford received Evelyn's manuscript papers from his descendants and cared for the documents. In his written work analyzing Evelyn's material, he suspected that Evelyn and Margaret's attachment exceeded the bounds of platonic friendship.[15] Hiscock paints a portrait of Margaret as undevoted to Godolphin, Evelyn as something of a lecher, and even Mrs. Evelyn as a spouse jealous of her husband's relationship to a woman many years her junior.[16] According to Frances Harris, who worked with the Godolphin papers as well as Evelyn's after the latter manuscripts moved to the British Library in 1995, Hiscock's assessment was prurient and unrepresentative of larger critical discourse.[17] His picture of Evelyn and Margaret's relationship especially fails to account for the

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that single state to match myself with the greatest monarch." "Queen Elizabeth's Speech at the Close of the Parliamentary Session, March 15, 1576," in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Muller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 170. John Guy speaks to the complexities of the marriage question and succession, in addition to the ways that Elizabeth employed marriage prospects (even past her childbearing years) to political ends. He includes her protracted negotiations with the Duc d'Alençon as a protective move to preserve England's relationship with France. See *Elizabeth: The Later Years* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 22, 47-48, 401.

[15] Of Margaret and Evelyn's friendship pact of 1672, W. G. Hiscock notes that Margaret "had told [Evelyn] that she had no friend in the world. Had she forgotten Sidney Godolphin to whom she had been engaged for six years?" He continues that "Though Margaret could be soft and melting at her devotions, she probably showed in sexual matters, not frigidity, but some physical aversion," and though "Evelyn could not refrain from warning her against the exciting danger of physical attraction," he was nonetheless "qualified to incite it, and put it to the test." Meanwhile, "Between the signing of the pact and 21 December Evelyn spent fourteen days with his wife and forty-five in London. It is not at all unlikely that Mrs. Evelyn now regretted her acquiescence, at the outset, of his friendship." *John Evelyn and His Family Circle* (London: Routledge, 1955), 81-82.

[16] Hiscock, *John Evelyn and His Family Circle*, 82.

[17] Harris, *Transformations of Love*, 3.

historical philosophical and religious contexts in which friendships between men and women could and did exist in the early modern period, from Neoplatonism to Salesian Devout Humanism.[18] Yet it remains instructive for this dissertation to consider Hiscock's assessment. His concerns over the legibility and reliability of both Evelyn and Margaret's professions of chastity evinces the skeptical anxiety that chastity produces.

Over the course of this dissertation, I will use literary test cases to argue that the monumental questions that skepticism asked during the early modern era shaped and intensified the problems that the difficulty of recognizing chastity presented. Both skeptical philosophy and chastity are concerned with the fundamental legibility of bodies and the certain knowability of others' minds. The authors of this study illustrate that both deciphering and obtaining certain knowledge, especially about chastity, were both more difficult to come by at a time when the alliance between sign and signified was coming under mounting pressure. This study confines itself to the twilight years of the last Tudor monarch, Elizabeth I, through to the last regnal year of the final Stuart monarch, Queen Anne. As female rulers, both queens faced questions about marriage's influence on their political power and took different approaches; Elizabeth never wed and Anne did, though neither had living direct heirs to succeed her.[19] Elizabeth and Anne's reigns bordered the tumultuous seventeenth century, a period in which English people felt themselves on the precipice of a contested modernity shaped by imperialism, war, religious

[18] Harris, *Transformations of Love*, 3-5.

[19] As mentioned previously, Elizabeth dangled marriage prospects for political gain, despite expressions of reluctance to wed, and ultimately died unmarried. Anne wed Prince George of Denmark, and despite seventeen pregnancies, none of her children survived her. Anne did identify with Elizabeth, even adopting her motto *semper eadem* ("always the same"). Yet as much as Elizabeth's not marrying produced political problems, Anne's marriage "created problems of its own, for some people believed that it contravened the divine order that her husband had a rank inferior to hers," especially in light of William of Orange's assertion of regnal rights during the Glorious Revolution. While George was less invested in being a co-ruler and quelled anxieties on that score, that no heirs survived from their marriage created dynastic struggles comparable to those that plagued Elizabeth's reign. See Anne Somerset, *Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 183, 546.

upheaval, and economic change.[20] Christopher Hill maintains that the seventeenth century was "perhaps the most decisive in English history" in that "modern English society and a modern state began to take shape, and England's position in the world was transformed."[21] That kind of radical transformation extended to sexual culture. While, as Hanne Blank contends, virginity as a concept and as a social condition has existed as long as civilization itself, it accrues new meanings in each age.[22] In the era from which this dissertation takes its scope, chastity was reconceptualized against the backdrop of the abovementioned English Reformation, the rise in proto-capitalism, and developments in fields like science and medicine, in which debate arose across the anatomy schools of Europe over whether the hymen was a significant indicator of virginity – or, indeed, if the hymen even existed at all (anatomists Ambroise Paré, Helkiah Crooke, Nicholas Culpeper, and Andreas Vesalius all expressed doubts about it).[23]

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[20] As Andy Wood puts it, "by the early seventeenth century many English people felt that the past was slipping away from them, generating a sense that the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries formed a separate world from that inhabited by the people of later Elizabethan and early Stuart England." Of the link between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he continues that "the distinct and traumatic experience of the English Revolution came to create a sense of continuity between the later Stuart and early Georgian periods, as the women and men of that time constructed memories and representations of the 1640s that fed directly into the political struggles of later times." This dissertation thus registers the "combined sense of change and continuity" across these eras that Wood observes. See "Coda: History, Time and Social Memory," in *A Social History of England, 1500-1750*, ed. Keith Wrightson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 375-76.

[21] Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603-1714* (1961; reis., New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 1. While adopting slightly different temporal parameters, Keith Wrightson agrees in his study of the period 1580-1680 that the tumult across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was transformative and consequential: "the relative social tranquility of the later seventeenth century must not be mistaken for a reversal of the social forces active in the preceding three generations. It was an equilibrium established on new terms." *English Society, 1580-1680* (1982; reis., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 228.

[22] Blank traces the twin developments of patriarchy and possessions, which in turn spawned human interest in virginity, to the Neolithic era. See *Virgin*, 26.

[23] Of the matrix of virginity, sexuality and settler colonialism, see Helen King's discussion of Sir Walter Ralegh's urging Queen Elizabeth I towards the "conquest of Guiana's maidenhood" as part of her imperialist project. King notes that "The state needed to be kept virginal, but for that to occur it was also necessary for the succession to be assured; virginity in one quarter depended on its loss in another." *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis and the Problems of Puberty* (London: Routledge, 2004), 77. Jankowski offers an explication of nascent capitalism's great impact on family formation and virginity in turn. See *Pure Resistance*, 75-80. Sherronda J. Brown analyzes how the intertwining histories of settler colonialism, enslavement, and anti-Black racism amid capitalism have shaped discourses around virginity and race especially within the American context. See *Refusing Compulsory Sexuality: A Black Asexual Lens on Our Sex-Obsessed Culture* (Huichin, unceded Ohlone land, *aka* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2022), esp. 13-15, 45-53, 56-57. For more on the anatomy debate in particular, see Amy Kenny, *Humoral Wombs on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 35-36.

The meaning and value of virginity and chastity remained in flux in England throughout the 1600s. As chastity ascended in importance over devout celibacy, marriage proved to be the expectation for many women (even though available demographic data does not entirely bear this out).[24] Instead of having the option to vow life-long chastity in the convent, English women found that, in the words of Hanne Blank, "Virginity was a commodity with a limited shelf life."[25] Sara Heller Mendelson and Patricia Crawford underscore that "after a woman passed the usual age of marriage, she was an object of suspicion."[26] Put another way in a 1632 treatise on women's legal rights, all women "are understood either married or to bee married and their desires or [*sic*] subject to their husband."[27] Citing the change to former religious hierarchies of holiness and value, Jankowski claims that "Virgins are no longer three times better than wives; they are simply women who are not yet wives. Chaste virgins will inevitably become chaste wives."[28] Angeline Goreau traces out that the "necessity for 'modesty' had its roots in concrete circumstance" – chiefly the preservation of virginity as a precursor for honest marriage and the production of legitimate heirs under patriarchal primogeniture inheritance. Yet out of this circumstance arose a more totalizing culture of chastity. Modesty, Goreau writes,

> was interpreted by contemporaries in an abstract, or symbolic, fashion, and then reapplied to the circumstances of everyday life—thus enlarging its sphere of influence to the circumstances of everyday life…Through this figurative interpretation of "modesty," sexual significance could be assigned to every sphere of a woman's life, placing inhibitions on her ways of speaking, looking, walking, imagining, thinking.[29]

Midwife Jane Sharp joined the anatomists in acknowledging that the hymen could signify virginity, but also that "it may be broken before Copulation." *The Midwives Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 296-97.

[24] Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 165-68.

[25] Blank, *Virgin*, 181.

[26] Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 67.

[27] Anon., *The lavves resolutions of womens rights: or, the lavves provision for women*…. (London: Iohn More Esq., 1632), 6. Qtd. in Blank, *Virgin*, 181.

[28] Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 101.

[29] Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 10.

Even so, virginity was difficult to define and, according to medical and legal experts of the period, its "loss" was allegedly easy to stage. Composed in twelfth-century Salerno, Italy, and associated with the historical female medical practitioner Trota, the Trotula text offers several prescriptions for vaginal constrictives for women to take to "appear as if they were virgins." The text even goes further to advise that "What is better is if the following is done one night before she is married: let her place leeches in the vagina (but take care that they do not go in too far) so that blood comes out and is converted into a little clot. And thus the man will be deceived by the effusion of blood."[30] The Trotula text indicates that the remedies listed above were used by sex workers to appear more virginal or for non-virgins to appear virginal during the consummation of their marriages. That women sought remedies to produce "signs" of virginity loss either for profit or to maintain appearances upon marriage underscores the cultural value of virginity. Though its roots were medieval, the Trotula text remained in circulation through to the end of the fifteenth century.

As in medicine, the law was also concerned with signs of virginity. The divorce trial of Frances Howard, Countess of Somerset offers a rather stunning example of the lengths that legal proceedings would go in order to prove virginity as a justification for annulment. In 1613, the countess sought an annulment from her husband on the grounds of his alleged impotence. She subsequently underwent physical examination by matrons and midwives, whose reports went to "confirm" her virginity.[31] This added layer of perception and reporting contrasted with more open practices in France, in which couples underwent "trial by congress" to prove impotence by

[30] Anon., *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, trans. Monica H. Green and Ruth Mazo Karras (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 103, 104.
[31] David Lindley's account of the trial and examination offers further details. See *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London: Routledge, 1993), esp. 80-82.

lying in bed together "while court officers waited in an adjoining room" before investigating husband and wife for "signs of that sexual intercourse had taken place."[32] While both English and French courts did make use of physical examination, the English court mediated such physical evidence by relying heavily on verbal reports, and even a process called "compurgation" in which "the accused might clear himself by bringing six or seven 'oath-helpers'—friends, relatives, or neighbors—to swear to the truth of his deposition."[33] However, cultural responses to the Howard trial indicate widespread received belief that the countess was "faking" her virginity. Beyond the sensational trials of the aristocracy, for the lower and middling sorts, certificates and witness statements could be proffered to support claims to chastity in lawsuits aimed at women accused of loose living.[34]

The above medical and legal examples suggest that chastity was created in the public arena, through performative displays of modesty or in verbal constructions like the aforementioned certificates. As Vives explicates,

> Virginitatem voco integritatem mentis, quae etiam in corpus dimanet; integritatem porro ab omni corrputione ac contagio.

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[32] Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 133.

[33] Maus, *Inwardness and Theater*, 133.

[34] The church courts' responsibility for "the upkeep of standards of Christian behavior…became more urgent after the Reformation, when new stress was laid on the equation of the good citizen with the good Christian." Maintaining sexual morality was central to that responsibility, and depended upon public attitudes and perceptions. See James A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-39. Dismissals of cases against those accused of fornication in the ecclesiastical court system were few, except for those who "were usually able to show that the charge against them was wholly spurious, or had come to court armed with certificates of innocence signed by their ministers and fellow-parishioners." Likewise, those accused of slander were able to "use the process of compurgation" to answer charges, in which "neighbours of the defamed person appeared in court to swear to their belief in his or her innocence – sometimes supplemented or replaced by certificates of good fame and credit signed by 'honest neighbours.'" Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 280, 293. This practice carried on into the eighteenth century. In 1718 Thame, Oxfordshire, "The vicar, churchwardens, overseers of the poor and twenty-five other inhabitants signed a petition" to declare one Thomas West was "'a very honest person & never suspected for an unchastity or Dishonesty'" when he was accused of fathering an illegitimate child. See Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, 113.

> I define virginity as integrity of the mind, which extends also to the body, an integrity free of all corruption and contamination.[35]

Vives is wary of a rupture in that connection between an internal, subjective purity and bodily purity:

> Huius ergo tantae Virginis sequetur mea puella non ficto et simulato, sed vero animo et certo, ne taetrius sit et perniciosius vitium sub facie virtutis latens et venenum sub re salutari ac morbus cute integra et sana contectus eoque se a cura defendens obtenu. Nihil agant feminae fucatum et fictum, ut bonae videantur, nec se rerum naturas aut fallere sperent aut mutare posse. Non idem valent simulata quod vera. Ficta et adumbrata invalida atque imbecilla sunt; ipsa tandem vel se produnt vel deteguntur. Vere igitur sit puella quod prae se ostendit—modesta, humilis, pudica, pudibunda, proba—et esse eam talem convenit et videri.
>
> My young woman will follow the example of the glorious Virgin not with a feigned and simulated spirit but with true and certain intention lest under the mask of virtue there lurk a more deadly and pernicious vice, a poison under the guise of health and a sickness concealed by a sound and healthy skin and under this cover avoiding cure. Let women do nothing that is counterfeit and feigned so that they may appear good, nor should they hope to change or deceive nature. Things that are simulated do not have the same validity as things that are true. That which is feigned is weak and ineffectual. In the end they give themselves away or they are exposed. Therefore the young woman should be in very fact what she appears to be externally. She must both appear and be humble, chaste, modest and upright.[36]

Vives' concern over the exact correspondence between interior and exterior bespeaks the instability of the signs of virginity and chastity alike, allowing for the possibility of "feigning" both. Despite that instability, maintaining a chaste exterior had far-reaching implications for the lived experience of women, whether in the forms of defamation suits for sexual incontinence, marriage negotiations, and everyday maintenance of one's reputation to keep a good community standing.

I agree with modern critics like Blank, who has demonstrated scientific consensus that "biological virginity" is not a discrete category to be proven by observations about the hymen

[35] Juan Luis Vives, *De institutione feminae christianae: Liber primus*, ed. Constantinus Matheussen and Charles Fantazzi, trans. Fantazzi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 52-53.
[36] Vives, *De institutione feminae christianae*, 110-11.

alone, and Jessica Valenti, who helpfully reminds us of virginity's lability as a social concept – often defined as a penetrative act that privileges heterosexist assumptions about whom and how individuals ought to love.[37] Their work certainly chimes with the early modern uncertainties about how to define virginity in the body, especially the uncertainty over the hymen's significance; Montaigne, for example, quotes Saint Augustine in his reporting:

> Il est des effects qui peuvent perdre sans impudicité leur pudicité et, qui plus est, sans leur sceu : «*Obstetrix, virginis cujusdam integritatem manu velut explorans, sive malevolentia, sive inscitia, sive casu, dum inspicit, perdidit*.» Telle a esdiré sa virginité pour l'avoir cherchée ; telle, s'en esbatant, l'a tuée.
>
> There are acts by which they can lose their chastity without unchastity, and, what is more, without their knowledge. *A midwife, for instance, making a manual examination of some virgin's integrity, whether through malice, unskillfulness, or accident, by inspecting it has destroyed it*…Some have lost their maidenhead for having looked for it; some have destroyed it in sport.[38]

Here, Montaigne notes other contexts for penetration besides marital consummation, from medical examination to pure curiosity or auto-eroticism. Because so much emphasis was placed on the penetrative act of love, other premarital sexual practices, even if they did not meet the high standard for chastity that Vives prescribes, were not necessarily punished. David Cressy details the mid-seventeenth-century courtship of Leonard Wheatcroft and Elizabeth Hawley as an example, which constituted long summer walks replete with "hand-holding, kisses, and embraces." Over time, "Leonard was permitted to stay overnight at her house and at her uncle's,

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[37] For more on the problems with a strictly biological reading of virginity, Blank cites clinical research that investigates the myth of the hymen in particular as "biological evidence" of virginity. See *Virgin*, 32-41, 55-57. In sum, she underscores that assumptions about the "breaking" of the hymen during first penetrative sexual intercourse are not entirely supported by biological reality (even noting twentieth-century clinical research in in which researchers have "cautioned against interpreting any hymenal findings in isolation" from clinical history [56]). Blank explains that "The thickness, thinness, and relative fragility of different hymens often complicate attempts to make virginity diagnoses based on what the hymen looks like." *Virgin*, 39-40. For more on the difficulties of defining virginity, and especially decentering heterosexual relations as the default narrative, see chapter 1 of Jessica Valenti, *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2010).

[38] For the French, see Michel de Montaigne, *Les essais*, ed. Pierre Villey (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1923), 3.111. For the English, see Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 660.

and she was allowed to stay over with him." Physical intimacy after their engagement increased, such that, "Leonard recalls, 'and for joy we so happily met together, we embraced each other all night and the night after'…the author represents no part of his courtship as unchaste or improper."[39] Scholars might apply the retroactive label of "bundling" to this encounter, defined as "a night of courting, fully clothed, which stopped short of intercourse."[40] Though there is some debate over the extent of this practice in England, Wheatcroft's anecdote nonetheless makes plain that couples were afforded some condoned premarital intimacies that complicate the picture of chastity as total abstinence.

In brief, what I hope to suggest is that both virginity and chastity are concepts that are socially malleable but intent on controlling the disposition of bodies, with uneven implications for men and women. Chastity was a state that could be achieved by virgins as much as by married and widowed persons – for the latter two, it had more to do with the controlling of unruly sexual appetites through sexual fidelity, including constancy towards one's spouse. However much men were also held to these standards, in practice their lapses were perhaps more easily forgiven, especially in the eyes of the law.[41] For women, virginity and chastity serve as cultural markers for control over their physical and mental states. Escalating the sort of rhetoric that Vives employed in the sixteenth century, Richard Allestree in his 1673 conduct book *The Ladies Calling* cautions that

> Every indecent curiosity, or impure fancy, is a deflowring of the mind, & every the least corruption of them gives some degrees of defilement to the body too: for between the state of pure immaculate Virginity & arrant Prostitution there are

[39] David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243.
[40] Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 118.
[41] Men were certainly allowed more latitude for premarital and extramarital sexuality, for example, in analysis of legal prosecutions for illegitimate births in early modern English courts. Mark Breitenberg notes the evidence of the sexual double standard in legal records from the 1570s through the 1670s and explicates how fears around the social order extended to anxieties over the regulation of (chiefly female) sexuality. See *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19-20.

> many intermedial steps, and she that makes any of them, is so far departed from her first integrity. She that listens to any wanton discourse, has violated her ears; she that speaks any, her tongue; every immodest glance vitiates her eye, and every the lightest act of dalliance leaves somthing of stain and sullage behind it. There is therefore a most rigorous caution requisit herein: for as nothing is more clean and white then a perfect Virginity, so every the least spot or soil is the more discernible.[42]

Allestree's lengthy note of caution is worth replicating in full to consider what an extreme rendering of chastity looks like. He offers a stark portrait of gradations of unchastity affecting the mind as well as the whole body, under constant threat of all manner of wantonness. While conduct literature such as *The Ladies Calling* does not evince in and of itself that the advice contained therein was followed broadly or to the letter, Allestree's passage nonetheless illustrates overwhelming concern that the virginal body as well as the mind could be corrupted and ought to be protected. The profound preoccupations with mental and bodily purity articulated by the likes of Vives and Allestree had implications for a culture of compulsory (hetero)sexuality, with its attendant expectations for timely and continent marriages that rely on a framework of reproductive futurism. Lee Edelman defines reproductive futurism as "terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations."[43] Central to this configuration is the valorization of a nominal, symbolic Child (as opposed to attending to the needs of flesh-and-blood children of the here and now) by which personal and political decisions are measured. Edelman continues by explaining that the Child "marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is

[42] Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*… (Oxford: 1673), 148. Allestree's advice had some longevity; it was copied near verbatim in an anonymously authored 1694 conduct book. See *The Ladies Dictionary, Being a General Entertainment for the Fair-Sex…*(London: Printed for John Dunton, 1694), 442.
[43] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism." Such a reading succinctly and powerfully encapsulates the driving political forces behind compulsory (hetero)sexuality and its attendant expectations regarding marriage and reproduction. It bolsters the ways that this dissertation's virgins and chaste characters (and sometimes authors) occupy an unaccountable status in the eyes of their communities and, to an extent, themselves. Because through abstinence or celibacy they put off or outright refuse to participate in perpetuating the particular cultural orders of reproductive heterosexuality in which they find themselves enmeshed, they upend pervading social expectations.[44]

While the term heterosexuality was only coined in the nineteenth century, it still proves useful in thinking through the ways that early modern English culture upheld marriage between man and woman as the standard unit of relationship upon which society flourished.[45] Adrienne Rich's pathbreaking work explicated the ways that "heterosexuality is presumed as a 'sexual preference' of 'most women,' either implicitly or explicitly." Her contention that "Heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women" in mid-twentieth-century examples specifically echo the pressures that early modern women faced when they were expected to progress from their roles as maids to those of wives and mothers.[46] This dissertation's examination of virginity and chastity owes much to Edelman and Rich's theoretical influence in evaluating how the characters studied herein pick apart and sometimes resist the culturally dominant family formation of the early modern age. Yet this dissertation also relies on Kristina Gupta's recent expansion of compulsory heterosexuality to compulsory sexuality writ large. She contributes to a body of work that raises questions about

[44] Edelman, *No Future*, 21.
[45] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "heterosexuality (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1993541836.
[46] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5., no. 4: Women: Sex and Sexuality (Summer 1980): 633, 653.

> the assumption that all people are sexual; the norms and practices that compel people to experience themselves as desiring subjects, take up sexual identities, and engage in sexual activity; and the norms and practices that marginalize various forms of nonsexuality (including a lack of interest in sex, a lack of sexual activity, or a disidentification with sexuality)…the concept seeks to emphasize that compulsory sexuality is a system that regulates the behavior of all people…[47]

While many – though not all – of characters of this dissertation's study sometimes experience attractions to characters of another gender, I employ these theoretical underpinnings from queer studies to examine the ways that characters' refusals to follow a normative path towards eventual family formation are perceived as non-normative by clinging on to virginity past its due season, or even pursuing abstinence or celibacy in perpetuity. Regardless of the direction of the characters' patterns of attraction, these critical tools help unpack the heteronormative social codes that have dominated throughout centuries; the pressures that these theorists observe in the present day resonate with the pressures early modern society exerted on people like Margaret Blagge.

Literary critics have variously read chastity in the early modern age through the lenses of medicine, economics, politics, and religion.[48] Likewise, some of the formational works on the

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[47] Kristina Gupta, "Compulsory Sexuality: Evaluating an Emerging Concept," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 1 (2015): 134-35.

[48] To offer some examples of these various critical models, Amy Kenny's *Humoral Wombs* devotes a chapter to virginity ("The green womb"), which will be referenced in chapter 1 of this dissertation. Katherine Gillen's *Chaste Value: Economic Crisis, Female Chastity, and the Production of Social Difference on Shakespeare's Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) explores how dramatized chastity was a means to explore the rise of capitalism. Jankowki's *Pure Resistance*, cited throughout this introduction, offers a chapter that includes a study of convent figures like Isabella in *Measure for Measure* and Lady Happy and her community in Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*. Marie Loughlin's *Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1997) investigates chastity, and particularly the hymen, as legally and politically salient within primarily Beaumont and Fletcher's canon. It becomes apparent from this sampling that drama remains a prioritized focus in published work on virginity, though Kimberly Guy Reigle's dissertation expands that scope to include verse in romance and the masque. See "Defensive Virginity from Spenser to Milton," PhD diss. (University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2010). Other texts worthy of mention include Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie's *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), a collection of essays exploring chastity's *longue durée* configurations. Mary Bly's *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queans on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) investigates virginity and homoeroticism in plays performed throughout the King's Revel's 1607-08 season.

topics of virginity and chastity have been confined to particular genres (especially drama) or are separated chronologically, focused on the sixteenth up to the early seventeenth or solely the eighteenth centuries. While informed by these scholarly strains, my dissertation primarily centers its study of chastity within the context of the seventeenth century's profound skeptical crisis and across genres. Skeptical philosophy, which reached a particular zenith in the 1600s, played a critical part not just in the era's new science and political revolutions but also in in the formulation of chastity under the umbrella of evolving understandings of sexuality.[49] As a philosophical system, skepticism concerns itself primarily with doubt surrounding how knowledge is made and whether or not certainty can be achieved. To put it another way, skepticism asks if received wisdom can be relied upon and whether or not sense perception provides a sufficient basis for our understanding. In his 1641 *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, René Descartes observes the disparity between ideas and observations in an illustrative example about the sun:

> duas diversas solis ideas apud me invenio, unam tanquam a sensibus haustam, & quae maxime inter illas quas adventitias existimo est recensenda, per quam mihi valde parvus apparet, aliam verò ex rationibus Astronomiae desumptam, hoc est ex notionibus quibusdam mihi innatis elicitam, vel quocumque alio modo a me factam, per quam aliquoties major quàm terra exhibetur.
>
> I find within me, for example, two different ideas of the sun, the one, as though derived from the senses, which is maximally to be reckoned among those ideas which I think are adventicious, and through which the sun appears to me to be very small, but the other, derived from the reasoning of astronomy, that is, elicited from certain notions innate to me or made by me in some manner, and through which the sun is exhibited as being several times greater than the earth.[50]

[49] As Hill summarizes, "Conservatives were frightened by the sceptical implications of the new scientific method, its refusal to accept traditional authority, its readiness to test everything by reason and experiment. If the earth was no longer the centre of the universe, this had implications which reached far beyond the science of astronomy." *The Century of Revolution*, 79.

[50] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy/Meditationes de prima philosophia: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. George Heffernan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 126-27.

Descartes asks how he ought to reconcile his particular idea of the sun with astronomical observations that tell a very different story about the star. That divergence informs skepticism's broader concerns with signifier and sign; those same tenets inform early modern concerns over chastity's reliability as a social precept and legibility as a social sign.

Richard Popkin traces skepticism's early modern flourishing to religious debates of the late medieval and Reformation eras about "the standard of religious knowledge, or what was called the 'rule of faith.'" "Once a fundamental criterion has been challenged," Popkin paraphrases, "how does one tell which of the alternative possibilities ought to be accepted?"[51] Beyond these religious debates, the skepticism of ancient figures like Pyrrho of Elis and Sextus Empiricus saw a revival during the Renaissance humanist movement on the Continent. One such humanist, Montaigne, may be best known for the skepticism he displays in his *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*. Nonetheless, he wrestles with skeptical questions throughout the entirety of his *Essais* (first published in 1580).

In his writing, Montaigne raises doubts about the sufficiency of human perception, underscoring the limitations of certain knowledge. However, much as he advocates for a tempered skepticism, Montaigne also cautions against the extremity of a radical skeptical philosophy. He cites Calicles in Plato who warns that "l'extremité de la philosophie estre dommageable…que, prinse avec moderation, elle est plaisante et commode" ("the extremity of philosophy is harmful, and with moderation, it is pleasant and advantageous"). Montaigne argues that

> en son excès, elle esclave nostre naturelle franchise, et nous desvoye, par une importune subtilité, du beau et plain chemin que nature nous a trace.

[51] Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3, 5.

> in its excess it enslaves our natural freedom and, by importunate subtlety, leads us astray from the fine and level road that nature has traced for us.[52]

Despite Montaigne's wariness, a hyperbolic skepticism was to succeed his anti-dogmatic approach. That latter type of philosophy exploded in Descartes' *Meditationes*. Though the abovementioned consideration of the sun seems a relatively tame thought experiment, the text also introduced the evil demon hypothesis, asking if all we perceive might be an illusion produced by a "Deus deceptor" (deceiving God). While Descartes produced his famous *cogito* (the proposition that "cogito ergo sum," or, "I think, therefore I am") to quell such anxiety and ultimately prove the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God, he had nonetheless fundamentally and irrevocably reshaped skeptical philosophy as a field. Descartes, in trying to answer definitively the threat of skepticism, instead precipitated a skeptical crisis that has persisted in waves.[53]

The revitalized interest in skeptical philosophy was not the sole provenance of Continental philosophers, however, as writers in English had an immense appetite for this school of thought. As William L. Hamlin explains of the skeptical episteme in early modern England, "if sustained engagement with doubt was encouraged by widespread doctrinal dispute, it was further promoted by the translation and dissemination of the ancient sceptical treatises." In 1590, England "produced the first vernacular translation of Sextus Empiricus: *The Sceptick*."[54] Thirteen years later, John Florio's translation of Montaigne was published and perused by the likes of

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[52] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 1.255; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 146.

[53] In our contemporary moment, with its conspiracy theories and "alternative facts," we could say that crisis still persists today. Duncan Pritchard notes how this manifests in current post-truth politics, citing as examples debates around the existence of climate change and the spin surrounding former US President Donald Trump's inauguration attendance figures. We might add the conspiracies around the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines as further examples. See Duncan Pritchard, *Scepticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3-4.

[54] William L. Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare's England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8.

none other than William Shakespeare himself. But Hamlin emphasizes that an engagement with skeptical philosophy proper was not a prerequisite to dealing with questions of skepticism writ large: "Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists certainly had the potential to be sceptical without reading Montaigne, and Montaigne had the same potential without reading Sextus or Cicero." He notes skeptical philosophy's place in a broader "distrust of dogmatism" emblematized in works by Thomas More, Desiderius Erasmus, Sebastian Castellio, and Reginald Scot as other examples.[55]

Building upon this foundation, English philosophers across the course of the seventeenth century, from Francis Bacon to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, offered their own contributions to skeptical thought. For his part, Bacon aimed to reorganize learning and emphasized the importance of observation in attaining knowledge, while stressing that individual perception has its own limitations that must be accounted for in the process of knowledge-making. His 1620 *Novum Organum* details how certain "idols" of received wisdom hamper the ability to find truth through inductive reasoning.[56] Hobbes, for his part, asserts in his 1651 *Leviathan* that "No discourse whatsoever, can end in absolute knowledge of fact, past, or to come. For, as for the knowledge of fact, it is, originally, sense; and even after, memory. And for the knowledge of consequence, which I have said before is called science, it is not absolute, but conditional."[57] Hobbes advocates here for a provisional knowledge that is indebted to a broader skeptical tradition. John Locke follows suit in his 1689 *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, supporting an empirical approach to knowledge-making, to be discussed further in this dissertation's third chapter. Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke each attempt to quash hyperbolic

[55] Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism*, 8.
[56] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40.
[57] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

skeptical concerns by arguing for a tempered skepticism often through empiricist method. Yet, as this dissertation suggests, hyperbolic skeptical problems remained.

This dissertation offers a literary history of intertwined developments in chastity and skepticism, united by a concern for attaining certain knowledge. Each chapter in this dissertation will explore a particular author and genre, progressing from analyzing questions surrounding virginity to abstinence and, ultimately, to celibacy. The first chapter begins with a work from late Elizabethan England, when sociopolitical conditions added to a religious and intellectual climate that fostered sustained skepticism: "when such intellectual access was conjoined with the particular social anxieties of Britain at the end of Elizabeth's reign, the fusion of disparate uncertainties could not help but infiltrate literary imagination."[58] Several of the products of that skeptically infused literary imagination are the central objects of this dissertation's study. Taking the titular heroines of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595) and Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (c. 1613) as its central focus, the first chapter outlines the ways that the virgin's body is read and misread as part of a broader habit of reading and misreading the female body. The requisites of genre predetermine the happy or unhappy ends for these heroines, and though the definitive endings of the plays seek to quell any concerns about ambiguity, the fact that bodily signs are so misapprehended evinces a skeptical undercurrent that will only intensify as the seventeenth-century skeptical movement gathers steam.

The second chapter centers on the question of abstinence in the anti-fruition verse made famous by Sir John Suckling, published in the tumultuous 1640s. I contend that Suckling

[58] Hamlin concludes that "Marlowe and Shakespeare may never have seen [*The Sceptick*], but its genesis within the same *fin de siècle* milieu that yielded *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Doctor Faustus* seems, in retrospect, virtually predictable." Hamlin also emphasizes that "engagement with skeptical philosophy proper was not a prerequisite to dealing with questions of skepticism writ large: "Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists certainly had the potential to be sceptical without reading Montaigne, and Montaigne had the same potential without reading Sextus or Cicero." He notes skeptical philosophy's place in a broader "distrust of dogmatism" emblematized in works by Thomas More, Erasmus, Castellio, and Scot as other examples. See *Tragedy and Scepticism*, 8.

employs a more regimented skeptical method to investigate the merits and demerits of embodied passion in a mode more philosophical than critics have generally allowed. The third and final chapter explores Jane Barker's 1713 novel *Love Intrigues* and its heroine Galesia's complex commitment to celibacy after a failed courtship with her cousin Bosvil. Galesia's recollection of her courtship points to the fundamental unknowability of other minds and the unreliability of sense perception in knowledge-making. The skeptical crisis hinted at in Shakespeare's play and explored in Suckling's verse becomes an outright catastrophe in Barker's prose, one that paves the way for eighteenth-century novels to follow.

* * *

In a sermon preached on the occasion of the Annunciation at New College, Oxford in 1641, Thomas Master took for his text Luke 1:26-7 and detailed the descriptors the Gospel writer assigned to the Virgin Mary. Of Mary's betrothal to Joseph, Master explicates "It is indeed the way, *via regia*, Gods, and the Kings high-way from Maid to Wife, but is neither; and therefore inferiour to both." Master thus presents a hierarchy that overturns centuries of received wisdom that virginity is the path to holiness; in his schema, marriage is superior to virginity and betrothal alike. He continues that "The Virgin stands like a blooming Rose in the midst of a Garden, and draws all eyes to hers: the Wife is as the Rose gathered, and bound in a Garland for the Husbands head."[59] Master charts a course of transitional virginity, aimed towards eventual marriage; a woman's virginity is what attracts, but marriage eventually best adorns and honors, crucially, men. Writing roughly forty years after Master preached his sermon, Jane Barker also makes use of the well-worn image of the rose in her own discussion of virginity, though to a very different end. In the manuscript poem "A song," Barker describes the exchange between an old woman

[59] Thomas Master, *The Virgin Mary. A Sermon Preached in St. Maries Colledge, (Vulgo New-Colledge), Oxon, March 25. 1641.* (London: Robert White, 1665), sig. B3.

offering flowers she should have received in youth to the handsome young gallant Strephon. Barker's poetic speaker reports that

> When poor Galæcia aged grew,
> Young strephon in his prime,
> The nosgay which to her was due,
> Poor nymph she gave to him,
> Which coldly he receiv'd and sed,
> Alas I her bemoan
> This nosgay's like her maiden-head
> The roses are o'er blown,[60]

This poetic portrait offers a modified version of the *carpe diem* tradition, reversing the gendered roles of lover and beloved and also, with a telescopic lens, glimpsing at the consequences of age. Barker's poetic persona Galesia's virginity, like the flowers she offers Strephon, is well past its prime in an explicit genital image meant to evoke a strong reaction in the poem's readers.[61] The poem ends with a comma, but no further written text. Whether the mark is a virgule ending the exchange or punctuation hinting at a further incomplete response, Galesia's reply to Strephon hangs unspoken in the air. Barker's biographer Kathryn R. King notes that "Poems such as these take a jaundiced view of a sexual economy based upon male control over definitions of female value and point toward the need for alternative sexual economies."[62] Barker shows a longstanding preoccupation with the pressures of time and chastity, whether in her late seventeenth-century verse or early eighteenth-century prose.

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[60] This transcription of Barker's poem contained in University of Oxford, Magdalen College MS 343, fol. 84 is printed in Kathryn R. King's modern edition. See *The Poems of Jane Barker: The Magdalen Manuscript* (Oxford: Magdalen College, 1998), 42.

[61] King interprets the pun thus: "an abject female speaker likens herself and, grotesquely, her hymen to an overblown flower." Introduction to *The Poems of Jane Barker*, 22. Jane Sharp compares the hymen to "a Rose half blown when the bearded leaves are taken away." *The Midwives Book*, 43. I take King's point that Barker is using a "grotesque" genital pun for shock value. In making sense of this moment, I follow Linda Williams, who explores the cinematic genres of pornography, horror, and melodrama "whose non-linear spectacles have centered more directly upon the gross display of the human body." These genre's excessive focus on the "spectacle of a 'sexually saturated' female body" elicits strong bodily responses in spectators. I would contend that Barker's crude pun elicits a similar jolt for her readers. See "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 3, 6.

[62] King, introduction to *The Poems of Jane Barker*, 22-23.

It is from this poem that I take my dissertation's title, "The Overblown Rose." Though using the term "overblown" risks the pejorative, modern sense in which that word might be taken, I nonetheless employ it as a prompt to consider the outsized reactions that chastity (emblematized as the rose in Master and Barker's work) for millennia, has provoked – and, indeed, continues to provoke today in ongoing debates about sexuality, bodily autonomy, and reproductive rights.[63] This dissertation is a plea, then, to attend to the nuanced lived experience of chastity, represented by literary figures; to recognize the pressures that social standards around chastity culture have exerted and still exert; and to call for ownership of our bodily autonomy and narratives.

Chastity as an experience in the works studied throughout this dissertation is often wrapped up with anxious concerns over timing, reproduction, and waste. In this framework, chastity becomes as much an object of suspicion as a product of skepticism. In chapter one, ascertaining how chaste another person may be and whether that chastity is performed correctly and for the appropriate period of time produces tragic consequences, whether permanent or

[63] With regards to seventeenth-century history, it is worth noting the historical contiguity between English and early American discourses of sexuality during the colonial period. See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1-38. Further, the questions about the value of chastity and marriage circulating throughout the early modern era certainly resonate in current debates over bodily autonomy and sexual privacy in today's fraught political climate. To offer some examples, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists offered a Committee Opinion to address increasing requests for surgical procedures under the wide umbrella of "vaginal rejuvenation" – including hymenoplasty – as troubling attempts to recapture (legibly virginal) prepubescence. See American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "Elective Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery," Committee Opinion Number 795, January 2020, https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2020/01/elective-female-genital-cosmetic-surgery. Meanwhile, abstinence-based sexual education continues to be standard practice in the US and has received billions of dollars of funding since 1996. For an overview of abstinence-only sexual education. See Valenti, *The Purity Myth*, 111-20. When the Supreme Court eventually overturned *Roe v. Wade* (an outcome about which Valenti warned her readers) with the 2022 *Dobbs* decision, Justice Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion threatened to undermine legal precedent regarding a whole host of sexual privacy rights, from same-sex intimacy to contraception. See Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, 697 U.S. 215 (2022) at 3 (Thomas, J. concurring opinion). Looking ahead, the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 *Mandate for Leadership* indicates that programs teaching anything but abstinence-based sexual education will essentially be defunded while pursuing *de facto* federal bans on abortion and gender-affirming care. See Roger Severino, "Department of Health and Human Services," in *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, ed. Paul Dans and Steven Groves (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2023): 458-59, 471-75 477.

temporary. In chapter two, skepticism over the value of chastity as opposed to the value of sexual activity provokes a bleak crisis of self. The last chapter's exploration of the problems chaste performances pose ultimately leads to an intensified notion that human sense perception fails in ascertaining certain knowledge.

By virtue of their evasions and aversions, the characters studied in this dissertation – the recalcitrant teenaged daughters Juliet and Moll in chapter one, Suckling's poetic persona as the failed gallant in chapter two, and Barker's spinster avatar Galesia in chapter three – inhabit chastity in a space sometimes quite apart from the expectations of marriage and reproduction. They each temporarily or even perpetually baffle social assumptions about virginity as a transitional stage towards eventual marriage and childbearing.[64] The figures of this study variously exist in gray areas of avoidance, chaste desire, hesitation, disgust, repulsion, demurring. They alternately desire and recoil, yearn and fear. In their stories, chastity can act as a bother, a retreat, a pathologized state, a means of resistance. The voice these figures give to nuanced, subjective experiences of virginity and chastity, abstinence and celibacy demonstrates that chastity and desire intertwine along a spectrum that challenges any notion that both are stable and neatly definable concepts. The authors of this study thus use their characters, poetic personae, and semi-autobiographical figureheads to engage skeptical principles in their explorations of what virginity and chastity mean across the long seventeenth century, with implications for what they mean for us today. Those explorations result in a demonstration of the historic variability of chastity and the long-held difficulty that comes with defining it as an invitation to think critically about the ways that virginity and chastity have been politicized in the

[64] I borrow here Hanne Blank's terminology of "transitional virginity." See *Virgin*, 14-15.

past and in our present moment – not as given truths but as subjective components of our own personal histories and desires that we ourselves might own.

Chapter 1
Seeing and Believing?: Reading the Virgin in Shakespeare and Middleton's Drama

A couple stands before a congregation of family and friends, ready to wed; the father of the bride instructs the officiant to make haste in performing the ceremony. After the officiating friar asks if there are any impediments to the match, the wedding descends into chaos as the groom accuses his bride-to-be of premarital sexual incontinence with another man. In this pivotal scene from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, the comedy veers temporarily towards tragedy. Claudio labels his intended Hero a "rotten orange" and highlights the physical evidence of her deception:

> She's but the sign and semblance of her honor.
> Behold, how like a maid she blushes here!
> Oh, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
> Comes not that blood as modest evidence
> To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
> All you that see her, that she were a maid
> By these exterior shows? But she is none.
> She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.
> Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty. (4.1.32-41)[65]

With a flourish of rhetorical questions, an almost lawyerly Claudio works to demonstrate to the assembled crowd that Hero's blushes, which they might take as evidence of her sexual modesty, in fact prove that she has engaged in premarital sex and infidelity. Claudio unmasks the "sign and semblance of honor," the mere "exterior shows" of Hero's supposed chastity, as proof of her sin, before spurning his bride and leaving her and their guests behind. The friar, for his part, uses his experience as evidence to counter Claudio's mistaken reading and to reassure Hero's distraught father Leonato: "I have marked / A thousand blushing apparitions / To start into her face a thousand innocent shames" (4.1.156-59). He dares Leonato not to trust "my observations, /

[65] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: The Essential Plays/The Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015).

Which with experimental seal doth warrant / The tenor of my book," let alone the backing provided by the friar's "age," "reverence," "calling," and "divinity" (4.1.163-66). After Claudio's quick judgment and even quicker exit, the friar adds his own extensive criteria for discerning the truth, even if Claudio, trusting his own sight, finds a very different truth about Hero.

The matter of correctly or incorrectly reading the virginal body is intertwined with a fundamental skeptical question regarding the reliability of the senses and what counts as a criterion for truth. For, even with all of Claudio's conviction, the audience knows that his perception is mistaken. Don John – the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro – sought revenge on Don Pedro by trying to ruin the match Don Pedro brokered between his associate Claudio and Hero. Don John's follower Borachio offered to orchestrate a tryst between himself and Hero's amorous maid Margaret (a kind of body-double for Hero herself) in the window of Hero's chamber, to be witnessed in the dark by Claudio and his friends below. The verbal proof of Don John's warning about the encounter in addition to the visual "proof" of the supposed tryst (obscured by the dark night, and in fact, taking place entirely off stage) precipitate this crisis point in the play. In an ironic twist, Claudio's sense perception, the basis upon which he forms his opinion of Hero's sexual immodesty, proves most flawed when he acts most self-assured. As this example from *Much Ado* attests, virginity – upon which marriage negotiations, succession plans, and inheritance depend – presents as difficult to define and even more difficult to prove within Shakespeare's dramatic oeuvre.[66] I would add, in agreement with Amy Kenny, that this difficulty provokes an anxiety closely related to broader concerns about "the epistemological apprehension around women's secretive interiors." The "uncertainty of corroborating virginity,"

[66] Shakespeare further explores that theme in the fourth act of *Troilus and Cressida*, in which Cressida's refusal of Ulysses' kiss prompts him to exclaim that her chastity belies sexual wiles evident in her body.

especially resulting from disagreement among early modern anatomists as to the function of the hymen and its ability to signify virginity, offers one such example of that anxiety.[67] The question of reading the virgin that Claudio raises will resonate throughout this chapter's exploration of *Romeo and Juliet*, probably composed in 1595 (several years before *Much Ado* most likely premiered). The chapter will further explore the ways that one of Shakespeare's successors, Thomas Middleton, escalates that same question in his city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (c. 1613).

The denunciation of the virgin Hero as anything but virginal reflects and refracts a pivotal moment in *Romeo and Juliet*. At the height of the tragedy's third act, Juliet – who has secretly married and consummated her relationship with Romeo of the rival Montague house – demurs when her parents demand that she marry another man, Paris. Capulet berates his only child, labelling her supposed sexual aversion as illness. Her reluctance to wed is perceived as pathological virginity, contrasting with Juliet's status as a desiring, married subject. Through her inwardly held feelings and romantic attachments, Juliet joins a host of early modern stage characters that critics like Catherine Belsey and Francis Barker argue inaugurate modern subjectivity.[68] While *Much Ado* asks questions about how far people may be deceived by outside

[67] See pp. 7-8 fn 23 of this dissertation's introduction.

[68] Catherine Belsey notes that the power of silence and secrecy indicate of a new kind of subjectivity in early modern drama quite apart from the medieval morality play. In *The Spanish Tragedy* (ca. 1590), she maintains that "Hieronimo finally bites out his own tongue, repudiating the right which defines the subject, the right of speech itself." *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), 75. Francis Barker cites Samuel Pepys' purchase and burning of the erotic text *L'escholle des filles*, and his report of it in his diary, as an example of emergent modern bourgeois subjectivity. The diary entry, "as its epistemological principle grasps the outer world as an accessible transparency, recedes from that world towards an inner location where the soul…apparently comes to fill the space of meaning and desire." *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 7. Though I appreciate critics like Elizabeth Hanson who offer some continuity of the early modern self's formation with the medieval moment. Hanson cautions that "If we go looking for the modern subject we will find signs of this 'emergence' everywhere, but will be hard pressed to seize upon either the time and place of his birth or his definitive full-dress instantiation…" She cites, for example, the ways that the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215's ban on clergy participation in trial by ordeal as a means of discovering proof. I tend to agree with Hanson's note that "what is new

forces, *Romeo and Juliet* asks how individuals and communities might deceive themselves by trusting too readily in appearances. *Romeo and Juliet*'s skeptical undercurrent evinces gaps in perception and understanding, as well as the inscrutability of other minds, less by characters' ruminations than by their reactions to make sense of what they see. By virtue of its engagement with paradoxes, like the live Juliet supposed dead in the family tomb, *Romeo and Juliet* probes whether sight leads to belief. The tidy explanations at the play's end seem to suggest that bodies can ultimately be read and that, to attain knowledge about others' subjective experiences and motivations, one only need ask the correct questions and make the proper observations.[69] But the insufficiency of sight and interpretation especially with regard to the virginal body throughout the play paves the way for the sort of hyperbolic skepticism motivating the works that round out this dissertation's later chapters.

This chapter will place *Romeo and Juliet* amid a roster of Shakespeare's plays that have gained substantial critical attention for their engagement with various strands of skeptical philosophy.[70] Juliet figures as a forerunner for characters like Hero, though in the obverse. The

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and catastrophic in the Renaissance is…the usually fearful, even paranoid recognition that interiority can give the subject leverage against his world." *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12-13, 16.

[69] My reading chimes with Richard Strier's examination of skepticism in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*. He studies Antipholus of Syracuse's arrival at Cartesian common sense to resolve the play's problems; insists that the other minds problem in *Othello* is really more concerned with Iago's mind than Desdemona's; and notes that Hamlet's disclosures to Horatio contradict the sense that "that within" Hamlet is unknowable. He concludes that Shakespeare "was indeed a Cartesian skeptic…one who believed that the senses, corrected as necessary by reason and judgment, are reliable, and that our minds can know the world and—to at least the same extent that we can know ourselves—other people." *Shakespearean Issues: Agency, Skepticism, and Other Puzzles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 227.

[70] There are a familiar cast of characters and group of plays that critics often turn to when studying Shakespeare and skepticism. *Hamlet* takes top billing, but *Othello*, *King Lear*, *The Winter's Tale*, and round out the cast. The inclusion of *Othello* in this list as well as *The Winter's Tale* demonstrates that scholars have considered the intertwining of skeptical philosophy and chastity on Shakespeare's stage. Graham Bradshaw focuses on *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Macbeth* in *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987). Millicent Bell chiefly studies *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* in *Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). Benjamin Bertram, in his study of early modern English skepticism, analyzes *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*. See *The Time Is Out of Joint: Skepticism in Shakespeare's England* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2004). *Troilus and Cressida* features in William M. Hamlin's *Tragedy*

Capulets and Paris misinterpret the secret bride Juliet's grief for her cousin Tybalt's death and her husband Romeo's banishment. Though she has consummated her marriage, Juliet presents to her parents as disobedient and even pathologically virginal. In that, she joins other female characters in Shakespeare's corpus whose bodies and sexual choices are pathologized under the label of greensickness, an early modern ailment said to affect virginal young women, from Marina in *Pericles* to the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[71] This act of pathologizing virginity appears at odds with a culture that places a premium on female chastity, an especially valued quality in a daughter of marriageable age. The appearance of problematic virgins across a number of Shakespeare's plays –which provides pretexts for marriages that end comedies happily and tragedies in misery – bolsters the re-articulation of an age-old cultural preoccupation with controlling virginity and brokering marriage. More narrowly, characters' inability to specifically read the virginal body amid their haste to arrange marriage evinces what the scholars of this dissertation's introduction have demonstrated: that virginity is an ill-defined, labile social construct, and yet incredibly consequential all the same.

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and Scepticism. In an updated edition, Stanley Cavell includes *Macbeth* among *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, and *The Winter's Tale* in *Disowning Knowledge In Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Suzanne M. Tartamella explores the nexus of skepticism and poetic praise in *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the Sonnets in *Rethinking Shakespeare's Skepticism: The Aesthetics of Doubt in the Sonnets and Plays* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014). Anita Gilman Sherman's study of seventeenth-century skepticism includes Shakespeare's *The Phoenix and The Turtle*. See *Skepticism in Early Modern English Literature: The Problems and Pleasures of Doubt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). *Hamlet* provides a point of departure for Lauren Robertson's *Entertaining Uncertainty in the Early Modern Theater: Stage Spectacle and Audience Response* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), Elizabeth Hanson's *Discovering the Subject*, Anita Gilman Sherman's *Skepticism in Early Modern English Literature*, and recently Robertson's *Entertaining Uncertainty*. Though Robertson does helpfully include *Romeo and Juliet* by highlighting that Friar Laurence's "explanation of the sleeping draught's physiological effects" serves as "an interpretive guide to the apparently dead body" of Juliet in her discussion of the uncertainty spawned by stage corpses. See *Entertaining Uncertainty*, 38.

[71] See Jessica C. Murphy, "Greensickness and Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare/Sex: Contemporary Readings in Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Jennifer Drouin (London: Arden Shakespeare Centre, 2020), 14-15, 17-20. Kenny catalogues other possible references to the ailment, including Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Viola's imagined sister in her speech to Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, and Margaret's reference to the "qualm" in conversation with Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. See *Humoral Wombs*, 33-34.

This chapter will then explore Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (c. 1613) to underscore the ways that the concerns over correctly perceiving and defining virginity in Shakespeare's work escalate in Middleton's. In his city comedy with tragicomic elements, Middleton offers a topsy-turvy portrait of a social world whose characters aspire to outward displays of sexual continence, but where sexual incontinence dominates. Moll Yellowhammer, whose story directly echoes Juliet's, finds herself rebelling against her parents who would have her marry the aptly named Sir Walter Whorehound (a notorious philanderer) in order to pursue a chaste, romantic love with Touchwood Junior. Her parents' misreading of her virginal body seems more willful; their attitudes towards marriage appear more determinedly mercenary than the Capulets'. Middleton explodes the skeptical questions at play in Shakespeare's work by undercutting his audience's confidence that signifiers of sexual propriety relate to a truthful sign. The surging skeptical philosophical crisis of the seventeenth century is evident in Middleton's escalatory drama. I contend that misreading the virgin in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Chaste Maid* both demonstrates an increasing skeptical concern with the reliability of sense perception and challenges conventional wisdom of determining a virgin's sexual status.

1. Reading Bodies in *Romeo and Juliet*

Before attending to reading Juliet and her virginity specifically, I offer here context for *Romeo and Juliet*'s broad preoccupation with the reliability of the visual field and the instability of interpreting bodily signs. Though the play begins in a declarative mode in a Prologue that lays out its large themes and time scale, and even apportions blame for the tragedy's devastating end, the brawl between Montague and Capulet servants introduces a note of ambiguity. Chiefly, it offers a microcosm of the concern with the correct interpretation of bodily signs that will dominate *Romeo and Juliet*. Samson, a Capulet servant, decides to bite his thumb at the servants

of the rival Montagues as a rude gesture of "disgrace to them if they bear it" (1.1.39).[72] A discussion among the servingmen follows on how one ought to read – and how far one might be liable for – certain corporeal gestures:

> ABRAHAM Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
> SAMSON I do bite my thumb, sir.
> ABRAHAM Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
> SAMSON *[aside to* GREGORY*]* Is the law of our side if I say "Ay"?
> GREGORY *[aside to* SAMSON*]* No.
> SAMSON —No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you sir; but I do bite my thumb, sir. (1.1.40-46)

Samson has clearly stated his intention in biting his thumb – as a sign of disrespect. Abraham clearly observes that gesture, asking twice to verify his intent as if to invite Samson to refute the insult. By questioning Gregory about their liability if he concedes to his intention, Samson demonstrates that he knows that possibly dire consequences might result from this gesture. Given Gregory's emphatic answer that, no, the law might not look kindly on gestures that could instigate violence, Samson strengthens his rhetoric to decouple the sign of biting his thumb from its signification, despite the obviousness of biting his thumb. The attempt at deflection fails and a brawl between the factions inevitably ensues. This moment stages in comic terms an attempt to undermine faith in an obvious bodily sign and reverberates in more tragic terms throughout *Romeo and Juliet*'s central love story. In particular, the Montagues' and Capulets' inability or unwillingness to properly read and interpret their children's behavior contributes extensively to Romeo and Juliet's demise.[73]

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[72] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: The Essential Plays/The Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015). All parenthetical citations derive from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

[73] The Prologue highlights the Montagues' and Capulets' share of the blame for their children's deaths, as it previews how the play depicts "the continuance of their parents' rage— / Which, but their children's end, naught could remove" (10-11).

The skeptical question of how one ought to read other people, and whether knowledge from that perception might be reliable, extends beyond Samson's thumb-biting. In another scene during the play's first act, the Montagues fail to fully read their own son's "symptoms" of what would be recognizable to an early modern audience as love melancholy. They ask his contemporary Benvolio what causes Romeo's sadness when he appears like a case out of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, displaying signs of sleeplessness (the pre-dawn waking Benvolio describes before Romeo's first lovelorn appearance) and despair in "tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew" (1.1.127).[74] Montague offers a dire picture, fearing that his son will continue to suffer: "Black and portentous must this humor prove, / Unless good counsel may the cause remove" (1.1.136-37). Benvolio, bewildered, asks "My noble uncle, do you know the cause?" (1.1.138). Montague offers a telling, resigned response: "I neither know it nor can learn of him" (1.1.139). Perhaps this line reflects sheer interpretative folly on the Montagues' part – how could they not recognize a case of love melancholy so obvious? Yet there remains the possibility that they understand signs and symptoms to be more complicated than they initially appear, pointing to subjective states that cannot be so easily accessed. Their error could arise, then, from deputizing Benvolio to do the interpretative work that they themselves should undertake as parents, if we are to take the patriarchal model that the Capulets, Paris, and, to an extent, Prince Escalus espouse as the standard of looking after one's dependents in the play world. While we may neither know or learn of the Montagues' failures to decipher the underlying cause of the symptoms that Romeo displays, it is striking that his tears are met with

[74] As Burton puts it, love-sick people "pine away, and look ill with waking, cares, sighs…with groans, griefs, sadness, dullness…want of appetite, etc." *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 3.2.3 (p. 133).

curiosity. Later, Juliet's own tears meet with condemnation, a fleeting diagnosis of sexual pathology, and the threat of abandonment.

2. Sick and Green: Misreading the Virgin and the Anxiety of Reproduction in Verona

Before their fateful meeting at the Capulet feast when Romeo enters Juliet's orbit, another marital match is afoot. Capulet and Paris' negotiations for a marriage between Paris and Juliet have preceded the play's action. Act 2, Scene 1 opens *in medias res* as the pair converse about the Montague and Capulet families' feud. Paris interrupts quickly to ask, "But now, my Lord, what say you to my suit?" (1.2.6). In his anaphoric reply, Capulet answers, "But saying o'er what I have said before: / My child is yet a stranger in the world" (1.2.7-8). As Juliet is not yet fourteen, Capulet urges patience in his decisive couplet: "Let two more summers wither in their pride / Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride" (1.2.10-11). This question of "ripeness," or when adolescents arrive at sexual maturity, was a vexed one in the early modern period, as Sarah Toulalan has demonstrated. While the average age of marriage remained in the late twenties throughout the early modern era, it was not entirely unusual for aristocratic children to wed in their early teens. What makes *Romeo and Juliet* unusual, however, is its characters' insistence on cohabitation and reproduction for the thirteen-year-old Juliet; most couples who married in their early teenaged years delayed both.[75]

Critics like Ursula Potter have speculated a biographical motivation underlying Shakespeare's decision to pinpoint Juliet's age to thirteen; his eldest daughter, Susanna, would

[75] For more on the age of marriage, see David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 312. For evidence of delayed cohabitation and delayed reproduction, see Sarah Toulalan, "'Unripe' Bodies: Children and Sex in Early Modern England," in *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), esp. 138-40.

have been about fourteen in 1597, when the First Quarto (Q1) of the tragedy was published.[76] We cannot definitively know why Shakespeare lowered Juliet's age from that in his source text, Arthur Brooke's 1562 narrative poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, whose titular heroine is sixteen. Yet Juliet's young age does intensify the play's broader thematic concern with matters of timing – from the precise run-time of "two hours' traffic" onstage noted in the prologue to Friar Laurence's calculus of when the sleeping draught's effects will wear off. The prominence of questions of the appropriate timing of marriage and motherhood certainly reflect this preoccupation.[77] While Paris insists that girls in Verona "younger than she are happy mothers made" (a piece of advice that Lady Capulet will echo nearly verbatim to Juliet in the next scene), Capulet maintains that "too soon marred are those so early made" (1.2.12, 13). Calculating from Lady Capulet's own admission, she was one such mother – giving insight, perhaps, into Capulet's remark, even tinging it with admitted retrospective concern over his own wife or their marriage. Juliet's young age, then, heightens the stakes of marriage and motherhood in Verona.

So too does Juliet's status as only child. Capulet goes on to remark twice that Juliet is his sole surviving child: "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she; / She's the hopeful lady of my earth" (1.2.14-15). These lines encompass the possibility that he either had ambitions that met with an end, or, that the Capulets had other children who perished. The only other child figure that we learn of besides Juliet in the Nurse's memories is the Nurse's own daughter Susan – Juliet's onetime contemporary who died young. "Well, Susan is with God; / She was too good

[76] Ursula A. Potter, *The Unruly Womb in Early Modern Drama: Plotting Women's Biology on the Stage* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2019), 103. For more on the documentary evidence regarding Shakespeare's children's births, see Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 93-94.
[77] For an overview of critical attempts to plot in time the events of the tragedy, see G. Thomas Tanselle, "Time in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1964): 349-61.

for me," laments the Nurse (1.3.20-22). Taken all together, these examples highlight how the womb and the tomb are often united within the tragedy, as Friar Laurence emphasizes when he contemplates the variety of life-giving and life-ending plants: "The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb; / What is her burying grave, that is her womb" (2.2.9-10). The play circles back to the oneness of life and death, and the fragility of the lineage and inheritance of its characters. While the lines cited above about Juliet being Capulet's only child do not appear in Q1, they certainly add a note of poignancy to Capulet's reluctance to give away his daughter in marriage too soon. Juliet is all that Capulet has in the world; to risk "marring" her with too-early marriage is intolerable to him. Nonetheless, Capulet does not entirely discourage Paris from his suit, instead instructing,

> woo her, gentle, Paris; get her heart—
> My will to her consent is but a part—
> And, she agreed, within her scope of choice
> Lies my consent and fair-according voice. (1.2.16-19)

Capulet's encouragement is predicated on his insistence that Juliet herself must ultimately choose a husband from a number of suitors that her father finds acceptable.

In point of fact, Capulet reminds Paris of Paris' own "scope of choice," too. Inviting Paris to the feast he plans to host that evening, Capulet suggests that Paris "Hear all, all see, / And like her most whose merit most shall be; / Which one more view, of many, mine being one, / May stand in number, though in reck'ning none" (1.2.30-33). Capulet's advice here anticipates Benvolio's admonishment to Romeo later on in this scene. Benvolio likewise appeals to Romeo that he use his sense perception to weigh whether or not another lady might stand in his esteem compared to Rosaline, Romeo's beloved who has scorned him to maintain her chastity:

> Tut, you saw her fair, none else being by,
> Herself poised with herself in either eye;
> But in that crystal scales let there be weighed

Your lady's love against some other maid. (1.2.97-100)

Both Capulet and Benvolio insist on the senses' central importance to forming good judgments in matters of the heart. Juliet's father registers the unpredictable alchemy of attraction on sight, in keeping with his emphasis on experience and relatively free choice as young people consider their marital options. Yet his stunning reversal of course with Juliet, and his eventual inability or unwillingness to correctly "hear all, all see" when it comes to the signs of her discomfort with the proposed match of Paris, undermines the notion the audience has of Capulet as a benign patriarch. The senses and judgments that he appeals to in conversation with Paris prove fallible, ironically, within himself.

Like her husband, Lady Capulet also encourages Juliet to rely on her sensory experience at the feast to help her in her choice, though Lady Capulet trains her gaze on Paris. Emphasizing Paris' physical characteristics that recommend him for a husband, she instructs Juliet to "Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face, / And find delight writ there with beauty's pen" (1.3.83-84). She continues her exhortation: "Examine every married lineament, / And see how one another lends content" (1.3.85-86). Lady Capulet's lines reflect the harmony she observes in Paris' features. Her rhyming couplets underscore the harmony of matrimony; two complementary halves come together both in verse and in marriage alike. While she largely focuses on surface observation, Lady Capulet nonetheless urges Juliet towards a thorough search and towards interpretation: "what obscured in this fair volume lies / Find written in the margin of his eyes" (1.3.87-88). By using her perception from this direct encounter, Lady Capulet intimates, Juliet will ultimately come to understand that she will be an ornament to her husband: "This precious book of love, this unbound lover / To beautify him only lacks a cover" (1.3.89-90). Beyond that subordinate status, and against the patriarchal imperative to arranged marriage

that she seems to espouse, Lady Capulet paints a picture of mutuality in the arrangement with Paris. She concludes "So shall you share all that he doth possess / By having him, making yourself no less" (1.3.95-96). Such an assessment is theologically sound, as marriage unites two spouses in one flesh. A companionate marriage rooted in mutuality is the standard to which Lady Capulet aspires – and which she employs to persuade her daughter. Yet the reality of women's subordination under the common law doctrine of coverture (making man and wife one legal person and affording certain rights only to the husband) complicates Lady Capulet's notion of a complete equality between spouses.[78]

Further, Lady Capulet seems unconcerned by her daughter's young age at this proposed marriage. In her conversation with Juliet, Lady Capulet notes that "Younger than you / Here in Verona, ladies of esteem, / Are made already mothers," indicating too that "by my count / I was your mother much upon these years / That you are now a maid" (1.3.71-5). Bringing up her own marital and maternal history, Lady Capulet highlights that she was a wedded mother in her early teens.[79] As a result, Juliet's virginity is outside of the bounds of an established social norm, which thus renders her unmarried status problematic. Lady Capulet clearly lays out for Juliet an expectation for virginity to be transitional in this play world. The Nurse's quip about her own "maidenhead" reaffirms Lady Capulet's advice to her daughter; exasperated by Juliet's delay to begin this all-important discussion, the Nurse swears "by my maidenhead at twelve year old, / I

[78] Mendelson and Crawford concisely summarize coverture: "Man and wife were one person, and that person was the husband…The implications of the doctrine of coverture—the view that the husband and wife were one person at law—affected married women in various ways. The law's protection of wives was limited. For crimes known as *male in se*—treason, keeping a brothel, murder—married women were to answer for themselves. As a husband was legally responsible for his wife, coverture placed her in the same category as children, wards, lunatics, idiots, and outlaws. A wife had few legal rights over her body in relation to her husband." See *Women in Early Modern England*, 37. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870 (33 & 34 Vict. c. 93) finally legally entitled married women to their own earnings and to the inheritance of property.

[79] Alison Findlay has demonstrated in her summary of the critical discussion around Lady Capulet's age, the play's treatment of Lady Capulet, as variously a young mother or old lady, calls into question this calculus. See *Women in Shakespeare: A Directory* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014), 66-67.

bade her come" (1.3.2-3). The Nurse implies here that she can trace the expiration date of her virginity to twelve years of age. Both of the maternal figures in Juliet's life, then, even across lines of social rank, encourage her towards early marriage and motherhood alike.

Juliet's response to her nurse and mother's attempts to encourage her to marry is temperate and obedient: "I'll look to like, if looking liking move; / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (1.3.99-101). Her dutiful answer underscores Juliet's proper performance of filial piety and her willingness to (at least appear) to be moved. Initially, when her mother asked her about her inclination towards marriage, Juliet replies "It is an hour that I dream not of" (1.3.68). While Juliet claims that marriage is an "honor that I dream not of" in Q1 (3.59), in the second quarto (Q2) she insists that marriage is an "*hour* that I dream not of" (1.3.69, italics mine).[80] The latter reading, reproduced also in the 1623 First Folio as "houre," consolidates *Romeo and Juliet*'s concern over temporality.[81] That question of timing reflects Capulet's and indeed the play's larger anxiety about "ripeness," another way of putting sexual maturity in preparation for matrimony.[82]

That anxiety affects how other young women are spoken about in the play; Lady Capulet and the Nurse are not the only ones to encourage marriage and Juliet is not the only young woman whose virginity meets with others' scrutiny over a purported "waste" of procreative potential. In a voice not unlike that featured in the initial poems in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*

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[80] The complete Q1 and Q2 texts are available in the digital edition of *The Norton Shakespeare: The Essential Plays/The Sonnets*.

[81] William Shakespeare, *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies* (London: Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623), 56.

[82] Adonis' apology to Venus in Shakespeare's eponymous poem also encapsulates concerns about both carnal and self-knowledge, and how both might not be possible without appropriate temporal maturation: "'Fair queen,' quoth he, 'if any love you owe me, / Measure my strangeness with my unripe years: / Before I know myself, seek not to know me" (524-25). *Venus and Adonis*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 171-236. My thanks to Rebecca Rush for highlighting this connection.

(published in 1609, though circulating earlier in manuscript), Romeo himself complains that his first beloved Rosaline's chastity will waste her beauty because it prevents her from procreating. He laments that she "in that sparing makes huge waste: / For beauty starved with her severity / Cuts beauty off from all posterity" (1.1.213-15).[83] The form of Romeo's speech supports its content: by switching from blank verse to rhyming couplets, Romeo creates a poetics of pairing up, one that resists Rosaline's vow to remain perpetually single (and, by extension, not bear children). Romeo's rhyming couplets reappear in the embedded sonnet that he and Juliet share when they first meet and fall in love at the Capulets' feast in Act 1, Scene 4. The reverberating formal echo of rhyme reinforces the emphasis Romeo places in the notion of figurative and literal coupling, as the sonnet shared with Juliet gestures towards the holy and profane aspects of sexual love in its discussion of kissing, saintliness, and sinning (1.4.204-18).

Though procreation remains central to *Romeo and Juliet*'s preoccupation with virginity, the sexual acts often envisaged throughout the play do not lend themselves towards reproduction. Mercutio, for example, in his noteworthy "Queen Mab" speech concludes with one final image of Mab as "the hag, when maids lie on their backs, / That presses them, and learns them first to bear, / Making them women of good carriage" (1.4.90-92). This image, in its instructional capacity, figures Mab almost as a shadow Nurse, who takes pleasure in repeatedly referencing her late husband's erstwhile jokes that Juliet will be expected to "fall backward" in bed for her eventual husband-to-be (1.3.43-45; 57-59). Romeo accuses Mercutio of talking of "nothing" (both talking idly, and talking of female genitalia in the punning sense, as Gordon Williams

[83] Romeo's poetic figuration that mingles language of "waste," posterity, and death chimes in particular with Shakespeare's Sonnet 4 ("Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend"). See William Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: The Essential Plays/The Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 1799.

notes).[84] Mercutio responds with a reference to another kind of procreation: "True, I talk of dreams, / Which are the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy" (1.4.94-96).[85] Here, procreation amounts to quite literally nothing, airy fantasies without substance.

Even though Mercutio seems to eventually push the lovelorn Romeo towards penetration – "to sink [in love's burden] should you burden love" and to "prick love for pricking" – Romeo instead imagines himself as penetrated, not just once, but twice (1.3.21, 26). He complains "I am too sore empiercèd with [Cupid's] shaft," and insists that love is "too rough, / Too rude, too boist'rous, and it pricks like thorn" (1.4.17, 23-24). While critics like Jonathan Goldberg have highlighted the queer potentiality of Romeo and Mercutio's relationship (a potentiality that theater practitioners have explored on stage), and the ways that Rosaline might translate as the masculine "fair youth" of Shakespeare's sonnets, it is likewise important to stress the queer configurations of Romeo's own sexual imagination, one that does not consistently align with procreative imperatives.[86]

What is clear is that in Romeo's estimation of Rosaline's chastity, the specter of reproduction looms large in a way that it does not when he considers his own sexuality. What Romeo envisions for himself – pleasurable penetration – and what he envisions for the women he loves differs, underscoring the play's sexual double standard. Even his discussion of Juliet is

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[84] Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), 2.960.
[85] Gordon Williams, *Shakespeare's Sexual Language: A Glossary* (London: Continuum, 2005), 219.
[86] See Jonathan Goldberg, "*Romeo and Juliet*'s Open Rs," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 218-35. Ian Munro notes that "[Baz] Luhrman's film was notable for foregrounding the homoerotic aspect of Romeo and Mercutio's relationship, a conjecture that had been visible since at least 1973, when Terry Hands's Royal Shakespeare Company production played up Mercutio's misogyny and thwarted affection for Romeo via a life-size female doll that he dismembers. Such elements have since become a standard, even expected, aspect of productions and adaptations – see, for example, Joe Calarco's 1998 play *Shakespeare's R&J*, in which four teenage boys at a military boarding school stage a play for each other as a vehicle for their forbidden desires." "Performance History," in *Romeo and Juliet: A Critical Reader*, ed. Julia Reinhard Lupton (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 65.

not immune to this kind of discourse. Observing Juliet on her balcony after the pair first meet at Capulets' feast, he likens Juliet to the sun, exhorting her to

> kill the envious moon,
> Who is already sick and pale with grief
> That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.
> Be not her maid, since she is envious;
> Her vestal livery is but sick and green,
> And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off. (2.1.46-51)

Romeo here figures Juliet's chastity in terms of illness, rather than deploying the idiom of militaristic triumph that he once used when describing Rosaline as well armed against the onslaught of Cupid's charms (1.2.205). While his linguistic configurations differ, portions of Romeo's rhetoric echo Capulet's in both his description of Rosaline and Juliet. Romeo's purported concern with procreation in his lament for Rosaline's choice to remain chaste and childless chimes with his equation of the chaste devotees of the moon (Diana's symbol) as "sick and green." The linguistic echo with greensickness – the term Capulet will apply to Juliet when she demurs at the prospect of marrying Paris – is tempting to consider. Yet Romeo's main preoccupation is with the chaste goddess' envy of Juliet's vitality and beauty that, in Romeo's estimation, must be in service of her eventual loss of virginity. In this way, Romeo's address fits within the play's figuration of chastity as something to be "cast off." To borrow Montaigne's formulation of the impossible sexual double standard of women's maintenance of their virtue,

> Nous…les voulons saines, vigoreuses, en bon point, bien nourries, et chastes ensemble, c'est à dire et chaudes et froides.
>
> We…want them to be healthy, vigorous, plump, well-nourished, and chaste at the same time: that is to say, both hot and cold.[87]

The double standard that Montaigne observes pervades in the context of *Romeo and Juliet*. Rosaline's virginity is met with Romeo's incredulous frustration; Juliet's protected virginal

[87] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 3.95-6; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 650.

status only extends so far in a social environment in which matrimony takes top priority (even if mismatched with Shakespeare's culture's broader sexual realities). After Juliet has secretly married, her sexual fidelity to Romeo and inability to countenance being given to another man will be misread and pathologized as a virgin's disobedience. While Juliet was disobedient in secretly marrying, she ironically remained wholly obedient not just to the precepts of the Church to wed before engaging in sexual intercourse but also to the imperative to wed, and wed soon.

Capulet's initial expressions of hesitance towards the marriage between Paris and Juliet eventually gives way to his hastening the match. He has no lines between the feast in Act 1, Scene 4 and Act 3, Scene 4, when he decides that Juliet will wed Paris. In the interval, the play's action has burst: Romeo and Juliet have fallen in love at the feast and plan to secretly marry. A street brawl results in Tybalt's slaying of Mercutio, and Romeo's retributive killing of Tybalt, precipitating Romeo's banishment from Verona. While Capulet remains unaware of his daughter and Romeo's attachment, he has nonetheless silently borne witness to the aftermath of Tybalt's cataclysmic murder. That silence pervades in the way that Capulet's motivation for his change of heart regarding Juliet and Paris' match goes unarticulated. Initially, Capulet continues a modified tack of delay, informing Paris that "Things have fall'n out, sir, so unluckily / That we have had no time to move our daughter" (3.4.1-2). While previously he had left Paris the task of wooing her, here Capulet presents matters in a different light. Before, he had indicated that his "will to her consent is but a part," yet now Capulet and his wife appear to want to direct Juliet's will entirely (1.2.17). He acknowledges the limitations of his influence, nonetheless, to plead Paris' case by gesturing both to Juliet's grief – "she loved her kinsman Tybalt dearly" – and also to the late hour – "she'll not come down tonight" (3.4.3, 5). He even offers a similar excuse for himself – "but for your company / I would have been abed an hour ago" (3.4.6-7). The hinge between

these various excuses is Capulet's brief, resigned acknowledgment of mortality: "Well, we were born to die" (3.4.4). While an actor could utter these lines to add different shades to Capulet's characterization – to express his shock, sadness, or even to reflect the simmering tensions on view between Tybalt and himself at the feast – what remains constant is the play's preoccupation with timeliness and the inexorability of the life cycle.

As Paris himself articulates it, "These times of woe afford no times to woo" (3.4.8). However, Lady Capulet, so deeply affected by Tybalt's death, still offers Paris a glimmer of encouragement for his suit, promising to "commend" Paris to Juliet and "know her mind early tomorrow" (3.4.9, 10). Whether through his own clipped but profound reflection on the inevitability of death, or taking an example from his wife's determination to pursue the match even from the depths of grief, Capulet changes his mind. Capulet will not just recommend Paris to his daughter but rather instruct her to marry him: "Sir Paris, I will make a *desperate* tender / Of my child's love. / *I think* she will be ruled / In all respects by me; *nay, more*, I doubt it not" (3.4.12-15, emphasis mine). Capulet's multiple qualifiers evince a patriarch unsure of his ability to command his child's obedience.

By making his "desperate tender" in offering Juliet's love up to Paris, Capulet almost has to convince himself not to doubt: the line "I think she will be ruled" indicates some degree of uncertainty in a way that a phrase like "I *know* she will be ruled" would not. The subsequent "nay, more, I doubt it not" paints a portrait of Capulet the doubtful paterfamilias, attempting to talk himself into absolute certainty rather than expressing true conviction. The first strokes of that portrait are painted in the very first act of the play, when Capulet struggles to exert control over Tybalt. Capulet strains to quash Tybalt's disobedient urge to antagonize Romeo at the feast: "It is my will, the which if thou respect, / Show a fair presence, and put off these frowns, / An ill-

beseeming semblance for a feast" (1.4.183-85). Amid Tybalt's disobedience, Capulet labels Tybalt "goodman boy" and exclaims "You are a saucy boy" (1.4.188, 194). His wrath seems best epitomized in the rhetorical question posed to his nephew: "Am I the master here or you?" (1.4.189). Whether in marriage negotiations or in managing his own extended kin, Capulet blunders his way to authority, exerting it on Juliet in a way that draws condemnation from the characters around him. When he goes on to berate an intractable Juliet the Nurse comes to her charge's defense: "You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so," she cries (3.5.169). Capulet's insinuations in response that the Nurse is a prattling drunk – "Utter your gravity o'er a gossip's bowl / For here we need it not" (3.5.173-74) – likewise meet with his wife's disapproval: "You are too hot" (3.5.175). In such a way, Capulet has failed twice over as benevolent patriarch – in not only insulting his daughter, but his servant, too.

Despite their eventual outcry over the manner in which he insists on Juliet and Paris' marriage, Capulet's adherence to the match is absolute. For Paris' part, he attributes the hastiness of the marriage squarely to Capulet. Answering Friar Laurence's protestations that "The time is very short" until the proposed wedding, Paris answers "My father Capulet will have it so" (4.1.1, 2). Again, Friar Laurence expresses discomfort with the match precisely because Paris is unsure about Juliet's mental state: "You say you do not know the lady's mind? / Uneven is the course; I like it not" (4.1.4-5). Of course, Friar Laurence has another ulterior motive to object to the match – he has just married Romeo and Juliet in secret. Nonetheless, his point remains; what distinguishes a forced marriage from merely an arranged one is the consent of each spouse, the "mind" each has to marry the other, which even Capulet insisted upon in the play's earliest scenes. Yet Paris, like Lady Capulet before him, explains that the wedding's purpose is to alleviate Juliet's "immoderate" grief, relaying Capulet's assessment:

her father counts it dangerous
That she do give her sorrow so much sway,
And in his wisdom hastes our marriage
To stop the inundation of her tears,
Which, too much minded by herself alone,
May be put from her by society. (4.1.9-14)

Paris counts Capulet's plan as wisdom despite the fact that, due to her grief, he has "little talk of love" with his intended (4.1.7).

Lady Capulet offers her own justification for her husband's actions. After Romeo and Juliet spend the first night of their marriage together and he flees for Mantua, she enters her daughter's bedchamber to announce that Capulet has arranged the match between her and Paris. She exclaims to Juliet "Well, well, thou hast a careful father, child; / One who, to put thee from thy heaviness, / Hath sorted out a sudden day of joy. / That thou expects not, nor I looked not for" (3.5.107-10). Again, ambiguity colors this explication. Lady Capulet fills in an interpretative gap by offering a motivation for Capulet's sudden change of heart – that he wishes to cheer his daughter amid her grief. Her own feelings on the matter remain murky. She notes that she "looked not for" this quick marriage; it is a statement of fact that she did not expect the development. While there may be a hint here that she did not expect her husband to take this plan into action, Lady Capulet does not entirely deny her own role in helping the marriage arrangement come to pass. After all, she had earlier encouraged Paris. While she did not outright tell him that she would broker the marriage (which would not be entirely Lady Capulet's place), she nonetheless gave him hope by promising to speak well of him and ascertain Juliet's thoughts as swiftly as possible. Either Lady Capulet is disingenuous when she tells her daughter she did not look for the match or she expresses some surprise at the arrangement coming to fruition after her husband's prior dithering.

Juliet's reaction is, understandably, one of bewilderment, fear, and sadness. As she cannot reveal that she is already married to Romeo (Tybalt's murderer from the enemy house no less), she protests, "I wonder at this haste, that I must wed / Ere he that should be husband comes to woo" (3.5.118-19). Juliet urges following the proper steps of wooing, betrothal, and marriage, the expected transitional progression from maid to wife. Of course, she has already followed that trajectory, but on her own terms, when she was wooed by, became engaged to, and wed Romeo. The irony compounds as Juliet's own irregularity (of not following her parents' wishes) matches her parents' irregularity of forcing through a marriage without taking the proper, incremental steps towards matrimony. Yet the negotiations continue apace with unspoken motivations, closely guarded secrets, and prompt an outburst that will continue to spur the play's tragedy.

Misinterpreting the cause behind Juliet's ensuing tears as solely sorrow for her deceased cousin, Capulet nonetheless reads Juliet's sadness for Tybalt as disproportionate. He compares her emotional distress to a storm that "Without a sudden calm will overset / Thy tempest-tossèd body" (3.5.136-37). He aims to provide that sudden calming effect with the news of the marriage he has brokered, which he labels as he and his wife's "decree" (3.5.139). Capulet's use of that particular word makes no space for dissent; his order is law. That Juliet resists the plan prompts a near apoplectic reaction in her father, particularly because the match is an aspirational one. As Capulet exclaims, "Doth she not count her blessed, / Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought / So worthy a gentleman to be her bride?" (3.5.143-45). The concern that Capulet initially displayed for Juliet's well-being, which the critics cited below are quick to label as tremendous paternal care, is quickly superseded by his wrath at her disobedience in a flickering moment where he pathologizes his daughter.

Capulet issues an ultimatum to Juliet to wed Paris, hurtling barbs that include a label of greensickness:

> Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,
> But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next
> To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
> Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.
> Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage,
> You tallow face! (3.4.152-57)

Helen King offers a succinct definition of greensickness as a "historical condition involving lack of menstruation, dietary disturbances, altered skin colour and general weakness once thought to affect, almost exclusively, young girls at puberty."[88] While modern medicine understands this condition as a type of iron deficiency anemia, cured easily enough with iron supplements, early modern medical practitioners offered contesting remedies. Among a variety of cures, marriage presented itself as an attractive option. As King powerfully summarizes, "marriage is simply the only socially acceptable situation in which the virgin's body can be put under proper male control, opened, entered and seeded. It is also presented as the *easiest* way to cure the condition."[89] Even though medical advice suggested treatments ranging from bloodletting and herbal remedies to clysters (enemas) and purgatives (laxatives) to combat greensickness, and though certain practitioners warned against sexual intercourse to alleviate the disease's symptoms, the marriage cure still loomed large in the cultural imagination.[90] As in popular drama, ballads like "A Remedy for the Green Sickness" (1678-1680), the "Maids Lamentation" (1672-1696), and "The Maids Complaint for Want of a Dil Doul" (1681-1684) offered a similar

[88] King, *The Disease of Virgins*, 1.
[89] King, *The Disease of Virgins*, 79.
[90] For examples of these various cures, see Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives* (London: Peter Cole, 1662), 100-103. See also Sharp, *The Midwives Book,* 198. Both Culpeper and Sharp issue cautions about sexual intercourse as a cure for greensickness. See Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 106 and Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 200.

discourse of the disease that relied on the marriage cure as a trope, often to poke fun at young women's sexuality. [91]

Capulet's above order, preserved in Q2 of *Romeo and Juliet* and in the First Folio edition thereafter, marks a decided escalation from Q1's rendering of the scene. In Q1, Capulet exclaims, "Out, you green-sickness baggage! Out, you tallow face!" (14.119).[92] The difference between "baggage" and "carrion" probes at the logical inconsistencies inherent in the greensickness diagnosis. "Baggage," though it took on more playful connotations over the course of the seventeenth century, was initially used in reference to women who were not only "worthless" or "good-for nothing" but also who were given to "disreputable or immoral" living.[93] In practice, "baggage" could sometimes serve as a colloquialism for "whore," while "carrion" denotes dead flesh.[94] Troubling meanings coalesce around each word. To be greensick and baggage is a contradiction in terms; one cannot be so virginal as to be a whore. Through his use of "baggage," Capulet might well emphasize Juliet's sheer disobedience, but the term's sexualized meaning is highlighted when he later labels Juliet a "hilding" (3.5.168), another label

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[91] The ballads respectively can be found in the following collections and under the following shelf marks: Magdalene College, Pepys 3.119; National Library of Scotland, Crawford 840; and Magdalen College, Pepys 4.50. Jessica C. Murphy reads Capulet's greensickness diagnosis through the lens of the three abovementioned ballads. She maintains that "In these ballad stories, doctors' tales of young women suffering from greensickness and attempts to cure the maid's pain through marriage, which are so popular in the late sixteenth century medical literature, are made out to be nothing but attempts to pander the bodies of young virgins. At the same time, the disease of greensickness reveals that popular ballads, like the medical treatises of the time, show women as untrustworthy keepers of their own bodies." "'Greensickness carrion': Re-reading Capulet through Broadside Ballads," Ballads and Performance: The Multimodal Stage in Early Modern England. July 4 2018. https://scalar.usc.edu/works/ballads-and-performance-the-multi-modal-stage-in-early-modern-england/greensickness-carrion-re-reading-capulet-through-broadside-ballads----jessica-murphy. Hanne Blank helpfully cites both a ballad, "A Cure for the Green-Sickness," and Elizabethan doggerel verse as further evidence of this particular cultural construction of greensickness. See *Virgin*, 66, 69.

[92] William Shakespeare, *The First Quarto of Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Lukas Erne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[93] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "baggage (n.), sense 5," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1148387890.

[94] Examples of the sexualized connotation of baggage occur in seventeenth-century dictionaries; Randle Cotgrave's 1611 *Dictionarie of French & English Tongues* equates Baggage with "Queane," a word that encompasses meanings of sex work as well as impudence. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "quean (n.)," September 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9795453579.

for a "sorry hack, a jade," also marginally glossed by the Norton Shakespeare editors as "hussy," with that word's pejorative sexual connotations.[95]

The insult at its core, then, revolves around the play's preoccupation with the orchestration of timely virginity loss in marriage. Greensickness is a disorder of the uterus, a reproductive organ, the cure of which aims to restore potential fertility. However, within the "carrion" schema, greensickness figures death. Certainly greensickness featured, according to early modern medical sources, corrupted blood and stifled humors, and could allegedly lead to lethal outcomes. However, it makes less sense to consider greensickness – a problem affecting youth, a disease of being unripe – with the overripe nature of death's decay. Perhaps, then, viewing this moment through the lens of reproductive futurism illuminates the shocking juxtaposition between fertility and death. They are precisely aligned in Juliet's disobedience, what her father sees as her refusal to participate in the demands of the marriage market and attendant reproduction, the wasted potential of her childbearing years so emphasized by Lady Capulet and Paris early on in the play.

Scholars have offered various apologia for Capulet's turn against his daughter. Potter defines his outburst as "an expression of a father's fear that his daughter is showing symptoms" of greensickness, and his attempt to effect a marriage is an avenue towards a cure, "taking measures to save Juliet's life."[96] Were Capulet truly trying to effect a "marriage cure" for Juliet's supposed greensickness as a display of fatherly concern, why would he lob insults at her up to the point of threatening to disown her? Alternately, Jessica C. Murphy postulates that Capulet might know how Juliet has spent the previous night, and that "the violent language he

[95] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "hilding (n.), sense 1," June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3957893236.
[96] Ursula Potter, "Greensickness in *Romeo and Juliet*," in *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society, 1150-1650*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 272, 274, 283, 285.

uses to describe her grieving body implies that he recognizes her incontinence."[97] Such an interpretation is in keeping with a strain of the greensickness trope that highlights how its symptoms (listlessness, paleness, disordered appetite) mimic those of pregnancy. That portrayal arises in the contemporary popular broadside ballads mentioned above as a means to cover up illegitimate pregnancy, an idea also explored in John Ford's stage play *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c. 1626).[98] While I agree with Potter that fear might partially motivate Capulet's outburst, I take issue with her characterization of his tirade as life-saving, wise, "comically naive," or even "poignantly real."[99] Likewise, Murphy's contention of Capulet's knowingness would depend on performance choice and is not supported by a text that insists on parental misapprehension of their children. Indeed, Bonnie Lander Johnson considers this moment with Capulet as "initiat[ing] the repetition of those 'bitter' separations" like Juliet's weaning "from which [her] greensickness may have emerged."[100] Yet all of these critical strains, even though they disagree on the extent of Capulet's knowledge and the motivation behind his diatribe against Juliet, take seriously the prospect of Juliet's greensickness.

I would offer instead that this brief exchange in which the specter of greensickness arises has less to do with the disease itself than a repeated pattern of mistaken readings of bodies and symptoms broadly and the more particular ways that virginal bodies throughout Shakespeare's canon baffle other characters' understanding of virgins' subjective states and capacities for

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[97] Murphy, "'Greensickness Carrion,'" n.p.
[98] In that tragedy, Arabella, pregnant after an incestuous affair with her brother, becomes unwell. Vasques duplicitously assures Soranzo that his contracted bride's swoon is nothing "but the maid's sickness, an overflux of youth—and then, sir, there is no such present remedy as present marriage" (3.2.76-78). The "diagnosis" of greensickness conceals the truth that Arabella carries a child from an otherwise unthinkable sexual union. See John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays*, ed. Marion Lomax (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[99] Potter, "Greensickness in *Romeo and Juliet*," 285.
[100] Bonnie Lander Johnson, "Blood, Milk, Poison: Romeo and Juliet's Tragedy of 'Green' Desire and Corrupted Blood," in *Blood Matters*: *Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400-1700*, ed. Bonnie Lander Johnson and Eleanor Decamp (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 147.

desire. In *Pericles*, the kidnapped princess Marina is sold to a brothel, where the Pander and Bawd lament how much she guards her chastity. The Pander exclaims "Now the pox upon her green sickness for me," to which the Bawd replies, "Faith, there's no way to be rid on't but by the way to the pox" (4.6.21-23).[101] Marina's virginity that the pair regard as almost supernaturally well-guarded – as the Bawd puts it, Marina is "able to freeze the god Priapus" – is subsumed into a language of illness (4.6.12). They suggest that only consummation can cure her pathological virginity, even if it brings with it the risk of syphilis. Though she does not suffer specifically from greensickness (Emilia is the character who demonstrates the ailment's symptomatic sexual aversion), the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* shows signs of a lovesickness for the noble Palamon, mismatched though their social stations may be. The Doctor called to treat her suggests that her Wooer take on the disguise of Palamon, advising that sexual intimacy with the supposed "Palamon" will cure her of her illness. The Wooer eventually reports that she believed the disguise, announcing that he "kissed her twice." The Doctor affirms "'Twas well done. Twenty times had been far better, / For there the cure lies mainly" (5.2.6-7).[102] The juxtaposition between Emilia's reluctance to wed (and the enforced arrangements made for her to marry either Palamon or Arcite) and the Jailer's Daughter's madness being attributed to her virginity are two sides of a single coin. Virginity must be managed; to preserve it past its due season or to have unruly sexual appetites in lovesickness can only be corrected through a carefully planned initiation into marriage and attendant sexual intimacy.

Fitting *Romeo and Juliet* into this context of pathologized virginity across Shakespeare's works demonstrates the plays' shared preoccupation with virginity that is not easily or readily

[101] William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, ed. Suzanne Gossett (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004).
[102] William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. Lois Potter (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1996). For more on the connections among greensickness, love melancholy, and madness, see the second chapter of Lesel Dawson, *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46-90.

relinquished either to meet the requisites of the market for sex or arranged marital prospects. That women would resist those ultimate aims renders the virgin characters' bodies as culturally illegible to the characters with whom they share a stage. Ultimately, both that pathologizing and that illegibility of the virginal body result from an overarching desire to shepherd that body through predictable stages in pursuit of eventual matrimony or simply to meet the expectations of compulsory sexuality in Marina's case. These larger, systemic social formations embolden Capulet to behave in the way that he does. Further, such formations encompass the ways that other women, including, as Sophie Duncan reminds us, his wife Lady Capulet and, to an extent, the Nurse, are complicit in his plan. They remain supporters of the model of patriarchy for which Capulet serves as an emblem, despite their protestations against his individual outburst.[103]

Curiously, though, this outburst proves uncharacteristic of Capulet more broadly. For in other moments he has proven himself capable of interpreting social cues and the niceties of socialized feminine behavior. He understands the possible divergence between the surface of the body and inward states. When he welcomes the gentlemen to his feast, he explains that "Ladies that have their toes / Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you" (1.4.128-29). Turning next towards the women, Capulet asks, "Ah, my mistresses, which of you all / Will now deny to dance? She that makes dainty, / She I'll swear hath corns. Am I come near ye now?" (1.4.130-32). Here, in this rather bad joke, Capulet demonstrates that he can read the codes of the women's excuses to avoid dancing – problems with their feet, unseen within stocking and shoe. But Capulet's reading of his own daughter's tears – the bodily manifestation of her emotional

[103] Duncan writes, "The idea that the Capulets were bad parents was not new. Shakespeare, after all, establishes in his prologue that the lovers' parents caused their deaths, and has Prince Escalus reiterate it at the play's end." *Juliet: The Life and Afterlives of Shakespeare's First Tragic Heroine* (New York: Seal Press, 2023), 99.

state – serves as the inverse of this interaction at the feast. Capulet proves himself most incisive when it counts the least, and most inept when it counts the most.

In the end, though he grasped at an alliance with Paris, Capulet loses his own child. Friar Laurence's attempts to help Juliet play dead with his sleeping draught come to naught when his fellow friar cannot inform the banished Romeo of the plan in time before Romeo's servant rushes to tell him the news of Juliet's "death." Instead, Romeo believes that Juliet is deceased; his suicide by her graveside is followed by her own suicide upon waking, as she is unable to live without her Romeo. Thus Capulet's marital negotiations hoping for a grand wedding shrink to a miniscule handshake with Montague over their wedded children's bodies: "O brother Montague, give me thy hand / This is my daughter's jointure, for no more / Can I demand" (5.3.296-98). Capulet's tragedy is not just that he is a bad patriarch; he is a bad reader, or rather, an inconsistent reader, willing to overlook the details of social life to which he customarily pays attention (on full display in the setting of the feast) when it comes to his daughter. Instead, Capulet ascribes an incorrect cause – greensickness – to the effects of grief that he observes in Juliet, all in the service of his own plans for the future. And, unfortunately, bad reading seems Romeo's ultimate tragedy, too, as he proves himself incapable of correctly interpreting Juliet's "corpse" for his sleeping beloved.[104] His encomium to her alleged postmortem beauty – "beauty's ensign yet / Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks, / And death's pale flag is not advanced there" (5.3.94-96) – instead should have been a catalogue of signs of life.

[104] Sophie Duncan observes that "William Painter, the author of one of Shakespeare's prose sources for *Romeo and Juliet*, shows both the Capulets and Romeo performing extensive checks that Juliet is *actually* dead – her parents summon 'the most expert Phisitians of the towne', and Romeo in the tomb puts his hands 'uppon the colde stomacke of Iulietta' and touches her 'in many places' to check there are no 'Iudgemente of Lyfe'. There is due diligence. Shakespeare cuts this, and if, like the early modern audience, you're familiar with Painter, Shakespeare's characters seem negligent." *Juliet*, 39.

This moment in the tomb where Romeo fails to apprehend the vitality of Juliet's "corpse" echoes in one of Shakespeare's latest plays, *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1610). After instructing his queen Hermione to make his childhood friend King Polixenes of Bohemia welcome to their court, King Leontes of Sicilia thinks he sees in her behavior evidence of adultery:

> Is whispering nothing?
> Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
> Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
> Of laughter with a sigh – a note infallible
> Of breaking honesty? (1.2.284-88).

The signs of friendly hospitality that Leontes demanded twist in his perception into symbols of Hermione's sexual infidelity. Worse still, he suspects Hermione's advanced pregnancy is the result of an earlier tryst with Polixenes (who has been staying to visit with the couple for months). Leontes' paranoia around Hermoine's supposed infidelity grows so great that he even fears that he is not the biological father of Mamilius, his son with Hermione and his heir. The speedy trial that Leontes orders for her supposed adultery results in Hermione's imprisonment, where she gives birth to their daughter, after which Hermione is reported to have died. Through the twists and turns of romance logic, that infant, Perdita, escapes death by exposure at her father's orders when shepherds adopt her. Perdita's eventual reunion with her birth family is complete when the penitent Leontes tries to make amends at what Hermione's faithful lady-in-waiting Paulina labels the allegedly deceased queen's statue. Yet Leontes, who originally thought he observed a sexual frisson between Hermione and Polixenes, now wonders if his eyes deceive him for a second time in observing the statue's lifelike qualities: "Would you not deem it breathed and that those veins / Did eerily bear blood?" (5.3.63-64). He continues to remark, "Still methinks / There is an air comes from her. What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath?" (5.3.77-79). He aims to kiss her much as Romeo kisses the supposedly dead Juliet. Yet, in *The*

Winter's Tale, with a flourish of music, the "statue" commemorating the supposedly dead Hermione comes to life at Paulina's command. Leontes, dazed, exclaims, "Oh, she's warm! / If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating" (5.3.109-11). Leontes, who once manipulated the mechanisms of the law to act on his unfounded suspicions about his wife's decided lack of marital chastity (read through her bodily comportment), abandons suspicions and accepts the miracle, sanctioning the magic as natural.

The Winter's Tale as romance, in contrast to the haste of the tragic *Romeo and Juliet*, operates on a cosmic scale of time that makes miracles like Hermione's "resurrection" possible. As Edward Dowden once poignantly wrote of Shakespeare's romances, "The resolution of the discords in these latest plays is not a mere stage necessity, or a necessity of composition, resorted to by the dramatist to effect an ending of his play, and little interesting his imagination or his heart. Its significance here is ethical and spiritual; it is a moral necessity."[105] Out of the tragedy of sexual jealousy, Time mediates a redemptive solution that reunites a fractured family. Yet even in the pastoral mode that opens the play's second half, freed from the oppressive court, the expectations for premarital chastity in anticipation of married, heterosexual reproductive relationships remain throughout Polixenes' son Florizell and Perdita's courtship. Though initially their relationship is star-crossed by perceived divisions of social station, the salvaging mode of romance allows them to overcome those barriers through the revelation of Perdita's royal pedigree – again, in the service of cementing marriage bonds and, eventually, the inheritance of the next generation of monarchs.

By contrast, in *Romeo and Juliet*, tragedy's great scythe mows down even the most canny reader of social niceties and the most equipped to understand how affective states might be read

[105] Edward Dowden, *Shakespere: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London: Henry S. King & Company, 1875), 407.

– here, Juliet. From the fated prologue, it could never have been otherwise. Yet tragedy as a genre also has a power to illuminate. I concur with Northrop Frye's assessment that tragedy contains both an ironic and an heroic side; the redemptive power of Romeo and Juliet's love reminds us that "nothing that breaks through the barriers of ordinary experience can remain in the world of ordinary experience…It always was, as we say, out of this world."[106] Along the way, it has illuminated, among other things, that the culture of virginity and chastity more broadly proves to be a double-edged sword. Virginal status can be conferred or revoked, assumed or rebuffed, at will or at moments of greatest convenience, having very little to do with an individual's sexual experience or lack thereof.

The play, if it were in a strictly comic genre, could have ended with Juliet entering into holy orders. Friar Laurence, entering into the tomb too late, is distraught to find Romeo and Paris slain. When Juliet awakens, he tries to salvage the plan that he brokered, which has gone horribly awry. "Come—" he begs Juliet, "I'll dispose of thee / Among a sisterhood of holy nuns. / Stay not to question, for the watch is coming" (5.3.156-58). Juliet refuses to run and Friar Laurence, afraid of the watch's retribution, flees. This moment, like the Nurse's earlier suggestion that Juliet simply marry Paris after Romeo's banishment, offer tantalizing alternate endings to the story (3.5.214-26). Juliet's grieving body is misread by her family as pathologically virginal; those who know the truth of her marriage and its consummation encourage pathways through which Juliet could either possibly play the virgin and wed again or lodge in a monastic setting. Would she take on the vows of chastity in that latter case? It is impossible to say, for Juliet displays a fierce, and ultimately lethal, fidelity to her wedded husband Romeo. This is all to note,

[106] Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, ed. Robert Sandler (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1986), 32-33.

however, that examples abound within the play where virginity and chastity are treated with flexibility and defined in a malleable manner that complicates these social categories.

I should like to leave the last word on misreading women's bodies in *Romeo and Juliet* to Juliet herself. For if more characters read others skeptically, inquired after motivations, and pressed for explications, disaster could have been averted. Juliet's perspicacity and awareness of social scripts shine when she eagerly expresses her adoration to Romeo on her balcony. She asks Romeo "If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully, / Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won, / I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay" (2.1.135-38). Here, Juliet proves herself capable of operating on two tracks of logic, aware of her own earnest desire and larger social expectations for unmarried young women's propriety when it comes to courtship. Similarly, she proves herself capable of engaging with the marriage system in ways that are more complex than the contractual arrangement her parents and Paris ultimately espouse. In her epithalamium, Juliet exclaims,

> Oh, I have bought the mansion of a love,
> But not possessed it; and though I am sold,
> Not yet enjoyed. So tedious is this day
> As is the night before some festival
> To an impatient child that hath new robes
> And may not wear them. (3.2.26-31)

It may be tempting to point to Juliet's lines "though I am sold, / Not yet enjoy'd" as indicative of her unquestioning participation in a sex-marriage system that requires her submission (3.2.27-28). Yet considering the verbal construction of the lines preceding these two casts her rhetoric in another light entirely. Juliet has "*bought* the mansion of a love, / But not yet posses'd it," first and foremost (3.2.26-27, italics mine). Her use of the active voice indicates that Juliet herself has made her choice. Moreover, her metaphor disrupts the expected chain of property ownership in a societal structure in which she, a young married woman, would be a *femme covert*, whose

property and legal personhood would be subsumed into her husband's.[107] Instead, Juliet shifts those dynamics towards the merging of mutual love and sexual fulfillment; Juliet herself is possessor and possessed. Her nuanced reading of her situation complements her pursuit of a match of her own choosing even from within the confines of the patriarchal order. That order, however, within its tragic setting could not accommodate Juliet's perceptual prowess. Her parents' inability to apply sufficient skeptical pressure to their perception of Juliet and her subjective state precipitates the ultimate crisis of forced marriage that seals Juliet and Romeo's fates, heightening the young lovers' levels of desperation. Specifically for Capulet, his increasingly rigid habit of mind renders unthinkable that Juliet might have subjective desires of her own, so much so that he apprehends Juliet's distress through the lens of pathologized virginity. Irony compounds for us as readers and audience members in that the reasoning behind Capulet's shift is opaque. Just as Juliet is inaccessible to her family, so too are her family members inaccessible to us, and therein lies the makings of the skeptical problem of other minds in the pursuit of truth.

Romeo and Juliet offers some tempting possible solutions to that problem in the end. Whereas Romeo's melancholy once baffled his parents, he instructs his servant Baltashar to "take this letter; early in the morning / See thou deliver it to my lord and father" (5.3.23-24). At the play's conclusion, the Prince takes the letter, announcing that it corroborates Friar Laurence's narration of the entire plot, a confession that he offers in self-defense. The families then, at great cost, have finally gained access to Romeo and Juliet's most inwardly held secrets and knowledge of those who collaborated in their plans. Prince Escalus declines to punish the friar, or Montague and Capulet themselves, through legal means. For, as Escalus puts it, "heaven finds means to kill

[107] For more on the gender play in the epithalamium, see Duncan, *Juliet*, 5.

your joys with love" and in Romeo and Juliet's loss, and even the prince's kinsman's death, "All are punished" (5.3.293, 295). All are punished, and all, mostly, found out. This kind of definitive resolution will likewise mark the end of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, a play that veers from comic to tragic to comic again, while exploding the skeptical concerns about the meanings of chastity and the reading of bodies for signs of sexual continence and purity that Shakespeare canvasses.

3. Who is the Chaste Maid in Cheapside?: Middleton's Escalated Skeptical Crisis

Nearly two decades after *Romeo and Juliet* is surmised to have been first acted, Shakespeare's successor Middleton's *Chaste Maid* was performed at The Swan, most likely in 1613.[108] Romeo and Juliet's story offers a model for the couple at the heart of *Chaste Maid*, Moll and her lover Touchwood Junior, who outwit Moll's parents when they stand in opposition to their marriage. Middleton's use of the comic genre allows his pair of lovers a happier end. His mode, one "satirizing love tragedies such as *Romeo and Juliet* with its outraged parents, defiant lovers, and counterfeit deaths," uses satire to explode the skeptical perceptual problems raised in *Romeo and Juliet* not just with regards to reading the virgin's body but also with reading chaste bodies more broadly.[109] Every sign of sexual continence and normative family formation is divorced from substance in the play. The playwright sheds a brighter light on the self-interested motives that undergird forced marriage, the threat of which leads the Yellowhammers to pathologize their daughter Moll's virginity. In such a way, Middleton intensifies the skeptical

[108] For more on *Chaste Maid*'s early performance history, see Michelle O'Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton, Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 68-70.
[109] Gail Kern Paster, "The Ecology of the Passions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 152.

contrast between sign and signified, emphasizing the performative aspects of chastity and its lability as a social formation.

Middleton's *Chaste Maid* takes its audience away from the Verona of Shakespeare's tragedy and into the closer contemporary world of London. There, Sir Walter Whorehound arrives to arrange a double-wedding. He plans to marry Moll Yellowhammer and, in recompense for services rendered, to affiance his Welsh mistress to Moll's brother, the Cambridge undergraduate Tim. In so doing, Whorehound hopes to provide for his mistress some social advancement while consolidating his own social position. The success of Whorehound's scheme, however, hinges on his otherwise unnamed mistress' ability to give the appearance of sexual innocence. He advises her that "Here you must pass for a pure virgin" (1.1.101).[110] In this set of instructions, Whorehound summarizes the concerns early on in *Chaste Maid* that will come to dominate the rest of the play. Specifically, his use of the verb "pass" establishes the precedent for feigning chastity – a social performance that resurges across the comedy's acts and scenes. Moreover, his inclusion of the qualifier "*pure* virgin" (italics mine) raises intriguing questions about those performances.

The use of the adjective "pure" appears, at first, redundant: does virginity not already indicate purity? Whorehound might merely deploy the descriptor "pure" for emphasis. Yet, could there be such a thing as an impure virgin? The questions raised by Whorehound's pleonasm, then, suggest a potential for gradations of virginity. The play's discourse surrounding the Country Wench, to be discussed further below, offers a paradoxical example of a "sworn" virgin who has also given birth to an illegitimate child. Thus Whorehound's phrasing upends the

[110] Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, in *Thomas Middleton: Women Beware Women and Other Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). All parenthetical in-line citations derive from this edition.

virgin/whore binary upon which much early modern (and even contemporary) gendered and sexual discourse depends. That upending process is not limited to Whorehound's linguistic play, however, as the term "honesty" likewise proves malleable throughout the drama. The wittol (or knowing cuckold) Allwit, for instance, allows Whorehound sexual access to his wife on the condition that Whorehound will pay for any resulting children's expenses. Allwit nevertheless attests to his wife's sexual honor to her lover Whorehound's face in an unconvincingly pat rhyming couplet: "She's a wife as honest of her body to me / As any lord's proud lady can be" (1.2.92-93). This double-edged oath may say more about the aristocracy's sexual mores than the Allwits' marital fidelity, but a great many of the play's characters across lines of social station profess to sexual continence and chastity not borne out by evidence.

While the Whorehound-Allwit arrangement upsets any such notion of marital faith, Touchwood Senior undermines the concept even further by calling into question the notion of "honesty" within marriage at all. Upon separating from his wife with the aim of controlling their supercharged fertility, Touchwood Senior (the elder brother of Moll Yellowhammer's beloved) muses that "had [his wife's] desires been wanton, they'd been blameless / In being lawful ever" (2.1.45-46). Marriage, in this estimation, does little to curb lust. Touchwood Senior's view undermines the old formulation in the Book of Common Prayer's wedding service, which makes plain that marriage "was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body."[111] Touchwood Senior's thoughts on married couples likewise run contrary to the Elizabethan *Homily on the state of Matrimony*'s views: "follow not the example of the wicked world who set their delight in the filthiness of sin, where both of you stand in the fear of

[111] John E. Booty, ed. *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book* (Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1976), 290-91.

God and abhor all filthiness…they in their wifeless state run into open abominations without any grudge of their conscience."[112] As such, Touchwood Senior's remarks challenge not only the Church's sacrament but also received wisdom and practice, and the world of *Chaste Maid*'s Cheapside might prove the wicked one against which the homilist warns.

Yet even amid his praise of his wife's "honesty" – her marital fidelity and sexual purity – Touchwood Senior overplays his hand: he goes on to note that his own sexual prowess and fertility extend beyond the bounds of wedlock. He exclaims, "I have such a fatal finger in such business / I must forth with't, chiefly for country wenches, / For every harvest I shall hinder hay-making" by impregnating his paramours – seven of them by his own count (2.1.59-61). One such woman enters the scene with a babe in arms, which she claims is his. Thus Touchwood Senior's encomium on marital fidelity and chaste desire clashes with the presentation of his alleged illegitimate child. The irony only intensifies when the Country Wench notes, too, that Touchwood Senior has seduced her cousin Ellen, breaking up Ellen's marriage (2.1.75-76). The play complicates binary thinking about sexual purity well beyond Whorehound and Touchwood Senior's remarks on "pure virginity" and "honesty," however. Unwitting puns uttered by Maudline Yellowhammer, the religious hypocrisy of priests in charge of upholding propriety in marital and sexual matters, and the farcical explosion of the Cheapside nuclear family's domestic arrangements via a series of sexual surrogacies and infidelities call into question the nature of chastity. In so doing, the play forces its audience to reconsider the standard of chastity to which Moll is held (and to which she and Touchwood Junior arguably hold themselves) and question the reliability of visual and verbal evidence alike.

[112] Gerald Bray, ed. *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Company, 2015), 472.

In this world in which marriage vows, like virginal status, mean little in practical terms, Moll and Touchwood Junior nonetheless seek to remain chaste before marriage, indeed adhering scrupulously to lawful and socially sanctioned practices around their nuptials. Touchwood Junior even scrambles for a special, and speedy, marriage license, as opposed to the more conventional, if time-consuming, route of reading banns publicly in church across three Sundays or holidays, a practice of communal surveillance to curb those ineligible to marry from doing so.[113] Touchwood Junior's hopes, though, to bypass such customs balance his need to elope with Moll before the Whorehound match takes effect with his need to remain in the Church's good graces. His punctilious efforts stand in stark contrast to the host of informal marital and household arrangements that dominate the play, including Sir Walter as the husband-approved cuckold in his affair with Mistress Allwit and the father of her illegitimate children; Touchwood Senior and his wife, estranged on account of the financial pressures of their overabundant fertility; and indeed Touchwood Senior and his numerous sexual partners. The Kixes' surrogate pregnancy – in which Touchwood Senior (unbeknownst to Sir Oliver Kix) impregnates Lady Kix – rounds out these alternative arrangements towards the close of the play.

Examples of premarital sexual contact elsewhere in the play itself only confirms that a precedent exists for Touchwood Junior and Moll to make *de presenti* vows to mark "an immediate and indissoluble commitment expressed by the words 'I do'" and hence pave the way for betrothed consummation to make fast their union; their adherence to premarital abstinence remains an outlier among *Chaste Maid*'s characters.[114] Lady Kix, amid her struggles with infertility, describes her sister's pregnancy after her wedding, and offers dates: "Everyone gets

[113] Cressy notes that the reading of the banns was "set forth in the Book of Common Prayer and repeated in the canons of 1604." *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 305-6.
[114] Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 267. Cressy offers more information on different types of contracts and betrothal rituals in *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 267-81.

before me; there's my sister / Was married but at Barthol'mew-eve last, / And she can have two children at birth" (2.1.162-64). While Lady Kix ultimately laments that her sister gave birth to twins, the subtext of her complaint reveals much about the sexual culture in which the Kixes are imbued. The play's Lenten setting suggests that her sister, married the previous August, was already pregnant at the time of her wedding (2.1.162-63 fn). Even Maudline Yellowhammer makes (perhaps unwitting) puns about her own sexual past, in which she seems not to have preserved her virginity before marrying Yellowhammer; she tells Moll that "When I was of your youth, I was lightsome / And quick two years before I was married" (1.1.10-11). "Quick," of course, had the medical connotation of viable pregnancy.[115] Against this backdrop, Touchwood Junior and Moll's commitment to following the proper steps towards marriage (albeit clandestine marriage) looks farcical by comparison.

In addition to the historical precedent, the aforementioned examples from within the play itself indicate that it is almost more unusual for Touchwood Junior and Moll to remain chaste before marriage. In their desire to receive ecclesiastical sanction for their relationship, Moll and Touchwood Junior mirror their tragic predecessors Romeo and Juliet. Both young couples live in worlds where premarital chastity and eventual married intercourse are held up as societal standards; yet, in Verona as in Cheapside, puns and explicit examples of sexual licentiousness pervade. Though, it appears that Cheapside may have the more glaring examples in the plethora of alternative household arrangements, as well as the illegitimate infants and children that evince reproductive sex in and out of wedlock.

Yet in this play few outward, physical signs are quite what they seem to those not already in-the-know. For example, Mistress Allwit's pregnant belly evinces her tryst with Whorehound,

[115] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "quick (adj., n.1, & adv.)," September 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1003218528.

even if to outsiders it might seem to indicate her sexual union with her husband. In keeping with anxieties in the early modern era over paternity, this "obvious" sign is ambiguous. But, to intensify the trope, Whorehound's status as surrogate father and master becomes an open secret among the Allwit household. Tellingly, the Allwits' servants consider Whorehound their master and Allwit merely "Our mistress' husband" (1.2.62). Compounding that irony, Whorehound insists on the performance of particular social niceties. Whorehound demands that he stand as godfather to his own child with Mistress Allwit as "it prevents suspicion" (2.2.31). Thus, even pregnancy and the presence of infants, which in theory should indicate a sure link between act and consequence, upend the bond between sign and signified in *Chaste Maid*. In a play world in which nothing physical or material is quite sure, it becomes imperative to take Touchwood Junior and Moll at their words, however elusive or subtle.

Touchwood Junior insists to Yellowhammer, in front of Moll, that she is as pure as the stone he wishes Yellowhammer to set in the ring he intends to give her (1.1.169-70). If one were to examine such a vow in the most unforgiving light, Touchwood's remark could merely be flattery. After all, Moll never admits to her own purity in so many words. However, another indicator of Touchwood Junior and Moll's chaste courtship comes in the form of a brother-to-brother discussion before the young couple attempts to escape to wed in secret. This discussion also underscores the play's exploration of the ways that sexuality and interiority intertwine. Touchwood Senior and Touchwood Junior have very different ideas about marriage; the former envisions it solely as a container for sexual energy, whereas the latter centers the importance of patience and fantasy in maintaining desire. After Moll's parents lock her in an upper room to prevent her elopement, Touchwood Junior remains undeterred because

> her vow is fixed
> Only to me; then time shall never grieve me,

> For by that vow e'en absent I enjoy her,
> Assuredly confirmed that none else shall,
> Which will make tedious years seem gameful to me. (3.1.3-7)[116]

While the hope of a one-sided possession drives Touchwood Junior's passion in this speech (as opposed to the idealized romantic mutuality that Romeo and Juliet sometimes exhibit), he nevertheless expresses a striking fidelity that stands in contrast to those around him. His picture of loyalty in love adheres to the sorts of unbreakable vows that marriage ceremonies, church doctrine, and social advice commended in early modern England. He stands ready to pursue Moll, even if in dreams, throughout a period of years; his constancy and (betrothed) chastity cast into relief his older brother's sexual proclivities. Both in the public sphere by vows and in the interiorized realm of dreams, chaste fidelity takes precedence for the young lovers. Whereas Touchwood Senior's sexual appetite activates with a hair trigger, Touchwood Junior prioritizes constancy, as the exclusivity of Moll's person and his sexual fantasy mingle with the promise of a future, embodied coupling.

Moll matches Touchwood Junior with devotion of equal measure. After her father interrupts the lovers' surreptitious wedding ceremony and threatens to separate them, Moll remains resolute. Her parting words to Touchwood Junior demonstrate a marked degree of loyalty amid the threat of perpetual separation. She cries,

> Farewell, sir,
> All content bless thee, and take this for comfort:
> Though violence keep me, thou canst lose me never,
> I am ever thine although we part for ever. (3.1.45-47)

Moll's rhyming couplet rings differently than Allwit's on fidelity. Here, it enacts the oneness of the young couple on the temporal scale of wedding vows – eternity. For this expression of chaste

[116] Amanda Flather offers evidence of such confinement in practice through several early modern legal cases. See *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, rept. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2011), 22, 49-50.

loyalty, her father saddles Moll with the label "minx," with all of its connotations of sexual laxity and excessive boldness (3.1.48). Even as Yellowhammer swears that he will lock Moll up as if another one of his possessions, she carves out for herself a space of mental, internal resistance, where the threat of physical harm cannot sever her emotional bond to the man she intends for her husband. The lovers' mutual assurance, at the very least, strives for the standard upon which an abiding model of companionate marriage rested.[117] In this way, Touchwood Junior and Moll continue to be the sole characters in the play taking the vows of marriage seriously, even if *de futuro* ones.

There remains the possibility that the mere inexperience of youth might motivate such fidelity; Tim Yellowhammer demonstrates a similar, if not even more punctilious, sense of sexual decorum. The play's youngest protagonists appear fundamentally different from their more worldly-wise counterparts. Their near contemporary, the Country Wench, offers a slanted presentation of by-the-book chastity. The Wench rails against Touchwood Senior for leaving her with a child: "Thou hast undone me; I was a maid before, / I can bring a certificate of it / From both the churchwardens" (2.1.70-72). That certificate of virginity is based upon potentially unreliable witnesses; Richard Dutton notes that Middleton implies "that they have given the certificate of virginity (warrants of good conduct were needed by law for people traveling outside their own parish) in return for sexual favours which self-evidently invalidate it" (2.1.72 fn).[118] Legal precedents for these certificates existed in early modern English fornication cases;

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[117] As the *Homily on the State of Matrimony* puts it, "married persons must apply their minds in most earnest wise to concord…that they be not dissevered by any division of discord," beseeching God "to rule their hearts and to knit their minds together." Bray, ed., *The Books of Homilies*, 473.

[118] Laura Gowing offers an example from a 1586 case of how such certificates were employed during slander suits. See *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 115-16. Similarly, a "certificate of character was often decisive" in fornication cases brought before the ecclesiastical courts. See Paul Hair, *Before the Bawdy Court*: *Selections from Church Court and Other Records Relating to the Correction of Moral Offences in England, Scotland and New England, 1300-1800* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), 234.

people accused of fornication could have charges dismissed if they came "to court armed with certificates of innocence signed by their ministers and fellow-parishioners."[119] Yet in *Chaste Maid*, that process is liable to corruption, as Touchwood counters that "I'll have the parson's / Hand too, or I'll not yield to 't" (2.1.72-73). And so, once again, a woman character claiming a degree of sexual purity, ensconced in double-entendres, only meets the mockery of one of the male figures in the play. The Welsh Gentlewoman and the Country Wench both share some verbal attestation of chastity (the Welsh Gentlewoman by the lies Sir Walter tells on her behalf, and the Country Wench her certificate). But neither are as pure in deed as in word, once again undermining the presumed link between verbal and physical manifestations of chastity. Social station inflects this particular break – the Country Wench and Whorehound's mistress, both in relatively precarious positions, seek sanction and marriage respectively to legitimize their positions on the fringes of female respectability.

But even the systems that would lend them respectability are compromised, evinced further by the Parson's own admission of corruption. Before his clandestine wedding to Moll is about to begin, Touchwood Junior begs of the priest, "O sir, if ever you felt the force of love, / Pity it in me" (3.1.1-2). The priest offers this telling response:

> Yes, though I ne'er was married, sir,
> I have felt the force of love from good men's daughters,
> And some that will be maids yet three years hence.
> Have you got a licence? (3.1.2-5)

[119] Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 280. James A. Sharpe offers several examples of certificates and petitions allowing accused fornicators to clear their name. He notes that "In 1608 a bachelor, William Heifeelde, and a widow, Ellin Higges, of Sydenham in Oxfordshire, were presented before the church courts for fornication. The churchwardens and sidesmen of the parish wrote to the courts, asking the officials to show the couple 'what favoure possibly you maye', as they had since married, and were 'ij poore folkes, livinge ever since the former acte, honestly and orderly together'." Sharpe cites cases like these up through the year 1743. See *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750*, 113.

The Parson implies that he has had extramarital dalliances with young women whose chastity he swears to protect long after their encounters (presumably via those same types of certificate to which the Country Wench refers). The juxtaposition between such a licentious admission with the Parson's diligent request for the special license is ironic. Yet, this moment is entirely in keeping with the play's insistence that those with a modicum of social capital expend it on their own interests.

That theme finds its greatest display in some of the play's greatest moments of irony as the Yellowhammers themselves put unintentional pressures on the vision of marriage they hold for their daughter, only confirming the gap between action and intention. The proving ground for their views rests in how they speak about premarital chastity in terms of illness, highlighting the discursive stakes of the play's initial use of the greensickness trope. Maudline blames Moll's tears and reluctance to wed Whorehound on the ailment, calling her a "dull maid" and telling her "You had need have somewhat to quicken / Your green sickness" (1.3-5.) Moll's rebellion against her parents' plan receives punishment, escalating the Yellowhammers' prior condemnation (and pathologization) of her comportment. In the penultimate act of the play, Allwit tries to ruin the Whorehound-Moll match out of the concern that it would jeopardize his particular arrangement with the knight. He offers that he has "heard of [Moll's] virtues / And other confirmed graces," but Yellowhammer refutes these, calling her "A plaguy girl, sir!" (4.1.190-93). "Plaguy" can merely mean annoying – but it is noteworthy that the language of pathology that Maudline first employed by "diagnosing" Moll as greensick in the play's first act persists even to this point in the play. Her parents cast Moll's disobedience in her aversion to Whorehound consistently as "sick."

Yellowhammer has no illusions, either, about how he envisions this marital match. When Allwit expresses his sorrow at the arrangement between Moll and Whorehound, Yellowhammer reveals "There's no contract passed" (4.1.202). Given that Maudline and Yellowhammer have issued various ultimata about the marriage, it comes as a shock that they have yet to draw up a marriage contract. Equally shocking is Yellowhammer's assertion that Whorehound is "the man that must *bed*" Moll (4.1.203, italics mine). Metrically, "wed" would supply the syllabic count for this line of iambic pentameter just as well as "bed"; but Yellowhammer here makes a particular point. Like Maudline before him, Yellowhammer centers the marriage experience on sex (though this gets complicated in his later admission of infidelity), just as the couple have focused largely before on procreation between Moll and Sir Walter as the ultimate goal of the marriage. As with his insistence on Moll being "plaguy" for her refusal, Yellowhammer here carries the themes that Maudline introduced in the very first scene of the play. Moll, in her parents' eyes, has one destiny, much like Juliet did in the Nurse's husband's presaging her eventual "fall." By hanging onto her virginity before marriage to a man not of her parents' choosing, Moll is doubly at fault in a play world that emphasizes reproduction at all costs.

When the Yellowhammers later retrieve Moll out of the Thames during a botched escape to meet Touchwood Junior for the second time, Maudline enters "drawing Moll by the hair" and vowing to thus "tug" her back home (4.4.18). This action mirrors the staging of Maudline dragging Tim towards the gossips for kisses during the christening of the latest Allwit infant to be discussed below. Maudline pulls the strings, rather literally, of her children's lives in the arrangement of their marriages. Yet, whereas the gossips participated gladly in Maudline's scheme with Tim, her dragging Moll does not go unnoticed by lookers-on. One waterman immediately exclaims "Good mistress, spare her," and when Maudline tells him to mind his own

business, another interjects "You are a cruel mother" (4.4.19; 20). When later reporting to Touchwood Junior, who arrives too late to save his beloved, the Second Waterman elaborates that "She cruelly / Tugged her by the hair, forced her disgracefully, / Not like a mother" (4.4.51-53). The violence in both Capulet's words and in Maudline's actions invite criticism from on-stage spectators, though Middleton goes further than his predecessor in offering this pointed third-party critique of parenting. As much as the characters of this play are conscious of and aspiring to ever higher social stations, wisdom comes from unexpected corners of the least enfranchised like the watermen. While it may be an overstatement to call these watermen the moral fringe of the play (as, so often, Middleton's plays operate in a moral vacuum), that may be the point. Glimpses of moral commentary about what people owe to one another briefly appear through sparse lines uttered by minor characters in *Chaste Maid*.[120]

Maudline hopes to "make [Moll] an example / For all the neighbours' daughters" by parading her daughter home through the streets – in this, she almost actualizes Capulet's threats to drag Juliet on a hurdle to church (4.4.21-22). Moll's distress reaches fatalistic heights; she cries out "O, my heart dies!" and "Farewell, life!" (4.4.21, 22). Maudline believes Moll is merely acting, as she exclaims, "You that have tricks can counterfeit," but Yellowhammer seems to acknowledge some signs of concern, asking Maudline to "Hold, hold," as though she has gone

[120] Herbert Jack Heller considers the links between that moral commentary and genre within the acceptance or rejection of God's grace through a final penitential act in Middleton's corpus. He writes that "Middleton does draw moral distinctions between villains and victims in the tragedies, tragicomedies, and *A Game at Chess*, but in the city comedies they are usually immoral equals, all together implicated in original sin." He includes *Chaste Maid* in the city comedy grouping, but considers the complexities of defining Middleton's generic forms. He concludes of Whorehound's end in *Chaste Maid* that "Sir Walter's imprisonment may say more about the values of the profane society in which he is portrayed than about the effectiveness of his repentance. Middleton's greatest accomplishment in comedy evokes a society almost devoid of theological and moral awareness, but suffused with reminders of a Christian spiritual reality: a christening, a 'resurrection' of Moll and Touchwood Junior, its Lenten setting. The grossness of *A Chaste Maid* is revealed from a Christian perspective, one which also suggests the value of repentance, regardless of Sir Walter's imprisonment." *Penitent Brothellers: Grace Sexuality, and Genre in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 38, 39-40, 47. Debates about the relative morality of Middleton's more comic mode, or whether the plays represent carnivalesque excess, continue in the criticism. For a review of these strands of scholarship, see O'Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton*, esp. 80-85.

too far (4.4.23). But again he reverses his position (4.4.23). Maudline now is the one to call her daughter "Dissembling, cunning baggage" in an echo of Capulet and Yellowhammer soon joins in, completing the verse of Maudline's line by labelling Moll as an "Impudent strumpet!" (4.4.29). A possible moment of redemption closes as the Yellowhammers unite to accuse Moll of dissembling her distress. Yet an interpretative avenue opens by comparing this instance to greensickness diagnosis of the play's first act. The Yellowhammers once took Moll's bodily signs of distress as not just natural, but also the potential result of disease. Now they decouple those outward displays as disingenuous, separate from an inwardly held emotional state. There is a disconnect between symptom and sign. Moll's parents have failed once again to take Moll's distress for what it is. Instead, they ascribe more and more elaborate causes to her affective state, from one that is out of control in its pathology to extremely controlled, the product of skilled acting. More troublingly, they perhaps know the difference, but simply do not care.

In an echo of Capulet rushing the wedding ceremony between Juliet and Paris, Yellowhammer takes his daughter's marital arrangements at an extreme clip: "we'll lose no time now, / Nor trust to't any longer. Tomorrow morn, / As early as sunrise, we'll have you joined" (4.4.34-36). Moll reacts with understandable dismay at the nuptial plans, and offers what could seem an extremely curtailed version of Juliet's plea for night to hurry on and conceal her love: "O, bring me death tonight, love-pitying fates; / Let me not see tomorrow up upon the world" (4.4.37-38). Yet Yellowhammer and Maudline swear that she will be watched until the point of the wedding, with an added insult of calling Moll "baggage." A complicit Tim offers his and his tutor's services of surveillance (4.4.39). At least in terms of dramatic action and time, the play's fourth act offers, then, an even more intense and compressed version of events from *Romeo and Juliet*. But both heroines are adamant that they would rather face death than marriage to men

other than the ones they love. Touchwood Junior likewise experiences feelings of ruin: hearing the report of Maudline's cruelty towards Moll, he cries that "this news splits me!" and dismisses the men around him to "leave me, like all my joys" (4.4.51, 53). Here, he echoes Moll's earlier line about the potential death of all of her joys.

These linguistic reverberations reinforce a sense of Moll and Touchwood Junior's mutuality in love; the couple are so well-suited to each other as to share a vocabulary. The imagery of Touchwood Junior split in half likewise speaks to that mutuality, as his "other half" is now locked away once more. Sir Walter, on the other hand, has a one-track mind; he delights that "ere tomorrow noon / I shall receive two thousand pound in gold / And a sweet maidenhead worth forty" (4.4.48-50). If Touchwood Junior already uses terms more becoming of marriage vows, which incorporate two lovers into one person, Whorehound still immerses himself in an idiom of sex for sale, equating his intended with the figures of sexual services he expects her to render. Yet this is in keeping with the ways that the play's economic logics operate; just as everyone from Maudline to Sir Walter equates Moll with her £2000 dowry, so too do the adults in the Allwit infant's life equate her with the material – one hundred marks for the christening ceremony (4.1.230-31). The Allwit boys likewise incur expenses – Allwit informs Yellowhammer that one "is now at Eton College" – but the tuition for that education goes un-numerated (4.1.226). The young women of this play, by contrast, are quantifiable to the pound as if commodities in trade.

The pinnacle of the discourse that exposes marriage at its most mercenary in *Chaste Maid* comes when Yellowhammer, after denouncing Whorehound to Allwit's face as a "knave" and a "villain," then pivots to justify marrying Moll off to Whorehound in a soliloquy (4.1.232). He envisions the match between Moll and Whorehound as a vehicle for Whorehound's reform:

"Pray, what serves marriage but to call him back?" (4.1.239). Yet in another reversal, Yellowhammer immediately undercuts this proposition when he acknowledges that he himself has "kept a whore," by whom he has had an illegitimate child, who has since had children of his own who are "base begot" (4.1.239, 243). The irony is unsurprisingly lost on Yellowhammer: if marriage is meant to reform "vice," it certainly has not done so for him. (And, indeed, after the christening scene, Maudline's increasing familiarity with the Tutor and request to speak to him privately suggests that she likewise might pursue her own pleasures outside the bounds of matrimony [4.1.69-73].) Yellowhammer's worldview contains a sliding-scale of morality. The bottom line, though, remains his covetous hopes for wealth:

> The knight is rich, he shall be my son-in-law;
> No matter, so the whore he keeps be wholesome,
> My daughter takes no hurt then; so let them wed:
> I'll have him sweat well ere they go to bed. (4.1.244-47)

Again, irony underpins Yellowhammer's logic: the "whore" that Whorehound keeps is indeed the Welsh Gentlewoman, about to wed Yellowhammer's son Tim. If Moll takes no hurt, then Tim might not either. (Yet Tim's later allusions that he will "clap" to his bride, a pun on gonorrheal infection, might suggest otherwise [4.1.133]). Yellowhammer even seems to doubt his own initial wishful thinking by proposing a further solution of Whorehound taking a sweating treatment as a prophylactic against venereal disease, a standard remedy that early modern people thought could prevent the worst ravages of syphilis.[121] If this mistress of Whorehound's is wholesome, why should Whorehound need a sweat at all? Here, the expedients of marital arrangements in exchange for the prospect of wealth trump concerns about bodily welfare. Moll, whose virginity was initially labeled as pathologically greensick at the play's beginning by her

[121] For more on this course of treatment, see Jennifer Evans and Sara Read, *Maladies & Medicine: Exploring Health and Healing, 1540-1740* (Barnsley, Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2017), 157-60.

mother, and who risked bodily harm during her swim in the Thames to escape forced marriage, is treated as a vessel for Whorehound's redemption no matter the cost to her person. Her objectification as a commodity for exchange is complete.

In this discussion of virginity and pathology, Tim Yellowhammer proves a helpful correlative by which to judge Moll's case further (much as Rosaline delineates more finely the discussion of Juliet's chastity). His presence in the play, marked by decided sexual aversion towards women, makes explicit a discourse of sexuality rooted in the ascendant gender binary and expectations prioritizing marriage and reproduction. Tim, indeed, might be the more fitting "chaste maid" of the play's title, rather than his sister Moll, who, even if chaste in body, is deeply enamored of Touchwood Junior.[122] Tim seems even more diligent than Moll and Touchwood Junior in following social etiquette's dictates on sexual behavior, even though those dictates place different pressures on men and women.[123] While his sister and her lover break with some social strictures by trying to outrun her parents' authority, the couple nevertheless do follow custom by urgently seeking a church license to sanctify their marriage. Yet Tim's social niceness – and his sexual reluctance – are even greater, and most prominently on display during the celebration for Mistress Allwit infant's christening mentioned earlier in this chapter. When Tim arrives at the gathering and sees it is filled with married women, he runs out of the room; he explains once he has been brought back that "'Tis against the laws of the university / For any that has answered under bachelor / To thrust 'mongst married wives" (3.2.118-20). Tim seems to have inherited his mother's trait for making unwitting sexual puns in his ill-timed usage of the

[122] From the fourteenth through the nineteenth centuries in mainstream English, the term "maid" could be applied universally, across lines of gender. The *OED* offers this definition: "a man without experience of sexual intercourse, esp. as a result of abstention" (the term now appears to be applied regionally). See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "maid (n.1)," September 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3532059626.
[123] See p. 13 fn 41 of this dissertation.

verb “thrust.” Yet unlike Maudline’s own sexual forthrightness, Tim displays reluctance as he clings to Cambridge’s policies of gendered separation. Maudline laments that policy to the assembled crowd before Tim’s return: “He’s so bashful, that’s the spoil of youth: / In the university they’re kept still to men, / And ne’er trained up to women’s company” (3.2.112-14). Of course, it does not seem to occur to Maudline that there remains the possibility that students might be trained up to their own company, or even that of their tutors.

But Maudline’s invocation of training suggests that she envisions Tim’s sexuality, like Moll’s, as distinctly involving attraction to the opposite sex, and within her parental remit: that she might train up both her children into the realm of procreative marriage, and to that end, she might be able to somehow manipulate, mold, or guide their sexual inclinations and experiences. Moll receives her mother’s diagnostic scolding for her apparent bashfulness (and, later, her rage for Moll’s disobedience). Tim’s initial sexual aversion – to the point of outright repulsion if not moral outrage (he cries out “O, I am betrayed!” when led into the assembly of gossips [3.2.110]) – does not garner him a diagnostic label. However, he is pushed into unwanted and unsought sexual contact; Maudline, in initially asking for Tim to be brought in, speculates that his time at the christening will “embolden him well, / For he wants nothing but audacity” (3.2.102-3). Lining up the gossips to welcome her son, Maudline insists that they each give Tim a kiss in greeting. Tim is disgusted, to say the least; after Lady Kix kisses him in greeting, he cries out: “O this is horrible, / She wets as she kisses! Your handkercher, sweet tutor, / To wipe them off as fast as they come on” (3.2.154-56). His kiss with another gossip goes no better, as he exclaims,

> This is intolerable!
> This woman had a villainous sweet breath,
> Did she not stink of comfits. Help me, sweet tutor,
> Or I shall rub my lips off. (3.2.157-59)

Both of Maudline's children express discomfort with the ways she brokers their sexual futures, but as Nancy Mohrlock Bunker indicates, Maudline still uses each child to her own ends.[124] One is labelled pathologically virginal, dragged through the streets, and confined; the other forced into a sexual situation he abhors. Both lose their autonomy in the process.

In contrast, Tim's tutor seems much more inclined than his young charge to participate in the ritual of greeting. He does not answer Tim's plea for help, but promises to go down the line himself, "I'll go kiss / The lower end the whilst" (3.2.160-61). Tim's subsequent speculation that "Perhaps that's the sweeter" might speak as much to the state of the present company as to the potential unwitting pun on non-procreative sex acts. That possibility for punning raises the question whether or not Tim is sexually inexperienced (and, in the vein of his mother, making outrageous puns) or rather more sexually knowledgeable, but disinclined. The bawdry here certainly is reminiscent of that present in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which sexual knowledge is insisted upon in puns but chastity is held up as a standard.[125] In either event, the bodily humor of this action typifies this scene's preoccupation with the grotesque, which Gail Kern Paster sees as rooted in a misogynistic discourse of feminine incontinence (whether urinary or sexual, or, more metaphorically, vocal).[126] However, this scene is not an isolated incident for Tim, but rather in keeping with his overall sexual aversion.

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[124] Nancy Mohrlock Bunker, *Marriage and Land Law in Shakespeare and Middleton* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 12.

[125] Stanley Wells labels *Romeo and Juliet* "one of the bawdiest of Shakespeare's plays, riddled with sexual puns, double meanings, and bawdy innuendo," acknowledging that it is "entirely integral to his artistic purposes" because it underscores the connection between sex and romance. As he puts it, "The play has begun with sex without love, and it is to continue with love without sex" as the tone shifts from comic to tragic, thus elevating the sacramental nature of Romeo and Juliet's consummation under marriage. See *Shakespeare, Sex, and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 148, 150, 151, 164 .

[126] Gail Kern Paster's influential chapter on *Chaste Maid* expands upon this point. See *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. 25.

Even the decidedly more alluring young woman whom his parents intend for Tim to marry inspires in him a sense of wariness like the gossips, those caricatures of undesirable femininity. In a monologue that grants the audience purchase into Tim's inward feeling more than is ever possible for Moll, Tim expresses a concern that he does not know the woman he is meant to marry:

> She's a stranger to me: I wonder what
> My parents mean, i'faith, to match me with a stranger so,
> A maid that's neither kiff nor kin to me.
> Life, do they think I have no more care of my body
> Than to lie with one that I ne'er knew, a mere stranger,
> One that ne'er went to school with me neither,
> Nor ever play-fellows together? (4.1.76-82)

In this revealing soliloquy, Tim's reluctance does not necessarily reflect, entirely, bodily or sexual repulsion. He does not state that he never wishes to ever lie with anybody but that he feels concerned about lying with someone so wholly unfamiliar. His concern with that unfamiliarity is persistent, if not extreme; he repeats the word "stranger" in reference to his fiancée a notable four times within the span of twenty-three lines of verse. Interestingly, he points to a schoolmate – quite presumably, another young boy – and "play-fellow" as the paragon of familiarity that might make possible for him a sexual connection.[127] And yet, the gossips make up part of his very familiar social circle, which makes one wonder if the root of his sexual aversion lies as

[127] Maudline's comment that she once whipped Tim at the "free-school / In Paul's church-yard" makes St. Paul's School in London identifiable as Tim's alma mater (3.2.132-133; 3.2.132 fn). John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, founded the school in 1509 for boys. Work to found St. Paul's School for Girls began in earnest in the late nineteenth century, and it was opened in 1904. See Michael McDonnell, *The History of St. Paul's School* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1909), 425. Presumably, then, Tim's education was in an all-male setting. Dorothy Gardner contends that in the Middle Ages, indirect evidence abounds enough "to make it probable that in many places boys and girls learned together the elements of faith and incidentally to know their letters and even to read." *English Girlhood at School: A Study of Women's Education Through Twelve Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 75. But the grammar schools of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like St. Paul's, catered to boys. Young girls who did receive an education were often taught privately in the home, or (increasingly throughout the seventeenth century) at day schools run by schoolmistresses, and later boarding schools in the eighteenth century. Gardner, *English Girlhood at School*, 209 and 338-48.

much in moments of the type of bodily disgust he was privy to in the christening scene as in his overall preoccupation with decorum. His squeamishness about sex equals his squeamishness about manners; here, he finds it improper for his intended to enter his chamber (again, because she is a "stranger") (4.1.93-94).

When next Tim and his intended meet, after an extended, farcical conversation in broken Welsh and Latin, Maudline forces Tim to kiss the Welsh Gentlewoman as a means of making "amends" (4.1.138). The kiss appears to have a remarkably transformative effect on Tim, who proclaims,

> O, delicious!
> One may discover her country by her kissing;
> 'Tis a true saying: "There's nothing tastes so sweet
> As your Welsh mutton." (4.1.139-42)

The embodied practice of theater-making prompts us to ask just how Tim delivers his line, "O, delicious." Is this the remark of sexual revelation, or, if delivered more painfully, the trite remark he can offer when backed into a corner? Unwittingly, he nods to further sexual consummation with a pun on "country"; his fiancée's status as a kept woman with a pun on "mutton" (for whore); and her sexual prowess with a pun on her "singing." He asks her to sing to show off her "good parts" so that he might "view how rich I were" – a prefiguration of the intimate bodily display in the bedchamber, and also the omnipresent equation of marriage with wealth (4.1.145-46). Has Tim finally come around to the Yellowhammer's mode of thinking? The song that Tim's intended sings is replete with innuendo and penetrative imagery (4.1.149-74). Afterwards, Tim declares he would not trade his "wife for a kingdom," and that he "can do somewhat too in my own lodging" (4.1.175-76). The comment offers a vague reference either to singing, or indeed to his own sexual capabilities. In any event, Maudline has successfully maneuvered one

of her children into the match of her choice (even though the full truth of the Welsh mistress' identity has yet to be revealed).

Throughout the play and even through this latter moment with the Welsh mistress, Tim Yellowhammer as a character is available for queer interpretations. Whether the homosocial environment of the university that Maudline decries ever crosses into a homosexual environment is an open question, bolstered by Tim's distorted reading of Ovidian poetry. After learning of Moll's escape via "a little hole looked into the gutter," Tim notes that "a wise man for love / Will seek every hole; my tutor knows it" (4.4.7, 9-10). Here, Tim butchers famous lines from the *Ars Amatoria* of the ways a lover might seek out whatever way necessary to reach the beloved, including the apertures provided by roofs and windows (4.4.10 fn). Critics likewise are undecided about whether Tim is sexually voracious or clueless and sexually repulsive – "an unappetizing moron" and a "stupid son" in the rather pointed words of Swapan Chakravorty.[128] No matter the way the character is portrayed, Tim Yellowhammer, like his sister, is pushed by his elders towards marriage, notwithstanding his initial aversion to the prospect. While the consequences for Moll's disobedience in her parents' particular choice of match are painted in the broad strokes of tragic fate, her fortunes only rescued by a comic reversal, even in the comic mode Tim is not entirely unscathed.

After Moll's fateful swim in the Thames, it appears to her family that she has died. At Moll's joint funeral with her beloved Touchwood Junior (supposed mortally wounded in a duel

[128] Bunker interprets Tim as particularly sexualized: she sees his sexual punning after the kiss with his intended as more knowing than incidental, evincing how he "desires immediate possession of her body, which validates their betrothal bargain…Tim's advances signal his priority for sex in his marriage." She continues that "Tim's immediate temptations and sexual innuendos to his betrothed produce her sexual love song, which expresses knowledge and desire." *Marriage and Land Law*, 24, 35. Paster also labels him a "perpetual adolescent." "The Ecology of the Passions," 154-55. Chakravorty's comment is found in his monograph *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 18, 97.

with Whorehound), her parents, much like the Capulets and Montagues before them, mourn. Yet the generic precepts of comedy enable Moll and Touchwood Junior's resurrection. The mourners' ready acceptance of the signs of their death pave the way for their joyous return to life, in contrast to Romeo's ready acceptance that Juliet's "corpse" is dead, catalyzing his and Juliet's tragic deaths. This festive reversal in *Chaste Maid* does not, though, entirely negate what has come before with regard to the play's characters' lack of skeptical inquiry. The acceptance of things at face value might only seem redeemed by nothing short of the miraculous, and even then, the miracle of resurrection is not all that it seems, for Touchwood Senior has a hand in coordinating the funerary show that prompted the Yellowhammers' repentance over their daughter's "death" and thus enables their consent to her match with Touchwood Junior after the pair have risen.

Moll's holding tightly to her virginity and her experience of chaste desire for Touchwood Junior temporarily upset her parents' efforts, leading them to decry her disobedience in turn. So, too, does Tim's sexual aversion likewise baffle the older generation. Both children resist letting go of their transitional virginity at the pace their parents would hope within the Cheapside economy of marriage, reproduction, and inheritance that moves at a quick clip and at any cost. Their closely guarded virginities and Moll's chaste desire are misread, willfully or not, by Yellowhammer and Maudline in a play world where little is as it seems. The Yellowhammers' treatment of Moll and Tim bespeak the play's sexual double standard, previously in evidence in the Country Wench's lack of redress and the lack of consequences for the likes of Touchwood Senior and even Yellowhammer for their philandering.

The women in the play whose sexual incontinence does not meet with punishment are women of means. Mistress Allwit's dalliances with Whorehound have met with financial support

for her whole family, while Lady Kix's child (conceived out of wedlock) will eventually be entitled to their inheritance (bound for Whorehound if not for a direct Kix heir). Because their incontinence is contained under the cover of married reproduction, these latter women characters escape unscathed. Yet it is through Moll's pursuit of a love match and Tim's eventual overcoming of his aversions with the Welsh mistress that Middleton shows preoccupations with the push and pull of attractions that defy social expectations and the ways that virginity is difficult to precisely define – a concern that continued to motivate his dramatic oeuvre, even in the historic and tragic genres.[129]

After *Chaste Maid* came *Hengist, King of Kent*; *or, the Mayor of Queenborough* (composed between 1616 and 1620). In that play, Roxena (the titular Saxon king's daughter), enters on Vortiger's arm. Hengist proclaims his status is too lowly for his daughter to be a worthy mistress for Vortiger. Subsequently, when Vortiger creates Hengist Earl of Kent, the captain Hersus feigns a swoon. Roxena claims that she alone is able to "cure" him:

> O 'tis his epilepsy, I know it well,
> I helped him once in Germany. Comes't again?
> A virgin's right hand stroked upon his heart
> Gives him ease straight, but't must be a pure virgin
> Or else it brings no comfort. (2.4.232-36)[130]

Roxena recycles Whorehound's phrasing about a "pure virgin" to emphasize the veracity of her claim to both virginity and healing. This moment self-consciously stages the folk medical belief

[129] A notable example of that continued concern with the mysteries of attraction and aversion is available in *The Changeling.* Alsemero encapsulates it thus: "one distastes / The scent of roses, which to infinites / Most pleasing is, and odoriferous; / One oil, the enemy of poison; / Another wine, the cheerer of the heart / And lively refresher of the countenance. / Indeed this fault (if so it be) is general; / There's scarce a thing but is both loved and loathed" (1.1.116-23). See Thomas Middleton, *The Changeling*, in *Thomas Middleton: Women Beware Women and Other Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). These lines recall Friar Laurence's speech in *Romeo and Juliet* on the bivalence of plants, which can harm and help (2.2.23-30).
[130] Thomas Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent; or, The Mayor of Queenborogh*, ed. by Grace Ioppolo, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

that a virgin girl has the unique capacity, through her purity, to heal.[131] The trick of Roxena's applying her hand so publicly to Hersus' heart, of course, is that she wants to prove herself virginal to increase her worth in the eyes of those with political power. Unbeknownst to Vortiger and the other onlookers, Roxena and Hersus have had sex. In a series of asides with the downed Hersus, Roxena begs his cooperation in making a "recovery"; "I'm content for this time to recover / To save thy credit," Hersus eventually concedes (2.4.245-46). Hersus' reluctant promise to go along with the trick comes in the hope that the pair of lovers might conceal her sexual past, in order to parlay her relationship with Vortiger into political gain for themselves. Though brief, this virginity test demonstrates the ways that the medicalization of virginity allows for the conditions of a performance of a different interior reality, all to make way for the accomplishment of politically ambitious aims. Once alone with Hersus, Roxena reflects on the costs of their plan:

> I pity all the fortunes of poor gentlewomen
> Now in mine own unhappiness; when we have given
> All that we have to men, what's their requital?
> An ill-faced jealousy. (3.1.44-47)

The performance of chastity in this moment has given Roxena opportunities for advancement – but at the price of her happiness.

First licensed for performance in 1622, Middleton's *The Changeling* (co-authored with William Rowley) continues to think through the implications of virginity featured in *Chaste Maid* and further refines the presentation of the virginity test featured in *Hengist*. Beatrice-Joanna faces her impending nuptials to Alsemero, whom she loves, with the knowledge that his discovery that she is no longer a virgin could upend the entire arrangement. Her virginity was the

[131] Mosca plays on this belief in *Volpone* when trying to goad Corvino into forcing Celia to sleep with the play's titular character.

price the villainous Deflores exacted for conducting her murder-for-hire scheme, killing Beatrice-Joanna's undesired suitor Alonzo so that she could wed Alsemero. Beatrice-Joanna imagines the worst consequences if Alsemero should learn the truth:

> There's no venturing
> Into his bed, what course soe'er I light upon,
> Without my shame, which may grow up to danger;
> He cannot but in justice strangle me
> As I lie by him, as a cheater use me;
> 'Tis a precious craft to play with a false die
> Before a cunning gamester. (4.1.11-17)[132]

But play with false die Beatrice-Joanna must, if she is to gamble on this marriage to Alsemero in the hopes of preserving her reputation and her life. In his closet, Beatrice-Joanna discovers a book purportedly authored by the real-life medical practitioner Antonius Mizaldus along with a potion with the directives on how to determine a woman's virginity. She reads aloud:

> A merry sleight, but true experiment, the author Antonius Mizaldus. Give the party you suspect the quantity of a spoonful of the water in glass M, which upon her that is a maid makes three several effects: 'twill make her incontinently gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughing; else dull, heavy, and lumpish. (4.1.44-48)

It is interesting that, in the test Beatrice-Joanna reads, a woman's sexual experience might be recognized in her seeming "dull, heavy, and lumpish." This trio of adjectives sounds remarkably like the symptoms of greensickness that Maudline Yellowhammer says she observes in her daughter Moll. The signs of sexual experience and inexperience thus overlap, and indeed, it is worth pondering the efficacy of such tests to begin with. Middleton's preoccupation, whether in his discussion of greensickness or virginity testing, seems to be with the arbitrariness of sexual signifiers writ large.

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[132] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Richard Dutton, in *Thomas Middleton: Women Beware Women and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

After all, the highly-theatrical display to "prove" virginity is easily played; Beatrice-Joanna first tests the water in glass M on her own chaste maid, her attendant Diaphanta, in order to establish its efficacy. Because Diaphanta gapes, then sneezes, and finally begins laughing, Beatrice-Joanna confidently assumes the drink has worked and the test is infallible (4.1.103SD, 4.1.105 SD, 4.1.108-12). Yet, should she not *suspect* Diaphanta's chastity? Could it be possible that the Mizaldus' virginity test is more common knowledge? Mizaldus was, after all, less the occult physician, but rather a doctor featured across popular printed medical material, including Thomas Lupton's medical treatise *A thousand notable things* (1579), where a remedy to anoint the breasts with juice to restore a "virginal" appearance is attributed to Mizaldus, something akin to Beatrice-Joanna's "merry sleight".[133]

The irony of Beatrice-Joanna's "sleight" is that the faith she puts in her maid's performance of a test of virginity when she herself is about to "fake" virginity through a bed-trick does not prompt further skepticism about the reliability of the test or signs of virginity writ large. While sexual jealousy prompted Shakespearean figures like Claudio or Leontes to misread the female virginal and chaste body, Middleton's Roxena and Beatrice-Joanna recognize the lability of virginal signs to take their fate into their own hands. That intensification deepens the skeptical problem about the reliability of sense perception and calls into question the reliable

[133] Per Lupton's text, "IF a Woman anoint often her Dugges or Pappes with the iuyce of Succorie, it wyll make them litle, round and hard. For if they be hanging or flagging, it wyl draw them together, whereby they shal seeme as the Dugges of a mayde. *Mizaldus*." *A thousand notable things* (London: John Charlewood, for Hugh Spooner, 1579), 14. In another popular source, Mizaldus offers a test regarding women's virginity, evinced through urinary continence: "Noscendi ratio an mulier sit virgo integra & intact, an non: Gagatis lapidis rasura, setaceo cribro transmissa, in tenuissimum redigatur puluerum, inde ex aqua vinove hauriatur, si ilico lotium retinere nequit, corruptæ virginitatis indicium…sin secus fiat, eam compescit, & arctius cohibendidatur facultas. Nec minus inualide, eodem modo, id manifestat succinum album." (The method of knowing whether a woman may be an untouched and intact virgin, or not: a scraping of jet stone, coarse having been passed through a sieve, being reduced into fine dust, thence drunk out of water or, as you please, wine, if immediately she cannot retain urine, it is a sign of her corrupt virginity…but if otherwise, [the urine] is restrained, and the faculty tightly holds back. Nor less ineffectual, by the same manner, it manifests a white liquor.) Latin sourced from Antonius Mizauld, *Centuriae IX. memorabilium utilium ac jucundorum in aphorismos arcanorum…digestae*. (Frankfurt: Ioannis Wechelsus, 1592), 253. English translation mine.

legibility of the virginal body; false accusations of sexual incontinence escalate into dramatic social displays that toy with the very notion of the connection between bodily signifier and essential "truth." One constant remains in that characters misread like Juliet or Moll, Hero or Hermione, and characters who are prompting misreading, like Roxena and Beatrice-Joanna, are pursuing ideals of marriage within a transitional moment in time where companionate marriage is praised, but whose ideals clash with the structures of gendered subordination, hierarchies of social order dependent upon chains of authority, and coverture.

* * *

A lack of skepticism when it comes to misreading the female body for signs of sexual continence fuels *Romeo and Juliet*'s tragic and resolves *Chaste Maid's* tragicomic plots. Yet as the philosophical skeptical crisis gains greater force throughout the seventeenth century, too much skepticism will prompt a crisis of irresolution regarding the merits and demerits of chastity – and of poetry itself – in the work of Sir John Suckling, the subject of this dissertation's next chapter.

Chapter 2
Skepticism, (In)action: Sir John Suckling and the Fruition Debate in Seventeenth-Century Verse

Though John Aubrey described him as the "greatest gallant of his time," the Cavalier poet Sir John Suckling was thrice unlucky in love.[134] In the late 1620s, he became enamored of his cousin Mary Cranfield and corresponded from a distance for several years. After Suckling embarked on an ambassadorial visit to Germany in 1631, however, "No further examples of his correspondence with Mary survive." Suckling's biographer Robert Wilcher considers that "This may be an accident of fortune or an indication…that the cousins were losing interest in their long-distance courtship, which may never have been more than a witty game played by two like-minded young people who were attracted to each other but for whom a serious relationship was never a practical option.[135] By 1633, after squandering his inheritance, Suckling sought to wed Anne Willoughby, a nineteen-year-old heiress, though Wilcher contends that "the proposed match had more to do with his pocket than his heart."[136] This pursuit ended in social disgrace as Suckling brawled in the streets with Sir John Digby, Anne and her father Sir Henry's preferred choice of suitor. Once Suckling had recovered his pride, he courted Welsh heiress Mary Bulkeley.[137] Their correspondence, though, likewise came to naught; by 1639, Mary Bulkeley married Richard Bodychen.[138]

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[134] John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Kate Bennett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.367. As to a potential fourth ill-fated love affair, Herbert Berry replicates George Garrard's 1637 comment that Suckling intended to wed "young mrs Whynierd a handsome wench," though nothing came of this alleged pursuit either. "This lady, about whom almost nothing is certainly known," writes Berry, "may have been the Anne Winyard whom Arthur Farewell married in 1641." Herbert Berry, "A Life of Sir John Suckling," PhD diss. (University of Nebraska, 1953), 158-59.
[135] Robert Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier: The Work of Sir John Suckling in Its Social, Religious, and Literary Contexts* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 73.
[136] Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 101.
[137] He may have been acquainted either through his uncle or Bulkeley's brother, a friend from his time at Greys Inn. See Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 248.
[138] Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 248.

Suckling's letters to Mary Cranfield and Mary Bulkeley during those failed pursuits offer engaging and varied prose.[139] The vogue for Neoplatonism in the Caroline court (to be explored further below) found an expression in Suckling's attempts to kindle and sustain long-distance affection in idealized language. After a missed connection in London, Suckling writes to Cranfield that the distance will not make his heart any less fond: "You (Madam) have my heart already, nor can you use it unkindly but with some injustice…After all, the wages will not be high; for it hath been brought up under Platonicks, and knows no other way of being paid for service, then by being commanded more."[140] Distance does not hamper desire but fuels until it reaches a level of almost religious devotion: "a gallerie hung with *Titians* or *Vandikes* hand, and a chamber filled with living Excellence, are the same things to me; and the use that I shall make of that Sex now, will be no other then that which the wiser sort of Catholiques do of Pictures; at the highest, they but serve to raise my devotion to you."[141] Neither imitative art nor embodied beauty can deter Suckling from this rarified experience of love for Cranfield. He uses similarly elevated language to negotiate distance and desire in the Platonic strain when he later writes to Bulkeley sometime between 1636 and 1639. He explains in a letter from this period that "In spite of all Philosophy, it will be hottest in my Climate, when my Sun is farthest off; and in spite of all reason, I proclaim, that I am not my self but when I am Yours wholy."[142] Suckling's love defies all logic, figured both in the principles of nature and in his own rational faculties.

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[139] All of the above-quoted letters saw publication in the 1646 first edition of *Fragmenta Aurea* (though their addressees were not included in that edition, but rather supplied by later Suckling biographers and critics.) On the identification of Suckling's beloveds, see Clayton's general introduction to John Suckling, *The Works of Sir John Suckling: The Non-Dramatic Works*, ed. Thomas Clayton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), xxxi-xxxii; xl-xlii.
[140] Letter 2 in *The Works*, 108.
[141] Letter 2, in Suckling, *The Works*, 109.
[142] Letter 29 in Suckling, *The Works*, 137.

Suckling employs competing discourses in other epistolary material. In another letter to Bulkeley, Suckling opens, "My Dear Dear, Think I have kist your Letter to nothing, and know not what to answer. Or that now I am answering, I am kissing you to nothing, and know not how to go on!"[143] Through this conceit, Suckling collapses the physical distance between himself and Bulkeley and telegraphs close sexual contact first through the medium of the letter and second through summoning his reader's power of imagination. He goes on to appropriate *carpe diem* generic ideals. Of "Those Tyrants, businesse, honour, and necessity, what have they to do with you and I?" he asks; "Why should we not do Loves commands before theirs whose Soveraignty is but usurped upon us?" In an escalating series of questions, he continues, "Shall we not smell to Roses 'cause others do look on? or gather them, 'cause there are prickles, and something that would hinder us? Dear—I fain would—and know no hindrance—but what must come from you—and—why should any come? since 'tis not I, but you must be sensible how much time we lose."[144] The running questions culminate in a frenzy of dashes that produces the effect of a speaker tripping over himself in haste to illustrate the *carpe diem* theme even more forcefully. Though the letters did not lead to lasting love, they display Suckling's skill in deploying a variety of rhetorical modes.

I begin with this glimpse of Suckling's biography and his letters because critics have often pointed to his failed courtships as the source for his deeply unromantic anti-fruition lyrics, poems that warn against consummating love, which this chapter will investigate. Fruition refers to "the action of enjoying; enjoyment, pleasurable possession, the pleasure arising from possession."[145] In usages dating from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries, it could

[143] Letter 31 in Suckling, *The Works*, 138.
[144] Letter 31 in Suckling, *The Works*, 138.
[145] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "fruition (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1168271816.

connote sexual consummation.[146] Inspired by ancient verse attributed to the Roman author Petronius, the poetic subgenre of the fruition lyric was revitalized by Ben Jonson. Suckling transformed the genre in his rendition of anti-fruition lyrics, which inspired a decades-long poetic debate after his untimely death. Scholars have deployed the biographical facts of Suckling's multiple unsuccessful courtships as motivation for his poetic speakers' stance against fruition and, moreover, Suckling's overall personal misogyny.[147] Yet, as the letters demonstrate, Suckling was both flexible and agile with rhetorical viewpoints. Though famous (or perhaps even infamous) for his more unsentimental verse, Suckling, in his correspondence with Cranfield and Bulkeley, demonstrates an ability to play with voice, tone, and emotion – an ability that is more capacious than that for which critics have often given him credit. Whether in an epistolary or poetic mode, Suckling consistently tries out a variety of subject positions. Suckling's modes of thought embodied variety. Or, as Wilcher puts it, Suckling had a "lifelong habit of putting both sides of a question," evinced even in his juvenilia.[148] In addition to being a feature of humanist educational curricula, this habit of dialectical debate also chimes with the classical skeptical habit of mind more broadly, which uses juxtaposition to resolve difficult questions.[149]

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[146] While Jonson's poem might best represent the reemergence of the ancient fruition lyric subgenre in English, its sentiments that subvert expectations of desire chime with other contemporaneous poetic output, including but not limited to the anti-blazon, so well exemplified in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"). See *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 641.

[147] George Parfitt presents Suckling as a miserable sort of person: "[Suckling] is often seen as the quintessential Cavalier, but often the laughter is hollow, the gaiety close to hysteria. Suckling, it seems, poses as he does because for him there are no solid values in the court of Charles I. It is hardly surprising to learn that he killed himself." *English Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Longman, 1985), 32. Gerald Hammond sees evidence of a violent streak of chauvinism in Suckling; he cites "Preferred Love Rejected" as evidence of a "real hatred" – he estimates it an "empty, vicious poem [that] reveals only Suckling's impotence as he gets his pleasure from speaking rather than acting." *Fleeting Things: English Poets and Poems, 1616-1660* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 314, 317-18. Joshua Scodel argues that in Suckling's anti-fruition verses "there is a psychologically authentic aspect of the poem[s], however: the contempt for women and their bodies as the disappointing embodiment of tedious 'excess' and the concomitant sense that male fantasy is always superior to female reality." "The Pleasures of Restraint: The Mean of Coyness in Cavalier Poetry," *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 258.

[148] Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 237.

[149] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, xix.

To offer an example of that mode in an early untitled poem, Suckling's speaker contemplates the arc from Christ's nativity through to his redemption of humanity. Of the immaculate conception, the speaker exclaims that it "Is such a wonder and soe great! that heere / Our *Faith* not *Reason* must us steere" (5-6).[150] He goes on to explain that uncertainties remain; each person will play the part of Jesus' doubting disciple in a quest for faith: "Each *Man* is *Thomas* heere, and faine would see / Something to helpe his Infidellitie." The speaker concludes with a plea: "But I beleive; *Lord* help my faithlesse mynd / And with Sainct *Thomas* lett mee *Pardon* find" (9-12). The speaker immediately undermines his claim to belief with a prayer to God to give him belief; he still remains of a "faithlesse mynd" like the saint to whom Suckling also dedicated another early poem, "Upon St. Thomas his disbeliefe."[151] Though ultimately contending that the untitled poem quoted above is ultimately "really quite conventional," L. A. Beaurline nevertheless concedes that it "gives us an early glimpse of the skeptic" Suckling.[152] Skepticism thus imbues Suckling's writing across time and genres, and this chapter argues that treating the anti-fruition poems as informed by skeptical principles enriches our understanding of the verse.

This chapter will explore how Suckling revises the original anti-fruition conceit's commitment to chaste desire by calling into question desire in and of itself. What critics have dismissed as Suckling's sour grapes in versified form over loves lost, lost, and lost again instead reflect a deepening skeptical crisis' reach into the field of sexuality, and the crisis over the

[150] Clayton supplies the title "[Faith and Doubt]," in Suckling, *The Works*, 12.
[151] Wilcher notes that Suckling's "'Upon St. Thomas his unbeliefe' is a poem in which natural skepticism is reinforced by the spectacle of different sects of believers squabbling and fighting over the fundamental doctrines of their faith, and comes close to dismissing the validity of the very concept of salvation in the final line and a half." *The Discontented Cavalier*, 34.
[152] L. A. Beaurline, "The Canon of Sir John Suckling's Poems," *Studies in Philology* 57, no. 3 (July 1960): 513. Wilcher likewise notes that, "Looking back over the eleven items of poetic juvenilia in the light of Suckling's early experiences, it is possible to catch…glimpses of the wryly skeptical view of human beliefs and behavior that was forming in the 'faithlesse mynd' of the future diplomat, courtier, and writer." *The Discontented Cavalier*, 41.

sufficiency of poetic form in an era of political and social upheaval. Suckling's poems leave their readers staring into a void. The long debate in response to his verse, though, would raise further questions about the sexual double standard and pave the way for the libertine poetic ethos that emerged in the latter half of the seventeenth century – an ethos that, while it turned to sexual excess, shared some of the irresolution that Suckling's discomfiting verses display. Suckling's poetry serves as a more vital hinge point than has been previously allowed, then, between the sort of classically infused skepticism propounded by the likes of Montaigne and the emerging radical skepticism that would take hold in England and the Continent; between the post-Donne love lyric and Restoration libertine poetry.

1. Suckling in Context: Neoplatonism and Fruition Verse

In a letter dated June 3, 1634, author James Howell informs fellow writer and politician Sir Philip Warwick, then in Paris, of the latest from Westminster. While the headline news of royal fleet's seaworthiness dominates the early part of Howell's missive, he summarizes the latest fad in King Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria's court:

> there is a Love call'd Platonick Love, which much sways there of late; it is a Love abstracted from all corporeal gross Impressions and sensual Appetite, but consists in Contemplations and Ideas of the Mind, not in any carnal Fruition. This Love sets the Wits of the Town on work; and they say there will be a Mask shortly of it, whereof Her Majesty and her Maids of Honour will be part.[153]

The Platonic tradition throughout the Renaissance had deep diachronic and international roots; the revived discourse on Platonism throughout the period runs back through sources as varied as Englishman Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* and earlier to Pietro Bembo in Book IV of

[153] James Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Elianae: The Familiar Letters of James Howell*, ed. Joseph Jacobs (London: David Nutt, 1892), 317-18.

Italian Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.[154] Yet the Neoplatonic vogue in the Caroline court referenced in Howell's letter helpfully encompasses the milieu in which Suckling wrote. Queen Henrietta Maria, who was imbued in the *salon* culture of her native France, imported to England a strand of Neoplatonism influenced by secular and sacred sources – particularly Honoré d'Urfé's romance *L'Astrée* (the first volume of which was published in 1607 and last in 1627) and St. François de Sales' theology of Devout Humanism explicated in his 1608 *Introduction à la vie devote*.[155] Erica Veevers notes d'Urfé's innovations from ancient ideals thus: "Plato had compared the ascent to God by means of beauty to a ladder or a stair, on which the original steps (the particular objects of love) drop out of sight as one ascends…D'Urfé's innovation was to allow the lover to linger on the stair." In that lingering, though, d'Urfé's Neoplatonism "neutralised love by dwelling on it so much: by making it into an object to be talked about, written about, played with, he succeeded in drawing from love the thorn of passion;

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[154] Sidney famously argues in his work (printed in 1595 though composed fifteen years earlier) that "any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself." He reformulates Plato's concept of the idea to the end of Sidney's imperative that poetry should "teach and delight": "And that the poet hath that *idea* is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he wholly imagined them; which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative…but so far substantially it worketh, not to make a Cyrus…but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses." *The Defence of Poesy*, in *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), 10, 9. Sir Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation of Castiglione's work applies the platonic ideal to the realm of love, chiefly to prioritize the ideal over the real to avoid the disappointments arising from time and age ravaging beauty. Hoby writes in his translation, "To avoid, therefore, the torment of this absence [of beauty], and to enjoy beauty without passion, the Courtier by the help of reason must full and wholly call back again the coveting of the body to beauty alone, and, in what he can, behold it in itself simple and pure, and frame it within his imagination, sundered from all matter, and so make it friendly and loving to his soul." *The Courtier* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume B: The Sixteenth and The Early Seventeenth Century*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, George Logan, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 10th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 187.

[155] When Henrietta Maria "first arrived in England, in June 1625, she undoubtedly brought with her a taste for the romantic ideas fostered by *L'Astrée*, and for the kind of activities that formed the pastimes of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and the French court." Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 33-34. The literary salon at the Hôtel de Rambouillet was frequented by Henrietta Maria's mother, Marie de Médicis, and the group had a particular fondness for *L'Astrée*. In point of fact, D'Urfé dedicated to Marie the third volume of the work. Marie likewise appreciated De Sales' theology, and it took precedence in Henrietta Maria's spiritual education. As a sign of her continued adherence to the theological foundation of her earliest years, during her widowhood Henrietta Maria founded the "third Visitandine convent in Paris and she was considered especially fit to be its benefactress because of her knowledge of Sales's *Introduction à la vie dévote* and her veneration of the mysteries it contained." Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218.

by bringing Platonic idealism into everyday life he turned mysticism into manners."[156] De Sales, inspired in part by his friend d'Urfé's views, "not only accepted but placed a high value on chaste human love as a means of approaching the love of God."[157]

Henrietta Maria's penchant for this brand of Neoplatonic philosophy found literary expression in court masques, as Howell's letter noted. On February 10, 1635, the Queen and her ladies presented at Whitehall William Davenant and Inigo Jones' collaboration *The Temple of Love*. In this masque, the Queen of Narsinga learns from "Divine Poesie (the Secretary of Nature)" that "by the influence of her beauty… / The Temple / of Chast Love should be re-established in this Island" after magicians threatened to overrun it with intemperance.[158] Thus the court theatrical machine upheld the virtues of a chaste love that earned the name of platonic. However, voices opposing the queen's vision of a rarified Neoplatonic love exemplified in dramatic entertainments did emerge over time. Even Davenant himself would go on to write a satire on the very subject he had recently lauded in *The Temple of Love* when he completed *The Platonick Lovers*, also in 1635.[159]

Furthermore, questions abounded over how thoroughly Henrietta Maria lived out her commitment to Neoplatonism. Court gossip circled around the relationship between Henry Jermyn and Henrietta Maria, "whose familiarity (to the extent of his being seen once with his arm about her neck)" featured in poetry by Carew.[160] As Veevers explicates, "Henrietta was no prude, she certainly enjoyed the company of men, and her behaviour, by English standards of the

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[156] Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion*, 18.
[157] Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion*, 23-24.
[158] William Davenant and Inigo Jones, "The Argument" in *The Temple of Love A Masque* (London: Thomas Walkley, 1634), n.p. For the performance dating, see "The Temple of Love," in *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks*, ed. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 2007. Accessed 21 February 2023. http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/viewrecord.php?deep_id=841.
[159] William Davenant, *The Platonick Lovers. A Tragæcomedy* (London: Richard Meighen, 1636). The quarto was published a year after the King's Men debuted the piece at the Blackfriars in 1635.
[160] Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion*, 56.

time, was comparatively free."[161] Even the otherwise commendatory *Temple of Love* itself did not unilaterally praise Neoplatonism. In point of fact, its gently satiric treatment of the reform of youthful indiscretion winked "at the queen consort's household and to its sexual misconduct." Karen Britland contends that, from this evidence, "Henrietta Maria cannot be considered to have been either entirely innocent or devoid of humour, and had already taken part in at least one production that invoked Rabelaisian burlesque."[162] Britland notes that Henrietta's sponsorship of *The Shepherds' Paradise* (1622/23) and *The Temple* in short order, both of which critiqued Neoplatonism to a degree, without her fully understanding those critical implications, defies credulity. She notes that "The common denominator between these productions is not masculine scepticism, but the queen herself, giving rise to an image of Henrietta Maria as a critic of her own fashion and not as a woman who unthinkingly replicated French salon culture."[163] Henrietta Maria seriously engaged with all that Neoplatonism had to offer as a mode of being in the world; a means to navigate the competing demands of married chastity and public, court life; and as an attractive mode of devotion. Yet she was not above critiquing the philosophy. It is important to understand the nuances of her engagement with Neoplatonism itself to make sense of the responses to the philosophy that were less than complimentary. Such an understanding lays the foundation for comprehending critiques of Neoplatonism that were generated not just by its chief exponent in Henrietta Maria but also in other court figures.

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[161] Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion*, 56.
[162] Britland, *Drama at the Courts*, 129-30. Some of the scandals that bedeviled Henrietta Maria's household included a 1627 trial of one of her musicians for the alleged sexual assault on the Earl of Carlisle's daughter. The clandestine marriage in 1632 of Carlisle's son with Margaret Russell, unbeknownst to Carlisle and facilitated with the assistance of the Earl of Holland, marked another scandal. Nor was the Earl of Holland himself free of scandal: he "was placed under house arrest for challenging Jerome Weston to a duel" in 1633. That same year, "Eleanor Villiers, one of Henrietta Maria's ladies-in-waiting, gave birth to the illegitimate child of Henry Jermyn." Jermyn refused to wed the mother of his child, and was imprisoned in the Tower, "threatened with banishment from court." But he did return, "unmarried, his credit with the queen apparently intact." Britland, *Drama at the Courts*, 142-43.
[163] Britland, *Drama at the Courts*, 129-30.

Suckling could certainly be placed among those dissenters, as he advocated for some level of chastity (perhaps best labeled abstinence) in his anti-fruition poems, but not for the ends of the kind of transcendence, beauty, and ideals for which the Queen's vision of chastity advocated. Critics of Suckling's verse often start with Neoplatonism and Henrietta Maria, arguing that Suckling must be opposed entirely to this philosophy on political grounds, and as a result must use poetry to air his grievances about this courtly trend. Joshua Scodel argues that Suckling "wages a battle" against the values of his day in part by "mocking the cult of 'Platonic love' associated with Henrietta Maria at the Caroline court."[164] A. J. Smith asserts Suckling's oppositional defiance to that cult thus: "One is always aware…of the enclosed court circle and its sense of strain, outwardly expressed in sophistication."[165] Likewise, running throughout both Scodel and Smith's critique of Suckling's verse is an insistence on Suckling's misogyny, which is at odds with the ways that Henrietta Maria's brand of Neoplatonism might just empower women. Scodel bluntly indicates that Suckling "rebels against the 'effeminizing' values of the court, substituting a cynical, manly hedonism that debases rather than idealizes women."[166] Scholars like Smith and Scodel have been quick to ascribe Suckling's defiant streak to, at best, mere political dissidence, and, at worst, a flaw in character. Yet even these critical estimations do not complete the picture.

As much as these scholarly accounts set Suckling in opposition to Henrietta Maria's aims, and for all Suckling's own personal reservations about the politics of the royal court, he nonetheless ended up giving up his life for the Royalist cause.[167] Moreover, Suckling's near

[164] Scodel, "The Pleasures of Restraint," 241.
[165] A.J. Smith, "The Failure of Love," in *Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1971), 55.
[166] Scodel, "The Pleasures of Restraint," 256.
[167] Wilcher notes that Suckling observed how his Uncle Lionel's fortunes had fallen in the court and took a lesson from it. See *The Discontented Cavalier*, 37-38.

contemporaries linked him posthumously to the Queen. The 1642 broadside *Magna Britannia Divisa* includes a print of the Queen's train, "Professio Romana, or King without his Parliament." Among the depicted host of pro-French and Spanish sympathizers, Suckling finds a place.[168] In registering these nuances, I aim to pressure critics' simplistic vision of a standoff between the Neoplatonic queen on one side, with all the powers of the court behind her, and the sulking Suckling on the other, who hates Neoplatonism for Neoplatonism's sake. The truth is more complicated. Suckling could use Neoplatonic convention when it was advantageous (such as in his love letters) but was not so invested in it that he could not leverage the idiom to consider the merits and demerits of the kinds of idealization with which Neoplatonism engages.[169] Much like the Queen's philosophy, Suckling's also contains multitudes.

I suggest, then, throughout this chapter that Suckling's poetry probes deeper philosophical questions regarding the vision of chastity that pervaded his social and literary milieu. He considers the complexities of sexual response and impulses alongside the mixed-up qualities of yearning and repulsion – all matters that "carnal Fruition," to borrow Howell's phrasing, bring to the fore. Suckling, with his customary skepticism, investigates sexual desire's sufficiency as a mode of being in the world and relating to others. And, at the same time, his poems' various speakers oscillate between expressing views with a perhaps less-than-sincere attachment to chastity and also a more expansive vision of abstinence as encompassing some forms of desire. What results is an uncomfortable middle ground in which both desire and chastity, in their various shades, cause more consternation than contentment. Suckling's poetic

[168] Britland, *Drama at the Courts*, 205-7.
[169] Veevers actually cites Suckling as a *proponent* of Neoplatonism: "The fashions of *précisosité* and Platonic love that Henrietta brought with her to the English court are probably better known today for the witty poems that mocked them than for the works that praised them; for instance Cleveland's 'Antiplatonick' verses…are more familiar than Suckling's solemn 'Letters' to Aglaura on the subject. In the 1630s, however, there were those (including, in other moods, the mockers) who took them very seriously indeed. Her fashions influenced court life and culture throughout Charles's reign, and beyond it to the Restoration." *Images of Love and Religion*, 14.

personae question if Neoplatonism's assurance that chaste desire is actually oriented towards the highest good. In turn, Suckling's poetic subject matter examines the adequacy of poetry as a mode of expression to give voice to a complex relationship between chastity and eroticism. Tensions in that relationship mounted as the ideals that undergirded both verse and court culture were crumbling in the face of coming war and gathering social and religious revolution amid the Puritan regime's rise. A later look at the fruition subgenre's long-term poetic survival will survey responses including Edmund Waller's 1645 "In Answer of Sir John Suckling's Verses," Abraham Cowley's anti-fruition verse from 1656 ("No, thou'rt a fool, I'll swear, if e'er thou grant"), the pseudonymously authored 1688 "A Poem against fruition written on the reading in Mountains Essay: By Alexis," and Aphra Behn's contemporaneous reply "To Alexis in answer to his poem against Fruition. Ode." While Waller's speaker disagrees with Suckling's speaker's premise, Cowley's speaker agrees in part. "Alexis" and Behn's speakers canvass the same themes forty years after Suckling's verses were first printed. Though "Alexis'" speaker advocates for restraint in his poem that owes debts to Montaigne, Behn's response demonstrates the double-bind in which women find themselves in matters of physical love under the sexual double standard. In brief, Suckling uses the skeptical method of opposition to explore received notions about sexual pleasure and the potential dangers of excessive passion. Yet Suckling does not resolve the questions he raises; if the classical Pyrrhonist skeptics used the suspension of judgment and opposition to attain equanimity, Suckling's skeptical process only leads to irresolution and doubt.[170] His respondents put their own stamp on the fruition debate, but none comes close to a solution. Thus a more hyperbolic version of skepticism, gaining ground as the seventeenth century wore on, is on view in Suckling's poetry and that of his successors.

[170] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, xix.

The aforementioned sense of irresolution present in these seventeenth-century poems is not prominent in the classical and Renaissance fruition verses that preceded them. The ancient Roman poet Petronius, most famous for authoring the *Satyricon* under the reign of Emperor Nero, generally receives credit for inaugurating the anti-fruition lyric as a poetic subgenre. Petronius, however, joined other writers like Martial and Ovid in translating Rome's commitment to a "golden mean" from civic life (propounded by the likes of Cicero) to an erotic realm.[171] The continued emphasis on the mean as a benchmark for courtly behavior in Renaissance courtesy literature provided an opportunity for renewed exploration of the theme.[172] Ben Jonson revived this subgenre in Britain by translating a verse fragment attributed to Petronius into English:

> Foeda est in coitu, & brevis voluptas,
> Et tædet Veneris statim peractæ.
> Non ergo ut pecudes libidinosæ,
> Cæci protinùs irruamus illuc:
> Nam languescit Amor perit*que* Flamma.
> Sed sic, sic, sine fine feriati,
> Et tecum jaceamus osculantes:
> Hic nullus labor est, rubor*que* nullus;
> Hoc juvit, juvat, & diu juvabit:
> Hoc non deficit, incipit*que* semper.
>
> Doing, a filthy pleasure is, and short;
> And done, we straight repent us of the sport:
> Let us not then rush blindly on unto it,
> Like lustful beasts, that only know to do it:
> For lust will languish, and that heat decay,
> But thus, thus, keeping endless holiday,
> Let us together closely lie, and kiss,
> There is no labour, nor no shame in this;
> This hath pleased, doth please, and long will please; never

[171] Scodel, "The Pleasures of Restraint," 244-46.
[172] Scodel notes the long-lasting influence of Aristotelian and Ciceronian conceptions of the mean likewise influencing the Renaissance courtesy literature that provided fertile ground for renewed parody by early modern vernacular poets. See "The Pleasures of Restraint," 245.

Can this decay, but is beginning ever.[173]

Printed in his *Underwood* of 1640 after circulating in manuscript, the initial lines in Jonson's poem summarize the anti-fruition genre quite succinctly: "Doing, a filthy pleasure is, and short; / And done, we straight repent us of the sport" (1-2). Disdaining the lust of beasts and hoping to stave off a kind of postcoital entropy, Jonson's speaker presents tempered abstinence as a solution: "keeping endless holiday, / Let us together closely lie, and kiss, / There is no labour, nor no shame in this." The speaker goes on to promise that this perpetual foreplay "never / Can…decay, but is beginning ever" (3-4, 6-8, 11). Recording his conversations with Ben Jonson, the Scottish poet William Drummond notes that Jonson's translation ultimately concludes "it was better to lie still and kiss than . . . ."[174] The picture Jonson (and, in his report, Drummond) offer is one of a chaste sexuality; a way to purely fulfill a yearning for physical passion, represented by Drummond's tantalizing ellipsis.[175] But, as Paul Hartle notes, the original Petronian notion of fruition, reflected in Jonson's verse, takes on new meaning in other Renaissance contexts.[176] While Jonson offers a licit, sexually continent choice, other authors, including Montaigne, linger on the "filthy pleasure," cataloguing both its troubles and also the troubles that arise from the intimacy Jonson presents as almost a delay tactic en route to ultimate consummation.

Popular in England since his *Essais* were translated in the 1590s and influencing later English writers in the fruition debate, Montaigne offered his own assessment of the fruition question. Absorbing classical philosophical and contemporary poetic influences, Montaigne's

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[173] I offer a semi-diplomatic transcription of the Latin "Fragmentum Petron. Arbitr." from the original *Underwood*. I have indicated the expansion of the ending "-que" ("and") in non-italicized letters. See Ben Jonson, *Works*, (London: Beale, et al. for Meighen and Walkey, 1641), 270-71.

[174] William Drummond, "Appendix 2: Conversations with William Drummond," in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1996), 459-80.

[175] In this, Jonson follows in the footsteps of authors like Edmund Spenser, who treats chaste desire in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*.

[176] Paul Hartle, "'Fruition was the Question in Debate': Pro and Contra the Renaissance Orgasm," *The Seventeenth Century* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 81.

philosophy is multiple and varied. He separates out certain types of love and prioritizes homosocial friendship (especially the particular friendship he had with Étienne de la Boétie) over romantic attachments with women. Comparing friendship between men with "l'affection envers les femmes" ("affection for women"), Montaigne finds a stark difference:

> En l'amitié, c'est une chaleur generale et universelle, temperée au demeurant et égale, une chaleur constante et rassize, toute douceur et polissure, qui n'a rien d'aspre et de poignant. Qui plus est, en l'amour, ce n'est qu'un desir forcené après ce qui nous fuit…La jouyssance le perd, comme ayant la fin corporelle et sujecte à sacieté.
>
> In friendship it is a general and universal warmth, moderate and even, besides, a constant and settled warmth, all gentleness and smoothness, with nothing bitter and stinging about it. What is more, in love there is nothing but a frantic desire for what flees from us…Enjoyment destroys it, as having a fleshly end, subject to satiety.[177]

The separation between an even and steady affection between men and the dangers of love for women stems from age-old Christian and even ancient Aristotelian precepts; the partitioning of love, in Elizabeth Guild's words, "speaks, as much as anything else, of a founding theme: the excessive and thereby destructive nature of passionate love."[178] To further the point, even within matrimony, Montaigne still prizes the values of friendship:

> Un bon marriage, s'il e nest, refuse la compaignie et conditions de l'amour. Il tache à representer celles de l'amitié. C'est une douce societé de vie, pleine de constance, de fiance et d'un nombre infiny d'utiles et solides offices et obligations mutuelles.
>
> A good marriage, if such there be, rejects the company and conditions of love. It tries to reproduce those of friendship. It is a sweet association in life, full of constancy, trust, and an infinite number of useful and solid services and mutual obligations.[179]

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[177] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 1.239; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 137.
[178] Guild likewise summarizes that "an enduring ideal love, of body, mind, and soul, a heterosexual combination of *philia* and *eros*, seems impossible, given that women, considered men's inferiors, constitutively less capable of virtue, are judged incapable of *philia*. Absent the possibility of such heterosexual love, Montaigne tends to distribute his 'loves' discretely, as if all will go well if you love the right person the right way: affection here, passion there, and so on." Elizabeth Guild, "Montaigne on Love," in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. Philippe Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 631.
[179] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 3.90; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 647.

Montaigne here describes a kind of chaste companionship as the bedrock of a good marriage; to predicate a marriage upon passion would risk perverting what makes it good.

That type of hazard in excessive desire prompts the sort of aversion that dovetails with arguments present in anti-fruition verse. Montaigne's essay "Que nostre desir s'accroit par la malaisance" ("That our desire is increased by difficulty") draws upon Ovid, Martial, and Horace, among other classical sources, to consider how ease prohibits pleasure.[180] Throughout the piece, Montaigne valorizes difficulty and distance in love relations as a test case for a decidedly Pyrrhonist observation that "Il n'y a raison qui n'en aye une contraire," or "There is no reason that does not have its opposite."[181] Montaigne observes that phenomenon more broadly, considering Seneca, in the ways that the secure things in life bring less satisfaction than those we have fear of losing, using that key word "fruition" in his assessment:

> la fruition de la vie ne nous peut estres vrayement plaisante, si nous sommes en crainte de la perdre. Il se pouroit toutes-fois dire, au rebours, que nous serrons et embrassons ce bien, d'autant plus estroit et avecques plus d'affection que nous le voyons nous estre moins seur et craignons qu'il nous soit osté.
>
> the enjoyment of life cannot be truly pleasant to us if we are in fear of losing it. It might be said, however, on the contrary, that we clutch and embrace this good all the more tightly and with more affection because we see that it is less secure and fear that it may be taken from us.[182]

In effect, Montaigne has taken the skeptical method of opposition to explore the paradoxical relationship between security and disaffection, insecurity and rabid pursuit. He applies the proposition to test cases from the natural world – that "le feu se picque à l'assistance du froid,"

[180] Hartle discusses the connection between Montaigne's discussion of the nexus among taste, appetite, and sexual satiety in "Que nostre desir s'accroit par la malaisance" and that in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. See "'Fruition Was the Question in Debate'," 81-83.
[181] Montaigne, *Les essais,* 2.382; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 63.
[182] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 2.382; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 463.

("fire is stirred up by the presence of cold"), for example – and extrapolates the selfsame proposition to sexual relations.[183]

The result sets the stage for the anti-fruition verse to follow, especially in Montaigne's contention that "Le desir et la jouyssance nous mettent pareillement en peine" ("Desire and enjoyment make us equally dissatisfied").[184] Yet, despite the equilibrium between desire and enjoyment in this assertion, Montaigne maintains that the pursuit of an unrelenting mistress is not as troublesome as that of an easily yielding one:

> La rigueur des maistresses est ennuyeuse, mais l'aisance et la facilité l'est, à dire verité, encores plus : d'autant que le mescontentement et la cholere naissent de l'estimation en quoy nous avons la chose desirée, éguisent l'amour et le reschauffent ; mais la satieté engendre le dégoust : c'est une passion mousse, hebetée, lasse et endormie.
>
> Rigor in mistresses is annoying, but ease and facility, to tell the truth, is even more so; inasmuch as discontent and anger are born of the value in which we hold the thing desired, sharpen love, and warm it up; but satiety engenders distaste: it is a blunt, dull, weary, and drowsy feeling…[185]

Montaigne employs a counter-intuitive mode here, and in a contrarian strain, frustrates the desired end of the long valorized chase of love. In Montaigne's vision, neither the pursuit nor the conquering ("le desir de vaincre") of the mistress can bring any true satisfaction.[186] The pleasurable state of limbo in which the lovers in the poems attributed to Petronius and authored by Jonson find themselves differs sharply from the view that Montaigne offers, one that provides an enabling discourse for the anti-fruition poems that follow.

The dissatisfaction with either option in Montaigne's estimation preempts Suckling's speaker and his successors' argumentation. As readers, it is incumbent upon us to hold both the

[183] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 2.382; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 464.
[184] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 2.384; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 465.
[185] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 2.384; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 465.
[186] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 2.385.

misogynistic implications of the logical conclusions that these figures draw from their skeptical thought exercises and also the actuality that these are not the definitive, all-conclusive opinions of Montaigne or Suckling. Hartle holds that, thanks to Montaigne's contribution, the fruition debate develops such that "Gender is now polarized; men are victims of appetite, women either dully compliant or artificially recalcitrant, thereby inviting (and desiring?) conquest."[187] Yet a healthy appreciation of Montaigne's skeptical method complicates such a totalizing analysis. Montaigne is decidedly anti-dogmatic, arguing that

> la raison m'a instruit que de condemner ainsi resoluement une chose pour fauce et impossible, c'est se donner l'advantage d'avoir dans la teste les bornes et limites de la volonté de Dieu et de la puissance de de [*sic*] nostre mere nature.
>
> reason has taught me that to condemn a thing thus, dogmatically, as false and impossible, is to assume the advantage of knowing the bounds and limits of God's will and the power of our mother Nature.[188]

Montaigne does not profess to take received wisdom at face value but rather aims to apply skeptical tools to examine everyday life. For instance, Montaigne offers analysis of chastity as a relativist custom rather than a natural fact:

> De vrai, la pudicité est une belle vertu, et de laquelle l'utilité est assez connuē : mais de la traitter et faire valoir selon nature, il est autant mal-aysé, comme il est aisé de la faire valoir selon l'usage, les loix et les preceptes.
>
> In truth, chastity is a fine virtue, whose utility is well enough known; but to treat it and justify it according to nature is as hard as it is easy to justify it according to custom, laws, and precepts.[189]

Further, as noted in this dissertation's first chapter, Montaigne powerfully summarizes the sexual double standard for women, that they must be "hot and cold" all at once.[190] Likewise, in true skeptical fashion, we ought to add another voice to round out the debate; it behooves us to place

[187] Hartle, "'Fruition was the Question in Debate'," 83.
[188] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 1.230; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 133.
[189] Montaigne, *Les essais*, 1.148-49; Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 84.
[190] See p. 43 of ch. 1.

figures like Montaigne and Suckling in conversation with authors like Behn, who gives her own oppositional perspective to the dialogue initiated by her predecessors. Her viewpoint underscores that their hyperbolic thought experiments have stark implications for women. Through Behn's verse, the love object has the opportunity to speak back.

Before we reach Behn's rebuttal, we must return to the myth of Suckling and the ways that his verse bespeaks a more complicated writer than critics have previously allowed. A spendthrift courtier and wit with a noted penchant for gambling, the son of a noble family who squandered his inheritance and purportedly invented the game of cribbage, Suckling lived and died in the tense years before the English Civil Wars erupted. The Suckling myth largely passed down by John Aubrey in his *Lives* portrays the poet as "the greatest gallant of his time, and the greatest gamester." As a soldier, Suckling raised for King Charles I in the 1639 Bishops' Wars a magnificent troop of fighters in feathered hats, the sight of which Aubrey praised as "one of the finest…in those dayes."[191] But Aubrey fails to mention the retreat of Suckling and his troops, beset by the wrath of Scottish combatants and the ravages of dysentery.[192]

Much as Aubrey's portrayal of Suckling the war hero deserves closer scrutiny, so too does his portrayal of Suckling the gallant. The term "gallant" can reflect prowess in battle as much as adeptness with women. Yet Suckling's verse and his failed, long-distance courtships alike present another image of the poet, one who held deep reservations about the nature of marriage and sexual desire. I do not wish to conflate biography with literary output in my study of Suckling's anti-fruition lyrics. Rather, I seek greater nuance in understanding Suckling's verse beyond the notion that it simply reflects Suckling's politically motivated rejection of courtly

[191] John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 2 vols., ed. Andrew Clark. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 2:240-42.
[192] Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 260-70.

ideals by satirizing the imported philosophical trend of Neoplatonic love, or his misogyny spawned by an unsuccessful love life alone. Such overgeneralizations miss the complexities of Suckling's life, including his allegiance to the crown. While he would offer some careful criticism of the king's politics in a letter to Henry Jermyn, for instance, evidence abounds to confirm Suckling's sustained commitment to the Royalist cause.[193] His exile to Paris was prompted by the implication of his participation in the First Army Plot, an effort to free the Earl of Strafford from the Tower (where Parliament had imprisoned him) to aid the king. After the plot's failure and his subsequent flight, Suckling was found guilty *in absentia* of high treason. Suckling's royalism, then, bears the hallmark of court factionalism rather than outright anti-monarchical sentiment.

My readings of Suckling's two anti-fruition poems constitute a thought experiment in and of itself. I aim to take seriously the poetic speakers' purported commitment to chastity and prioritization of fantasy in matters of desire as a skeptical exercise, which Suckling's critics have generally downplayed or outright dismissed. I next aim to trace the development of those concerns in another poem included in *Fragmenta Aurea*, the posthumously published collection of Suckling's works brought to the press shortly after Suckling's early 1640s death in Paris.[194]

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[193] As for his political wariness, his letter to Henry Jermyn (published in corrupted form before its inclusion in *Fragmenta Aurea*) to rally his support for the king includes the warning that the King ought to repair his relationship with his subjects "in a union with his people." See "To Mr. Henry German, in the Beginning of Parliament, 1640" in Suckling, *The Works*, 164. Suckling's biographer Robert Wilcher assesses that "the alacrity with which he responded to Charles I's call to arms in 1639, and his later involvement in the reckless Army Plot of 1641" may at first seem "the more perplexing passages of Suckling's…career." And yet, " In spite of the skepticism with which he viewed the antics of his fellow men (and women) in both public and private spheres, he seems on these occasions to have acted from a sense of honor that has been identified as 'the basis on which many English gentlemen supported the King in 1642.'" *The Discontented Cavalier,* 294.

[194] Aubrey alleges that in France, Suckling, "after some time being come to the bottome of his fund that was left, reflecting on the miserable and despicable condition he should be reduced to, having nothing left to maintaine him, he (having a convenience for that purpose, lyeing at an apothecarie's house, in Paris) tooke poison, which killed him miserably with vomiting." The veracity of this report is not established. See *Brief Lives*, 2:242. Another unsubstantiated contemporary claim is that Suckling died "from an infected foot after a servant robbed him and drove a nail into his shoe to prevent the impetuous Suckling from pursuing him." *The Columbia Anthology of British Poetry*, ed. Carl Woodring and James Shapiro (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 186.

Instead of being merely superficial poems, Suckling's verses display greater degrees of introspection and philosophical complexity than scholarship has previously indicated. Suckling's verse challenges assumptions about both the experience and also the poetic language of desire. Through his poetry, Suckling explodes the lyric modes that predominated in his day and finds them wanting. His poetic speakers' advocacy for a tempered abstinence to maintain the delight of fantasy as a radical skeptical thought experiment highlights the deep entanglements between skepticism and sexual passion.

2. Suckling's Anti-Fruition Lyrics

The first of Suckling's "Against Fruition" poems stages a homosocial exchange in which the poetic speaker cautions a "fond youth" against the trials and tribulations of physical love:

> Stay here, fond youth, and ask no more, be wise,
> Knowing too much long since lost paradise.
> The virtuous joys thou hast, thou would'st should still
> Last in their pride; and would'st not take it ill,
> If rudely from sweet dreams (and for a toy)
> Thou wert waked? he wakes himself that does enjoy. ("AF [1]," 1-6)[195]

The competition in this initial stanza between end stops and enjambment mimics the tension in the speaker's line of thinking. His reference of the loss of Paradise through knowledge (eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as much as carnal knowledge itself) and his emphasis on preserving "virtuous joys," where virtue stands in for sexual honesty, both reflect a viewpoint advocating chastity. But the imagery of erotic dreaming complicates matters. Working in the hypothetical mode, the speaker imagines and critiques the stance of his interlocutor, the youth. Instead of advocating for total abstinence, the speaker centers an argument that prioritizes

[195] All in-line parenthetical citations of John Suckling's "Against Fruition [1]" and "Against Fruition [2]" are taken out of *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry: 1603-1660*, ed. John P. Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 418, 421. The poem's titles will be respectively abbreviated to "AF [1]" and "AF [2]" in said parenthetical in-line citations.

sexual fantasy over physicalized passion. In this way, the first stanza points towards the larger philosophical question at work in the fruition poetic subgenre as a whole: whether the idealized version of desire is better than the actualized, embodied reality of sexual intercourse.

The "Against Fruition [1]" speaker's value placed on fantasy is heightened as the practical, embodied concerns of fruition creep into his verse. He raises the matter of the results of "The homeliest thing which mankind does," noting that

> The world is of a vast extent, we see,
> And must be peopled; children there must be;
> So must bread too; but since they are enough
> Born to the drudgery, what need we plough? ("AF [1]," 13, 14-17).

The crude association that the speaker makes likens human reproduction with agricultural tillage. The biblical pronouncement to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" is not one to which the speaker pays heed.[196] There are enough people born to toil to produce bread; the speaker does not need to take up his plow and join them much as he does not intend to figuratively "plough" in order to beget children. By diminishing the lofty representations of coupling into their "homeliest" elements, he deflates the pleasure of fruition to little better than a reproductive chore. That viewpoint disrupts the expected chain of transitional virginity to heterosexual, chaste marriage and reproduction laid out throughout this dissertation's introduction. Just as the speaker presents himself as unconstrained by a particular social script about coupling and childbearing, he gives himself license to persuade the youth against fruition through other argumentative strains.

He quickly moves on from concerns about the material elements of fruition to the metaphysical. Suckling's speaker urges that while fruition

> pleaseth much the palate, cloys;
> Who thinks he shall be happier for that,

[196] Gen. 1:28 (King James Version).

As reasonably might hope he might grow fat
By eating to a surfeit; this once past
What relishes? even kisses loose their taste. ("AF [1]," 8-12)

Such an assertion would surprise Petronius or Jonson's speakers, whose anti-fruition lyrics read like encomia on kisses. Those earlier poetic speakers see in foreplay endless possibility, a constantly renewing source of pleasure. Meanwhile Suckling's speaker equates it with excess. The dual specters of excess and bodily reality loom large in tandem. In the simile Suckling's speaker offers of a person hoping only to grow larger by eating to a surfeit, taste hardly figures as a motivating force for that endeavor. But the speaker's consistent concerns over embodied reality defy logic. He prefers "sweet dreams" to the cold possibility that there may be too much of a good thing in the pleasures of the flesh, whether gustatory or carnal.

The speaker presses that point when he shifts the target of his speech towards women specifically in the fourth stanza. Earlier stanzas obfuscate human agents in passive constructions: when the speaker claims that "The World…must be peopled," he obscures who, exactly, does the peopling. Yet Suckling's speaker turns towards gendered and misogynistic rhetoric.[197] Suckling's speaker presents a rather totalizing view of "Women enjoyed" losing their appeal after the act of love ("AF [1]," 19). The poetic speaker asserts that "'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear; / Heaven were not heaven, if we knew what it were" ("AF [1]," 23-24). Too much knowledge, then, carnal and otherwise, blocks the potential for bliss, celestial and otherwise. The hope, the speaker again claims, is sweeter than the reality. The simile he employs likens women to tired artistic pursuits that exclude his own: they are "like romances read," "sights once seen," spoiled "play[s]" ("AF [1]," 20-21). While these forms can employ verse, the speaker omits lyric itself from the list of genres that he uses to go on the attack – perhaps he does not wish to

[197] Hartle observes that rhetoric's overlap with the Montaignian model. See "'Fruition was the Question'," 83.

entirely undermine his own poetic endeavor. Regardless, the inevitable comparison undercuts his very poetic project; why record the written word at all if the potential of repeated encounters ruins the experience of the work? Suckling's speaker here criticizes not just consummated desire, then, but the kind of artistic representation in which he himself is engaged.

The final stanza raises more questions than it answers, fitting for a poem that raises more questions than it answers. The speaker uses two different images to surround his apparent conclusion:

> as in prospects we are there pleased most
> Where something keeps the eye from being lost,
> And leaves us room to guess, so here restraint
> Holds up delight, that with excess would faint. ("AF [1]," 25-28)

The speaker's argumentative aim has shifted from an advocacy of (tempered) abstinence to an acknowledgement that "delight" might just win out. If restraint merely "Holds up" delight, that suggests restraint can only delay, or moderate, the inevitable "delight" or consummation. Previously, the speaker suggested that even the foreplay of kisses cannot sustain delight. Yet in his usual mode, he jumps from one concern to another, concluding with one final metaphor of fruition's excess. Earlier, he asserted that fruition "adds no wealth, but destroys." But now he claims that such precise, accounted knowledge of the tangible, the quantifiable, the physicalized inhibits pleasure: "They who know all the wealth they have, are poor, / He's only rich that cannot tell his store" ("AF [1]," 29-30). The sands of a cogent, unified argument have shifted significantly underfoot throughout the poem. The stanzas have piled metaphor upon metaphor – an ironic choice in and of itself given the poetic speaker's sustained warnings against the dangers of excess.

The pat ending offered in praise of restraint is clouded by the contradictory impulses and unconvincing absolutes presented throughout the lyric. The image of a vista anchored by an

undetermined "something" that offers a landmark for one's gaze but, in offering that point of reference, creates an obstruction that spurs the imagination, seems an apt metaphor for the poem's own lack of a cohesive conclusion. The poem's indeterminacy might preview some aspects of the negative capability that John Keats would define in 1817 as a quality of particular artists who show themselves "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (a capacity he considered Shakespeare to have "possessed so enormously").[198] Yet, Suckling's speaker's attempt to round out the poem with a convincing couplet might display that "irritable reaching" towards a more definitive mode. Indeed, the totalizing view of people – the "we" of stanza three and the universalized "women" of stanza four – disallows the nuances of individuated experience.

This totalizing vision only escalates in a lover's monologue directed to his mistress, "Against Fruition [2]," which begins with the speaker declaiming against love's mutuality:

> Fie upon hearts that burn with mutual fire!
> I hate two minds that breathe but one desire.
> Were I to curse th'unhallowed sort of men,
> I'd wish them to love, and be loved again. ("AF [2]," 1-4)

The speaker strikes a defiant tone, especially in the context of the poetry in circulation at this point. Thomas Carew, for example, uses the same image of mutual fire in "To My Mistress in Absence."[199] In Carew's poem, that symbol illustrates the devotion of a pair parted "by force" of the lady's "command" (1-2). While it's unclear if the command for distance is mere chaste

[198] By contrast, Keats considered Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a writer who pursued an objective of truth at the expense of lingering in mystery and beauty. He writes, "Coleridge…would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration." *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats: Cambridge Edition*, ed. Horace E. Scudder (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 277.
[199] Thomas Carew, "To My Mistress in Absence," in *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 299-300.

evasion or a decree, the poetic speaker nonetheless promotes a vision that, even when apart, each member of the couple can experience and contribute to a mutually constitutive passion. Echoing his predecessor John Donne's vision in poems like "The Ecstasy," Carew's speaker invites his mistress to join him in an out-of-body observation of themselves: "Let us look down, and mark what pain / Our absent bodies here sustain," he urges (21-22).[200] Yet by the power of their ardent, mutual love, the speaker and his mistress' souls experience a spiritual kind of consummation even if they are physically separated; their bodies "Yet burn and languish with desire / To join, and quench their mutual fire" (25-26). From their vantage point, the pair can

> joy to see from far
> Our emulous flames at loving war,
> Whilst both with equal lustre shine,
> Mine bright as yours, yours bright as mine. (27-30)

This is a pair whose passion is not just mutual, but rather mirrors one another's. Their equal contributions set aflame a sustaining kind of enmeshment, "Making our bitter absence sweet, / Till souls and bodies both may meet," as the poem concludes, promising a corporeal consummation to complement the spiritual one the poem envisions (33-34). Not so for Suckling, however. His poem's vision of the mutual fire is decidedly one-sided; it is his speaker's to "hate." Furthermore, he would wish upon already cursed ("unhallow'd") men another curse besides: that of falling in love time and again. While there had been something torturous to the vision that Carew presents (the bodies separated are in definitive pain), that sensation is, by the poetic speaker's own admission, "bittersweet." For Suckling's speaker, however, the "sweet

[200] Donne's verse stages a couple whose souls come together, which they observe as if from a distance from their bodies as they hold hands and stare into one another's eyes. See "The Ecstasy," in *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 37-39.

bitterness" and "painful pleasure" of the older Petrarchan oxymoronic tradition, and the virtues of his closer cotemporary Carew's speaker's mutual fire, is only bitter.[201]

This hyperbolic vision of "Against Fruition [2]" continues with an intensification of two key images from "Against Fruition [1]": surfeiting and the interruption of a pleasant dream. The speaker of the second poem proclaims that "Love's a chameleon, that lives on mere air, / And surfeits when it comes to grosser fare" ("AF [2]," 5-6). Here, the speaker amplifies the conceit of the surfeit, moving it from the dining table to a more mythological plane. The earlier description of eating to a surfeit, and thereby losing a sense of taste, escalates to a surfeit resulting from tasting anything at all – the "grosser fare" being anything besides air itself. This change raises the stakes of the sexual restraint advocated in the first poem. While the first speaker decries too much of a good thing, the second speaker decries the very thing itself. Likewise, the second speaker expands upon the imagery of being awakened during a pleasant dream. Initially posited as a rhetorical question in the first poem, the conceit transforms into a more declarative, extensive simile in the second poem. The speaker contextualizes the comparison with a lengthy list of love's tribulations – insights, perhaps, into why his poem begins with the adamant stance against the mutual fire of desire. He lists the pains of love that, taken all together, would result in pleasure:

> 'Tis petty jealousies, and little fears,
> Hopes joined with doubts, and joys with April tears,
> That crowns our love with pleasures: these are gone
> When once we come to full fruition,
> Like waking in the morning, when all night
> Our fancy hath been fed with true delight. ("AF [2]," 7-12)

[201] I quote, in translation, "il dolce acerbo e 'l bel piacer molesto," from Petrarch's 331st poem "Solea de la fontana di mia vita," in Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 519.

When compared to the difficulties of the everyday realities of love, the dream – fancy itself – becomes the "true" delight for the speaker. The thrill of the chase comes to a stark end upon mutual possession. Such a contention marks a point of contrast from Carew's speaker's fantasy vision in "To His Mistress in Absence." In that poem, fancy serves merely to sustain a pair of lovers in anticipation of an eventual reunion after a period of distance and is not the end of love in itself. This contention also marks a departure from "Against Fruition [1]," which seems to offer little by way of delight, true or false. Suckling's speaker, then, tries out a new line of argument: that embodied, physical connection makes the more subjective, emotional, bittersweet sufferings for that pleasure of love not worth the pain. The gravity or levity of the speaker's warning depends on how we read his punning assertion that "Oh, what a stroke 'twould be! Sure I should die, / Should I but hear my mistress once say, 'Aye'" ("AF [2]," 13-14). The joke results from the Renaissance equation of "to die" with "to orgasm." Indeed the speaker would metaphorically "die" if the mistress and he were to participate in the act of love.

Despite this moment of punning, troubling implications arise from this couplet's succeeding lines:

> no brave spirit ever cared for that
> Which in down beds with ease he could come at.
> She's but an honest whore that yields, although
> She be as cold as ice, as pure as snow;
> He that enjoys her hath no more to say
> But keep us fasting, if you'll have us pray. ("AF [2]," 17-22)

Giving these lines their most generous interpretation, Suckling's speaker voices plainly and bluntly the disquieting nature of the chase long valorized in the tradition of Renaissance love poetry.[202] These lines could, in Hartle's charitable estimation, give a stark and unflinching

[202] One especially noteworthy example in English vernacular is Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt," a translation of one of Petrarch's *Rime Sparse*. The extended conceit of the hunted deer, a cipher for a romantically

account of the double-bind women face under the strictures of a culture that paradoxically demands sexual participation and also total restraint.[203] Suckling here has offered in microcosm the kinds of harmful implications that result from a culture that not only holds women up to an impossible standard but also requires their "coldness" and purity such that resistance is all that a "brave spirit" cares for, rather than consent. That consent is tantamount to whoredom in such a configuration is disquieting to say the least. And it remains unclear what stance Suckling's speaker takes in the matter; he has also forcefully articulated the painful issue of sexual predation and disempowerment that forms his culture's sexual double standard for women. He does not quite seem to inhabit the role of the "brave spirit" committed to the chase, if indeed he would rather die than consummate a relationship with his beloved because of a combination of the power of fancy and the impossibility of reality matching with expectation.

This is the note on which the speaker ends his poem: endowing his mistress with the right of refusal. He begs his beloved,

> Then, fairest mistress, hold the power you have,
> By still denying what we still do crave;
> In keeping us in hopes strange things to see,
> That never were, nor are, nor e'er shall be. ("AF [2]," 22-26).

The self-denial invoked in these lines, as in the images of fasting and prayer, does not lead to any sense of the near-divine closeness that such religious language might imply. The speaker offers an extreme inversion of language describing religious praxis, including a twisted doxology, which leads to solitude instead of the expected communion of interconnection.[204] The hope that

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desirable but unattainable woman, ends on a note of futility. See *The New Oxford Book of Sixteenth-Century Verse*, ed. Emrys Jones (1991; reis., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 76.

[203] Hartle, "'Fruition was the Question'," 90.

[204] Suckling refashions the ending of the *Gloria Patri* here – "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be" in Bishop Thomas Cranmer's 1559 Book of Common Prayer translation (to which Suckling certainly would have been accustomed in the Anglican tradition). See Booty, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer*, 57. For more analysis on the "parodic echo of the Christian doxology," see Michael P. Parker, "'All are not born (Sir) to the Bay': 'Jack' Suckling, 'Tom' Carew, and the Making of a Poet," *English Literary Renaissance* 12 (Autumn 1982): 355.

kept an expectation dear in "Against Fruition [1]" now seems to lead to a sort of cosmic emptiness, one the speaker has tried to uplift as somehow preferable to the possibilities of fruition. On its face, the speaker's request to his mistress seems a gesture towards empowerment, but a question remains: what if the mistress would have wanted to say "Aye" after all?

Against the visions of mutual desire and possession, the "Against Fruition" poems prioritize fancy as more fulfilling than physical consummation, which the first poem's speaker finds dull and mundane and the second, a fantasy with which the realities of human relationships cannot compete. Suckling's speakers have tried out various lines of argumentation for two very different interlocutors: the first poem's homosocial and distinctly dialogic setting stands in stark contrast with a poem that appears at first a meandering monologue, only to end up having an addressee in the mistress all along. The shifts in rhetoric about the value of fancy undergird Suckling's skeptical method; he places extreme opposites in contact. Though other skeptics might use that method to search for an ultimate truth, Suckling's more radical train of thought resists neat conclusions. Put another way, we as readers are the ones left to contend with Suckling's speakers' contradictions, argumentative twists and turns, and logical inconsistencies. The endless chase in matters of romance that he advocates for becomes, in matters of poetry, more puzzling than pleasurable.

3. A Competing Vision: "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking in Hampton Court Garden"

The most frustrating elements of Suckling's anti-fruition lyrics – and the element that spawned so many impassioned replies in verse – is also the poems' most lasting: limitless ambiguity. Though the poems purport to take a strong, argumentative stance – "*against* fruition" – and traffic in extremes, they demonstrate convoluted logic, inconsistent rhetorical strategy, and

iterations of key words and images that complicate, qualify, and even confuse the stance implicit in the lyrics' shared titles. These poems become a place for respondents to project their own visions. Suckling's formal structure itself serves as the screen upon which such projections can dance and swirl. Tension arises between the steady use of his rhyming couplets with more fluid stanzaic patterns. The couplets – neat two-by-two, mated pairs of verse – mirror the romantic or sexual pairing of the couple, of lovers that the poems' content decries. As if to prove that point, against these pairs of verse, Suckling's stanzas lag on, or get cut short, protracting the consummation of an idea as much as Suckling's poetic personae forestall physical consummation. Gone are the triumphant, resounding, declarative couplets concluding Shakespeare's compact love sonnets. Some vestiges remain of Donne's more sprawling poetic vision and even his libertine impulse to pun. But Suckling's poems prove themselves decidedly less cosmic – or, if cosmic, they show a persona staring into the abyss, off skepticism's cliff's edge into a dark vacuum of alienation from self and other. Contrary to Millamant of William Congreve's 1700 comedy *The Way of the World*, who labeled the poet "natural, easy Suckling," his verse's philosophical architecture is almost so tortured that it collapses in on itself. "Ease" is a quality Suckling's personae often yearn for, but fail to achieve.[205]

Scholars have striven to pin down Suckling's verse, often with less favorable assessments than Millamant's. Cheryl M. Gibson considers Suckling's anti-fruition lyrics as misogynistic symbols of his proto-Enlightenment philosophical viewpoint, dedicated to "masculine" scientific and Deistic reason over the "feminine" passion of art. She argues that "Suckling portrays women who are dehumanized, mere objects to be controlled and scorned by the poet whose superior

[205] William Congreve, *The Way of the World*, ed. Richard Kroll, in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama: Concise Edition*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 2003), IV.102 (p. 572).

reason lifts him beyond the frenzy of passion she represents."[206] In that vein, Scodel wonders if the verses might serve as biographical evidence for Suckling's psychological hatred of women.[207] Gerald Hammond concurs with Scodel, contending that, at best, Suckling's verse unmasks the illusion of love but fails to engage with that illusion's complexities, and, at worst, it reveals the poet as a violent misogynist.[208] George Parfitt offers a similarly stark assessment, one that feels unduly harsh, insisting that the poems reflect Suckling's miserable and flawed personal character. H. M. Richmond cautions that "Stuart love poetry maps an avenue in the human imagination, a hypothetical mode of behavior, which might be partly realized in practice. But to a large extent it probably remains a hypothesis."[209] I concur that, precisely because of Suckling's skeptical habit of mind and the relative dearth of primary source material about his life, we would be hard-pressed to find evidence of definitive biographical truths in his poetic thought experiments.

I would also counter that there is greater depth to Suckling's verse than scholarly consensus often acknowledges. Suckling's speakers' praise of illusion falls startlingly short of the superior air Gibson and Scodel cite, which the poem I will next discuss, "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking in Hampton Court Garden," confirms. This poem demonstrates a deeper engagement with matters of subjectivity, sexuality, and style than Hammond and Parfitt allow in their schema of Suckling as a hateful, miserable man who turns to verse solely to air his

[206] Cheryl M. Gibson, "'Tis not the meat, but 'tis the appetite': The Destruction of Woman in the Poetry of Sir John Suckling," *Explorations in Renaissance Literature* (December 1994): 44.
[207] Scodel claims that "there is a psychologically authentic aspect of the poem[s], however: the contempt for women and their bodies as the disappointing embodiment of tedious 'excess' and the concomitant sense that male fantasy is always superior to female reality." "The Pleasures of Restraint," 228.
[208] Gerald Hammond pairs Suckling and Rochester, contending that they "claimed to see through the whole illusion and wrote plainly about the dildoes which underlay it. Waller's poetry is more interesting than theirs because of his willingness to dwell on the illusions rather than just sweep them away." *Fleeting Things*, 314.
[209] H. M. Richmond, *The School of Love: The Evolution of the Stuart Love Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 295.

grievances. Instead, this poem extends the skeptical impetus motivating his anti-fruition verses by leaning into a dialogic form, one that literally juxtaposes oppositional poetic registers and viewpoints on questions of sexual desire. That extended engagement with skepticism calls into question what poetry can accomplish. The variance in the poem's print and manuscript endings offer further points of ambiguity about chaste desires; Suckling's hyperbolic skeptical poetic project does not offer any resolution to the questions that the anti-fruition poems raise.

Few other poems in Suckling's oeuvre better illustrate that lack of a resolution than "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking." The poem features a persona of Suckling, "JS," and another figure called "TC," generally accepted as his contemporary poet Thomas Carew, with whom Suckling associated and whose lyric mode he imitates in part throughout the poem.[210] As underscored above in my analysis of "To My Mistress in Absence," Carew's poetry offers a Platonic contrast to Suckling's verses. Beyond "To My Mistress in Absence," Carew's poetic voice can differ starkly from Suckling's in other poems: his rhapsodic "A Rapture" is a rich example of eroticism in verse.[211] Thus Carew makes an interesting interlocutor for Suckling's speaker. As Suckling's love letters attest, Suckling himself was able to adopt Neoplatonic

[210] Parker offers an intriguing analysis of the differences and similarities between Suckling's and Carew's registers. Though Suckling differs in stylistic and formal matters, but reaches for a mode of compliment similar to Carew's in the stanzas voiced by TC. Yet Parker goes further to mine a psychological potential in this imitative attempt: that "'Tom' not only stands for Carew, but for the side of Suckling that aspired to be a 'rapturous' poet in the mode of Carew." While the luxurious imagery Suckling employs has equivalents in his drama *Aglaura* (1638), I find the rest of his poetic oeuvre more often than not defies the sort of rapturous mode for which, Parker claims, Suckling might strive. See "'All are not born (Sir) to the Bay'," 348.

[211] The poem envisions a journey to "Love's Elysium" where "We seek no midnight arbor, no dark groves / To hide our kisses: there the hated name / Of husband, wife, lust, modest, chaste, or shame, / Are vain and empty words, whose very sound / Was never heard in the Elysian ground. / All things are lawful there that may delight / Nature or unrestrainèd appetite; / Like and enjoy, to will and act is one: / We only sin when Love's rites are not done" (106-114). "A Rapture," in *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 302-6. Though, as Christopher Tilmouth argues, Carew himself had his own breadth of poetic range; he notes that Carew's emphasis on bodily sensation "rejects pious talk of souls embracing one another," and so is not "emulating the metaphysical aspirations of Charles's' Neoplatonist court." At the same time, Tilmouth encourages us "to remember the limits of Carew's libertinism," noting that "his lusty pieces always coexisted alongside a host of idealizing works." *Passion's Triumph Over Reason: A History of Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 267.

rhetoric and viewpoints, and he does so in his deployment of TC's register. The dialogue itself stages the sorts of skeptical opposition contained in the anti-fruition lyrics. In "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking," the discourse shuttles at a dizzying speed between puzzlement and passion, concupiscence and confusion at the sight of Lucy Hay, Countess of Carlisle, in her perambulations in the royal garden.

The Countess of Carlisle is a strategically chosen object of JS and TC's gaze for this particular poem. As a favorite of Queen Henrietta and a literary patron in her own right, the countess emblematizes the sociopolitical and cultural currents of the circle enmeshed with the queen's Neoplatonism, which Suckling's verse purports to counter. The poem sees JS explore his self-proclaimed insufficiency in matters of desire and verse alike. And by taking skepticism to the extreme, the poem probes the sufficiency of Platonic love lyrics in a period after Jonson famously declared his answer to the question "Why I Write Not of Love."[212] As Smith declares of poetry in the 1630s, this decade's verses "present love as a human commitment, which is therefore subject to all human chance in a universe that doesn't favour us. The perception may be expressly related to the alarms of the times."[213] The vision of adoration of the countess exemplified in TC's portion of the poem clashes with JS' more skeptical position, and the poem's conclusion (if we can call it such) will point more to a human failure to connect than to transcendence through love.

TC opens the poem with a flowery description of Lady Carlisle befitting the garden scene. He explains that "rare perfumes all about" surround her person as she walks, emitting scents "Such as bean-blossoms newly out, / Or chafèd spices give," and he notes the fine

[212] In the poem Jonson imagines an abortive attempt to capture Cupid in verse. The love god flees him, of which Jonson declares: "Then wonder not / That since, my numbers are so cold, / When Love is fled, and I grow old" (10-12). "Why I Write Not of Love" in *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 97.
[213] A. J. Smith, "The Failure of Love," 48.

musicality of her voice (7-9). TC thus elevates the sensory into heights of idealization in keeping with a Neoplatonic frame. When TC asks if JS has made similar observations, JS offers much blunter verse that undercuts TC's lofty rhetoric. Even the structure of JS' reply, marked by halting pauses, contrast with TC's flowing, luxurious, enjambed praise. JS merely responds, "I must confess those perfumes, Tom, / I did not smell; nor found that from / Her passing by, aught sprung up new" (10-12). From this outset, the poem takes on skeptical perceptual concerns by focusing on smell and sight – JS underscores not just the limitations of his own sense perception but also that those limitations preclude consensus. TC meets JS' noncommittal answer to his questions with sheer incredulity: "Dull and insensible, could'st see / A thing so near a deity / Move up and down, and feel no change?" (18-20). Again, JS answers in the negative: "None and so great were alike strange. / I had my thoughts, but not your way; / All are not born, sir, to the bay" (21-24). Here, JS uses the opportunity to mock, perhaps gently, TC's participation in the courtly game of verse, exchanging poetry for a patron's praises ("the bay" alludes to the laurels of renowned poets – laurels that just happen to feature in the frontispiece portrait of Suckling prefacing *Fragmenta Aurea*).[214] There is a certain irony in JS, while disavowing lyric art, then going on to describe poetically (matching TC's rhyming couplets no less) his process of mentally undressing Lady Carlisle in the vein of Donne's "To His Mistress Going to Bed."[215] However, while the lines adhere to the conventions of seventeenth-century verse, their formal punctiliousness only highlights JS' inability to uphold other conventions of making love and making love poetry.

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[214] The frontispiece appears in the early edition of *Fragmenta Aurea* published in London by Humphrey Moseley in 1646.

[215] Donne's speaker, with great self-assurance, urges his lady "Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistering;" "Off with that happy busk, which I envy;" "Off with that wiry coronet and show / The hairy diadem which on you doth grow;" "Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread / In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed" in a white shift he compares to angels' garb (5, 11, 15-18). See "Elegy 8. To His Mistress Going to Bed," *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 46-7.

Whereas TC, with panache, describes the lady's beauty in the first stanza, JS continually struggles to make sense of how the woman he sees before him matches TC's perception. Or, perhaps more accurately, he struggles to understand how his own perception could be differ so much from TC's. As the poem goes on, the more JS flustered becomes. He exclaims, "Alas! Tom, I am flesh and blood," as if to insist that he has complete and red-blooded desire, but then shares, "[I] was consulting how I could / In spite of masks and hoods descry / The parts denied unto the eye" (24-27). The lady, by not completing another turn in her promenade, thus further frustrates JS' efforts to imagine her as "Eve in her first state," who, before the Fall, "had not been / More naked, or more plainly seen" (30-31). The comparison to the prelapsarian world echoes the warning Suckling's speaker issued to the youth in "Against Fruition [1]" – "Knowing too much long since lost Paradise" (2). There likewise seems to be an incompatibility with a kind of virtual carnal knowledge of the countess in the fallen environs of Hampton Court's garden.

Unlike Donne's commanding his mistress' striptease in "To His Mistress Going to Bed," or Herrick's delight in the sumptuous layers of fabric in "Upon Julia's Clothes," physical ornaments like masks and hoods provide no titillation for JS.[216] Instead, they become obstacles to the imaginative function. Such a rhetorical frame consequently inflects our understanding of the obstacle in the vista described in "Against Fruition [1]." And while he does employ metaphor in his description of Eve (contradicting his claim that he was not "born to the bay"), the effect is curious. This is "Eve in her *first* state" (emphasis mine); a prelapsarian feminine form unsaddled with the sexualized shame of the Fall so prominent in the lyrics against fruition. Instead, she stands in human nakedness with some degree of innocence. Yet the overall impression is that JS,

[216] See fn 214 for a sample of Donne's verse. Herrick's compact poem illustrates his interest in the power of clothing to arouse: "Whenas in silks my Julia goes, / Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows / That liquefaction of her clothes. / Next, when I cast mine eyes and see / That brave vibration each way free; / O, how that glittering taketh me!" (1-6). *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 214.

even with a visual aid of the feminine form in view, still fails in the imagination praised in earlier verse at the slightest stumbling blocks of fashion accessories.

The poem's last verses shatter any illusions of JS' entire cluelessness about matters of nudity or sexuality but still uphold the sense that fantasy is not as powerful as the "Against Fruition" speakers argue. The printed verse culminates with TC warning his companion that further contemplation of Lady Carlisle would have ultimately led JS to envision her most intimate parts, and thus to JS' "loss," or perdition (39). But the manuscript version of the poem, first made known to the wider public by Beaurline in 1960, sees JS getting the last word in a stanza that encapsulates some of the anxiety over what he perceives as his own sexual defectiveness, his poetic incapability, and the shortcomings of fantasy.[217] The poem's conclusion exposes the gap between the social standard of a red-blooded, desiring man and JS' more fraught experience of desire. The expected script, whether in TC's courtly register or the "Against Fruition" speaker's more contrarian strain, falls flat.

This final manuscript stanza of the poem ends crudely with JS' meditation:

> 'Troth in her face I could descry
> No danger, no divinity.
> But since the pillars were so good
> On which the lovely fountain stood,
> Being once come so near, I think
> I should have ventured hard to drink.
> What ever fool like me had been
> If I'd not done as well as seen?
> There to be lost why should I doubt
> When fools with ease go in and out? (40-49)[218]

JS certainly produces a less-than-poetic effect in employing the common poetic stand-in of the lady's "fountain" for genitalia, a metaphor that readers of Shakespeare will recall from *Venus*

[217] L. A. Beaurline, "The Canon of Sir John Suckling's Poems," 495-96.
[218] The manuscript version is included in Rumrich and Chaplin's Norton edition.

and Adonis.[219] JS asserts that his mental picture of the lady's legs should have led him to more vivid, coital imaginings: "But since the pillars were so good / On which the lovely fountain stood, / Being once so near, *I think* / *I should* have ventured hard to drink" (42-45). The picture, in its entirety, seems rather unconvinced and unconvincing. The plethora of pauses in JS' final stanza mimic the stilting, halted nature of his thinking, couched in qualifying clauses like "I think" and "I should have ventured." That "should" in particular does interesting work – as much as it could convey the "should" of JS' desire (and his wish to envision a sexual fantasy), it could equally convey a sense of obligation: the "should" of the social expectations arising from a culture that offers an overriding, abiding script for desire, one against which chaste imperatives clash.[220]

The "should" likewise might mirror his own failure of personal desire, placing the poem within a larger tradition of impotency verses that go on to gain further popularity in the Restoration era (JS' inability to "venture hard to drink" might be a double-entendre for his own flaccid sexual response). It matters, too, that JS uses the word "should" as opposed to "would," which would still fit metrically. That choice of diction emphasizes that JS operates in a hypothetical mode, and even in this realm of fantasy, he is unable to achieve pleasure. Christopher Tilmouth sees in Suckling's "visceral aim" to give and receive pleasure with the countess as "brutally forthright in reducing the woman to an object of animal appetite," which goes to belittle the "hint of [TC's] Platonist idealism."[221] Tilmouth here interprets JS' concluding

[219] Suckling, a devotee of Shakespeare who included Shakespeare's folio in his own portrait, employs a poetic speaker that sounds rather less confident than Shakespeare's Venus, who instructs Adonis "I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer: / Feed where thou wilt, on mountain, or in dale; / Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry, / Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie" (231-34). JS, who believes he should be aligned closer with the goddess of love, sounds more like the sex-repulsed Adonis.
[220] See the introduction for a discussion on compulsory (hetero)sexuality, the sorts of abiding scripts to which I refer above.
[221] Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason*, 268.

stanza as a successful sexual fantasy, a degrading consummation with the object of his gaze. Yet I would counter that the poem lends greater textual evidence for JS' ultimate failures of imagination. What supports such a reading of this obviated, obscured, and unsure scene of a failed sexual imagining is the image's being ensconced by the stanza's initial and final images of doubt and self-condemnation.

JS' last manuscript stanza opens with the declaration "Troth, in her face, I could descry / No danger, no divinity," showing that JS has reached some conclusion about the descriptive act over which he faltered in the fourth stanza (40-41). It ends with a moment, though, of punning self-deprecation: "What ever fool like me had been / If I'd not done as well as seen? / There to be lost why should I doubt / When fools with ease go in and out?" (46-49). Thus JS closes with a, perhaps artificially unwitting, pun on penetration. His repetition of "fool" shows the twists and turns of his logic continue beyond the anti-fruition lyrics. He considers himself as a fool for not, even in fantasy, being capable of consummation. But he also equates those capable of consummation with fools – the act of love being so simple and so easy that even fools could achieve it (and "with ease," no less), save fools like himself. Qualms as well as questions arise for readers from this poem's manuscript conclusion. JS has protested throughout the poem his incapability of successfully competing for the bays that poets like TC seem able to achieve, able to give melodious voice to their sexual desire. But JS does prove himself somewhat capable of entering their discourse; the fountain imagery affirms as much, just as the concluding penetrative pun does. This moment could be a knowing wink on the part of Suckling-the-writer, wryly ribbing JS-the-speaker. Or, it could illustrate that the knowledge of one discourse does not amount necessarily to painless participation *within* said discourse.

As evidenced by the qualifier, the manuscript final verse never made it into the early print edition of the published *Fragmenta Aurea*. We can only speculate as to the reasons for its exclusion. Lady Carlisle was, of course, a real person. Not just a convenient poetic character, the countess was a central figure in court life, a royal favorite – and even sometime literary patron as mentioned above. Both Lady Carlisle and the poet who "assiduously courted [her] favor," Tobie Matthew, are mentioned in Suckling's "A Sessions of the Poets" (also known as "The Wits"):

> Tobie Matthew (pox on him, how came he here?)
> Was whispering nothing in somebody's ear,
> When he had the honor to be named i'th' court;
> But, sir, you may thank my Lady Carlisle for't. (64-68)[222]

This less-than-generous assessment of Matthew's insubstantial verse ("whispering nothing") seems to bespeak the countess' poor literary taste. Such an undervaluation of Lady Carlisle's poetic discrimination is only intensified by a poem that works to undress her. JS' crudity attempts to dash her refinement, whether in matters of poetry or dress. And JS' view that has all the potential to degrade Lady Carlisle stands apart in sharp contrast from the other poetic output that revered her: "Suckling's cynical view of Lady Carlisle is at odds with the admiring note struck in poems addressed to her by Herrick, Waller, and Carew (who wrote two New Year's poems to the lady)."[223] In point of fact, "that her famous intelligence and beauty secured her a central place in the court milieu is corroborated by the attention she attracted from no fewer than ten poets during the 1630s and 1640s—all but two of them celebrating her as a cultural icon."[224] Given the countess' literary and social status, the camaraderie JS seeks with TC founders on

[222] For particulars on Matthew and his relationship to the Countess, see l.64 fn of Suckling's "A Sessions of the Poets," in *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 413-15.
[223] Sir John Suckling, "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking in Hampton Court Garden," in *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 419-420. For the editorial note see l. 5 fn.
[224] Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 131.

another level, too, then – not just by failing to match TC's discourse but also debasing the very woman to whom Carew devoted extensive and long-lasting poetic praise.

Concern for social niceties and the pursuit of social connection, though, do not reign supreme in "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking." The concluding image of rude penetration surely would not best please either Lady Lucy or her husband, and Paul Joseph Zajac, citing Suckling's modern editor Thomas Clayton, explicates the defamatory potential of the stanza, one that portrays the Countess of Carlisle as sexually loose, even long after Suckling's demise. He writes:

> a libelous accusation concerning a prominent aristocrat in the Caroline Court might have offended the Royalist audience addressed in Moseley's preface. Moreover, Lucy Hay was once the mistress of Lord Strafford, and the reference to 'fools' in line 49 could be interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as an insult to Strafford—the same man for whom Suckling risked his reputation and life in the Army Plot of 1641.

However, Zajac goes on to acknowledge that it is equally possible that Suckling's posthumous printer Moseley "may have obtained the poem in a different state, as the two texts [i.e., manuscript and print] differ substantively at many other points."[225] Even though we cannot definitively know the reasons for its omission, the final manuscript stanza seems but one more variation on Suckling's themes. Taken in either context, manuscript or print, the Neoplatonic vision that TC and the countess underscore, verbally and by their very presence in the poem respectively, falls short of the ideals it proposes. But so too does Suckling's less rarified presentation of both chastity and desire.

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[225] Paul Joseph Zajac, "Suckling's *Fragmenta Aurea* and Cavalier Authorship," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 55, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 139-40. He likewise points to the potential political ramifications of the variation of this poem: that the printed text, manuscript stanza aside, "still ostensibly reinforces specific accusations of anti-Royalist polemicists, but it does so within a context that drastically undermines the severity of those claims." Clayton's rationale to which Zajac points is located in Clayton's commentary to his edition of Suckling's *Works*, 238.

I bring up this poem because it recasts the anti-fruition lyrics, and Suckling's verse more broadly, as an investigation into what happens when time-tested scripts for desire do not work for a poet. The print version of "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking" shows the abiding virile, heterosexual version of desire and consummation, though couched in flowery verse, asserted in TC's warning that should JS fantasize further, he will be lost. TC cautions that nudging towards consummation brings danger and delight at once, thus presaging the Fall that JS fails to contemplate in his description of the innocent Eve in the stanza prior. But the manuscript ending, like other *Fragmenta Aurea* verses, shows instead the complicated nuances of desire – the twisting dance of yearning and apprehension, want and confusion. This is a shifting lens through which to view Suckling's poetry, not just as a vehicle for misogynistic opinion (the supposed supporting evidence of his biographical, personal sexual failings and subsequent resentments), or a cypher for his politics. Instead, we can find evidence in his poetry that gives voice to a literary and social culture that offers competing, if not opposing, messages on the import of sexual congress. We see Suckling testing various lyric registers to explore those messages, and purportedly failing each time, raising doubts not just about that sexual culture, but, crucially, about what verse can accomplish. That latter picture was a bleak one for Suckling and other leading Cavalier voices, as Smith summarizes:

> Carew died just before war broke out; and Suckling fled the country after failing to rescue Strafford in 1631, to kill himself (as report was) in France a year later. Vaughan's turn from Amoret to lost innocence and countries beyond the stars, his imperative sense that it's every man for himself in the oncoming cataclysm, gives us a measure of the psychic shock Royalists sustained in the events of 1648-9 and what love poetry counted for then.[226]

This brief survey of several emblematic Cavalier poets' fates demonstrates how love poetry counted for little amid the earth-shattering war years. Indeed, Smith continues, "When the

[226] Smith, "The Failure of Love," 61-62.

Cavalier voice is heard again there's a difference," emblematized by "Love; sottishness; debt" and offering a "sleazy voice of…Royalism."[227] If the tropes no longer worked for the Cavaliers, then their successors expose the Royalist set as a tired and played-out poetic group; in such an altered world, the love poetry of the earliest years of the seventeenth century seems incompatible.

"Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking" does not and cannot explain away the grosser excesses of misogyny evident in the anti-fruition verses. But it can lend further context to the motivations lying underneath that rhetoric. Of course, we cannot know the order in which Suckling would have envisioned his poems appearing, or even if he wanted them, in print; he died before he got the chance to see such a thing come to pass. As such, there is no linear conclusion to be drawn from one poem to another. Yet collected poems speak back to one another, reflecting and refracting images that came before and come after, in a collage of refashioned meaning. While the speaker of "Against Fruition [2]" sees "ease" in consummation as an obstacle to any "brave spirit's" satisfaction, JS in "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking" reaches an opposing conclusion. JS takes himself to task for his doubts; that he cannot consummate desire, even in fantasy, like the "fools" who do so supposedly with ease in reality. Similarly, the "Against Fruition [2]" speaker urges his mistress' restraint, asking her to keep at bay the sight of "strange things" (her person, we might assume), as a means of prolonging expectation and feeding desire. But JS complicates that picture. In his thought experiment, he strives but is unable to clearly envision said "strange things." The result yields little by way of satisfaction. Rather, the pursuit stymies his poetic endeavor (articulated as his struggle to describe Lady Carlisle's form) and leads him, in manuscript verse at least, to chastise himself for

[227] Smith, "The Failure of Love," 62.

his seeming inability to experience and voice desire in the way that the poetic script that TC, his contemporaries, and forebears might offer. Even in the print version, leaving out the manuscript verse (another moment of non-consummation, or non-ending, perhaps), pleasure seems far off. The imagined, disrobed mistress of that version conjured in TC's imagination does not lead to unqualified joy or pleasure, but rather "loss."

Despite the declarative stance of "Against Fruition [1]" and "Against Fruition [2]," those poem's visions are not the end-all, be-all of either Suckling's lyric project or the experience of sexuality and desire. "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking" provides a productive foil for both anti-fruition lyrics. The juxtaposition between TC and JS highlights the distance between courtly and anti-Platonic points of view. The third character in the poem, Lady Carlisle, also offers a test case for the limits of *both* of the registers that TC and JS employ. Her constructed presence that serves as the poem's pretext shows the inadequacy of inflated rhetoric and the inadequacy of Suckling's more "debased" rhetoric all at once. Following long traditions of lyric hyperbole established by the likes of Petrarch, TC hyper-inflates his impression of Lady Carlisle so that he cannot see her for who she is; JS deflates her so that he cannot see her for who she is. And the audience cannot see her for who she is through the interpretative lenses imposed upon the already artificial scenario in which this encounter takes place. Indeed, she even walks out of frame, leaving TC and JS to an unwinnable debate. Or, as Wilcher aptly puts it, the men's crudity "does not reflect negatively on Lady Carlisle herself, who has 'left the place' oblivious to the lecherous imaginings of the two men with her status as great court lady intact."[228] I would offer that, though JS may use lecherous terms, his imagination falls short of the sort of consummation that TC envisions in his description of following a line of sight up the imagined

[228] Wilcher, *The Discontented Cavalier*, 135.

Lady Carlisle's thigh. If the "Against Fruition" speakers' mission was once to find a haven in the ideal against the "homely" aspects of desire and humanity, in "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking," both TC's illusion and JS' less sentimental picture fail.

All told, these conventional oppositions that delineate cultural experiences and depictions of opposed abstinence and eroticism are not unlike the binary logics Suckling's verses purport to uphold. The nature of both desire and poetry resides in the gray middle: a space that social expectation and Suckling's argumentation both resist but cannot quite overcome. If the original skeptical philosophical method of opposition was used to achieve a kind of consensus and peace, Suckling's poetic project falls in line with a more radical, hyperbolic skeptical vision. As much as the anti-fruition lyrics work to counter a particular portrait of desire and advocate for a certain degree of chastity, whether in instructions to the youth or to put off a mistress, they end on unsettling notes that preclude intersubjective relationships altogether. Likewise, as "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking" takes skeptical opposition as a formal feature in dialogue, the poem does not offer a satisfactory end. Radical skepticism, in philosophy as in poetry, in its attempt to come to an answer only begets more questions.

4. The Legacy of Suckling's Debate

Suckling's anti-fruition verse began its public life already in the midst of poetic interchange. While both were circulating in manuscript in the 1630s, "Against Fruition [1]" did not make its print debut in Suckling's collected works, *Fragmenta Aurea* (1646).[229] Rather, it was first printed

[229] One manuscript witness from the 1630s is University of Oxford, Bodleian MS Ashmole 47, ff. 21v-2r, a volume compiled in part by antiquarian Elias Ashmole. The other known seventeenth-century manuscript witnesses include University of Oxford, Bodleian MS Don. d. 55, ff. 39r-40r; University of Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 160, ff. 48v-9r; Hertfordshire Record Office, DE/P F36, p. [141]; and Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, U269 F36, No. 42, pp. 4-5. The Rosenbach Museum & Library, MS 239/16, pp. 142-3 is a further witness with dating evidence for composition into the early eighteenth century.

in Edmund Waller's 1645 collected works alongside Waller's rebuttal, "In Answer of Sir John Suckling's Verses." Waller's poem and Abraham Cowley's "Against Fruition," contained in his 1647 *The Mistress*, offer two contemporary voicings for and against fruition around the time Suckling's verses were gaining traction in the wider public sphere. The rebuttal that Waller makes and Cowley's variation on the anti-fruition theme present in Suckling's poetry both help to refine an understanding of Suckling's messaging and also pave the way for later responses to come in the Restoration.

Suckling's respondents writing in favor of fruition, like Edmund Waller, take him to task for the logical inconsistencies of his anti-fruition poetry. Waller's response is particularly memorable, as he interlineally offers "pro" positions to Suckling's "cons" over sixteen stanzas.[230] In this endeavor he replicates the form of the dialogic thought experiment that Suckling uses in "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking" and applies it to refute Suckling's speaker's arguments against fruition. Waller's speaker's argument drives towards insistent praise of a licit, embodied, married sexuality to counter Suckling's speaker's assertions. To Suckling's speaker's claim that "Knowing too much long since lost paradise," Waller's speaker counters, "by your knowledge, we should be bereft / Of all that paradise which yet is left" (3-4). He supports finding some glimpse of the prelapsarian in the fruition of a postlapsarian world. While Suckling's speaker compares fruition to waking from "sweet dreams" for a "toy," Waller's speaker answers, "'Tis true, he wakes that feels this real fire; / But to sleep better" (12-13). He envisions a consummation that provides postcoital balm: "whoe'er drinks deep / Of this Nepenthe, rocks himself asleep" (13-14). Likewise, when Suckling's speaker warns against the danger of fruition's "surfeit," Waller's asks, "But shall we starve, 'cause surfeitings destroy?"

[230] Edmund Waller, "In Answer of Sir John Suckling's Verses," in *The Poems of Edmund Waller*, ed. George Thorn-Drury (London: A. H. Bullen, 1901), 1.116-19.

(21-22). To Suckling's speaker's insistence that "even kisses lose their taste," Waller's speaker contends that if kisses were "impair[ed]" by fruition, then why would married couples "Whose joys just Hymen warrants all the night / Consume the day, too, in this less delight?" (23, 25-26). He praises a spectrum of sexually continent behaviors in their appropriate time, place, and manner (in matrimony, chiefly) against Suckling's speaker's all-or-nothing views.

That line of argument is exemplified well in Waller's speaker's argument that, even though "Plays and romances read and seen, do fall / In our opinions," to not experience them at all would risk having no enjoyment whatsoever: "not seen at all, / Whom would they please? To an heroic tale / Would you not listen, lest it should grow stale?" (43-46). In a rare point of agreement, Waller's speaker does not necessarily refute Suckling's speaker's claim that repeated textual/sexual encounters lead to a kind of dullness; but he suggests that not participating in those encounters would be a lost opportunity for pleasure at all. He declares that "Restraint preserves the pleasure we have got, / But he ne'er has it that enjoys it not" (55-56). In this mode, Waller's speaker concludes his rebuttal: "Not he that knows the wealth he has is poor, / But he that dares not touch, nor use, his store" (65-66). In an argumentative strain closer perhaps to Jonson's Petronian fragment, Waller's speaker hopes to "preserve" pleasure through moderate use rather than forego it altogether. Before the poem's declaratory end, he has employed an interrogative mode that consistently pokes holes in Suckling's speaker's argument – raising questions Suckling cannot answer posthumously. Yet these unanswered questions might offer irresolution in and of themselves; the debate cannot in fairness reach a conclusion.

Cowley's verse differs from Waller's, falling more closely in line with Suckling's, even though they have some key points of contrast. Cowley's speaker's innovation is to combine the sort of modes of Suckling's "Against Fruition [1]" and "Against Fruition [2]"; his poem consists

of a warning not to a youth, but to his mistress. However, his conclusions chime with Suckling's anti-fruition speakers' as he even employs some of the same imagery and diction, creating a piece that seems to smooth out some of the rougher edges of Suckling's poetry. He begins with a line similar to "Against Fruition [1]," appropriates some of its logics, and gives voice to the sexual double standard in a compact opening gambit:

> No; thou'rt a fool, I'll swear, if e'er thou grant:
> Much of my veneration thou must want,
> When once thy kindness puts my ignorance out;
> For a learned age is always least devout.
> Keep still thy distance, for at once to me
> Goddess and woman too thou canst not be…(1-6)[231]

Cowley's speaker translates the quality of foolishness that Suckling's speaker reserved for the "fond" youth (fond meaning both affectionate as well as foolish) to his mistress in a prohibition against her yielding. The double standard for women that Suckling's speaker equated to honest whoredom Cowley's speaker lifts up to the level of his beloved's inability to be both divine and flesh-and-blood mortal. His preceding couplet about knowledge, ignorance, and devotion not only sets up his observation about the sexual double standard but also articulates the underpinnings of the skeptical movement. Skepticism is positioned against dogma, the acceptance of received wisdom as incontrovertibly true (hence some of the contemporary fears surrounding the early modern skeptic's potential to lapse into atheism).[232] Preserving the mistress in a position of near divinity with all of its mystery, and as a figure to whom the speaker can remain devout, clashes with an imperative to knowledge; he asks her to preserve the mystery by refraining to yield entirely.

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[231] Abraham Cowley, "Against Fruition," in *The New Oxford Book of Seventeenth-Century Verse*, ed. Alastair Fowler, (1991; reis., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 553-54.
[232] Popkin charts the backlash to the religious skepticism in works by Hobbes and Spinoza. See *The History of Scepticism*, 193-207.

However, the speaker lands somewhere in the middle between Waller's and Suckling's by allowing the mistress to give "Such freedom…as may admit command, / But keep the forts and magazines in thine hand" (9-10). He effectively asks her to arm herself with chastity in a reversal of Romeo's annoyance at Rosaline's chaste defenses (figured in militaristic terms), discussed in this dissertation's first chapter. Instead, Waller's speaker recognizes here the power that the mistress has over his imagination and worries that his own devotion to fancy might inhibit any sort of relationality with the mistress: "Thou in my fancy dost much higher stand / Than women can be placed by nature's hand," he admits (19-20). He continues, "And I must needs, I'm sure, a loser be, / To change thee, as thou'rt there, for very thee" (20-21). This is much closer to an admission of Cowley's speaker's own insufficiency than that expressed in the generalities of Suckling's anti-fruition speakers, though perhaps it leans closer to JS' voice in the final manuscript stanza of "Upon My Lady Carlisle's Walking."

Nonetheless, Cowley's clear-eyed speaker shares diction with Suckling's anti-fruition speakers, employing images that reverberate with his predecessors'. He likens Love to a "greedy hawk," which "if we give way, / Does over-gorge himself in his own prey; / Of very hopes a surfeit he'll sustain, / Unless by fears he cast them up again" (28-31). Cowley's speaker unites the conceit of Suckling's speaker's surfeit of "Against Fruition [1]" with love's fears and hopes of "Against Fruition [2]" in a much more graphic image of the ill bird of prey, at whose mercy all lovers stand to experience the vicissitudes of fruition. He appears far more critical of himself for not only the unfairness of the sexual double-bind in which the mistress finds herself in the web of his desires ("Goddess and woman too thou canst not be") but also for the ways that attraction makes him behave. Of beauty he admits that "We admire it, whilst unknown, but after more / Admire ourselves for liking it before" (24-25). The surprising twist is not a slight on the

mistress' beauty depreciating with familiarity but rather the speaker's own sense of self-importance or even sheer self-congratulation over time. Even if he comes to similar conclusions to Suckling's first anti-fruition poem's speaker in terms of his imagery and diction, he does not share the same sense of self-assured superiority as that man advising the youth. And though he shares the same type of interlocutor – a beloved – as Suckling's speaker in the second anti-fruition poem, Cowley's speaker turns a critical eye inward to his own experience of sexual attraction as opposed to the generalities on offer in his predecessor's verse. The conclusion that Cowley and Suckling's speakers reach, against that of Waller's speaker, is closer to a call for abstinence to avoid love's vicissitudes. Yet, in the process of exploring the power of fantasy over an embodied sexuality, Suckling and Cowley's speakers offer skeptical accounts of the scripts of desire that result in portraits of themselves done up in shades of disillusionment and even outright angst.

Forty-two years after *Fragmenta Aurea* first came to the press, poems contained in 1688's *Lycidus, or, the Lover in Fashion* demonstrate that the fruition debate was far from settled, even decades after Suckling's demise. While Suckling's verse hangs in the air with little by way of satisfaction or even much conclusion, what unites Waller and Cowley's responses to Suckling's verse with those of the successors to the fruition debate in the Restoration era is that they all seek some kind of solution to the fruition question. Waller's speaker calls for chaste sexuality; Cowley's speaker calls for a kind of abstinence. Behn and the Earl of Rochester's speakers, however, will advocate for a more libertine pursuit of pleasure. Yet all the while the poetic conundrum of the unresolved and unwinnable fruition debate reflects the issue of seventeenth-century hyperbolic skepticism writ large: attempts at resolution cannot undo the extreme doubts raised in works that came before.

I begin the discussion of the fruition debate's Restoration iteration with companion verses appearing in *Lycidus*, respectively penned by the pseudonymous "Alexis" and Behn, generally accepted as the collection's editor. The poem by "Alexis" echoes the Montaignian anti-fruition model while Behn's reply encapsulates how a poetic speaker's gender contours any picture of chastity advocated therein; she offers a strong rebuttal to the vision propagated by male-voiced poetic speakers from Suckling to Cowley. The love object who had retained a silent, implied presence in their poetic dialogues has an opportunity, through Behn, to speak back. "Alexis" and Behn's poems likewise indicate the persistence of the philosophical questions undergirding the fruition debate. Their innovations to the form owe much to the evolutions of skeptical philosophy in the intervening years between 1646 and 1688. Those years between *Fragmenta Aurea* and *Lycidus*' publication would witness revolutions in skeptical thought with the printing and promulgation of Descartes' radical skepticism, an intensification of the skeptical project that, as the introduction to this dissertation suggests, marked an irrevocable new phase of skeptical philosophy. Not only did this period represent the bridge between Cartesian metaphysics and the proto-Enlightenment, skeptically influenced empiricism advocated by the likes of John Locke (to be discussed in the next chapter), but it also saw evolutions in sexual culture, including, on the one hand, the waning influence of the ecclesiastical courts to prosecute sexual indiscretions, and on the other, the rise of the Society for the Reformation of Manners (founded in London in 1691) that, in its focus to rid the capital of immorality and reform sex work, anticipated the sensibility culture that would arise in the eighteenth century.[233]

[233] Faramerz Dabhoiwala offers a helpful overview of a culture of surveillance around illicit sex arising in London about the time of the Glorious Revolution. He goes on to trace the backlash that the reformers faced and how the policing of chastity remained in flux throughout the eighteenth century. See *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75-78.

"Alexis" begins his poem with an immediate, generalized discussion of fruition:

> AH wretched Man! whom neither fate can please
> Nor Heavens indulgent to his wish can bless,
> Desire torments him, or fruition cloys,
> Fruition which shou'd make his bliss, destroys;
> Far from our Eyes th' inchanting objects set
> Advantage by the friendly distance get. (1-6)[234]

The territory is familiar, with language that echoes Suckling's first "Against Fruition" poem (specifically lines seven and eight). "Alexis'" speaker insists that "Desire torments him, or fruition cloys, / Fruition which shou'd make his bliss, destroys" (3-4). While Suckling's first "Against Fruition" poem moves from this discussion of fulfilled desire's cloying towards a consideration of the material results of fruition, "Alexis'" speaker explores the relationship between fruition and accurate perception. The speaker argues that "Fruition shews the cheat" of objects that, at a distance, seemed attractive, but with proximity "plain appear, / And we what with much care we gain and skill / An empty nothing find, or real ill" (7, 8-10). "Alexis'" poetic speaker decries errors of perception inherent in fruition. Indeed, he outright denounces "our mistaken thought" that, after failing to gain satisfaction, "Most wisely strives to be deceiv'd again" (11, 14). The concern over errors in perception override Suckling's anti-fruition speakers' prioritization of fantasy. Here, "Alexis'" speaker reacts with horror at the unmasking of the fantastical for the real. The "empty nothing" could be a pun on female genitalia, invoking a misogynistic trope, yet could just as well invoke the hyperbolic skeptical fear that all is illusion. In either case, the speaker of the poem does not find much recuperative power in fruition.

While Suckling's anti-fruition speakers, though operating along similar philosophical lines, disavow physicality and fruition altogether, "Alexis'" speaker exclaims that "Left to our

[234] All citations of the poem by "Alexis" are from *Lycidus: or, The Lover in Fashion…*, ed. Aphra Behn (London: Joseph Knight and Francis Saunders, 1688), 127-29.

reason, and by that betray'd / We lose a present bliss to catch a shade" (31-32). Such a logical turn suggests the speaker's yearning for some tangible, present, bodily satisfaction amid the "restless anxious Progress" of the unrelenting "Ambitious feaver" of "fantastick wild desire" (24, 19, 15). The picture he paints resembles that by the speaker of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129, who exclaims that the consummation of lustful desires is "Mad in pursuit and in possession so, / Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme" (9-10).[235] The frenetic pursuit that "Alexis'" speaker, as successor to the sonnet speaker, envisions marks a stark departure from Suckling's speakers' warning, in which the illusion of desire receives pride of place. Suckling thus fits neatly, in "Alexis'" speaker's estimation, within a group of writers that he lambasts:

> Philosophers and Poets strove in vain
> The restless anxious Progress to restrain,
> And to their loss soon found their Good supream
> An Airy notion and a pleasing Dream. (23-26)

The mention of a "Good supream" seems pointed both towards the kind of Neoplatonic striving for "the Good" in the realm of the Forms and also the earthly good of erotic pleasure. Such a critique would appear to place "Alexis'" speaker in a more materialist strain. But, crucially, as previously discussed with regard to his "On My Lady Carlisle's Walking" lyric, Suckling's poetic persona admitted philosophical deficiencies in both Neoplatonic idealization and in materialist views.

While he envisages fruition as an especially destructive force, "Alexis'" speaker also lays bare his concerns with fruition's ability to reduce "Man" from power to abjection. In the relentless chase after "fantastick wild desire," men only hunger for more fantasy and lose themselves in the process:

> Are we then masters or the slaves of things?
> Poor wretched vassalls, or terrestrial Kings?

[235] Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, 639.

Left to our reason, and by that betray'd,
We lose a present bliss to catch a shade.
Unsatisfy'd with Beauteous natures store
The universal Monarch Man is only poor. (15, 29-34)

Unlike Suckling's anti-fruition speakers who took refuge in the ability to imagine, "Alexis'" speaker escalates the skeptical debate by even maligning fantasy itself as increasing the kind of frenzy that Montaigne observed in the unending pursuit of fruition. That frenzy seems enough to topple Man from his rightful place as "terrestrial King" in a culture that relied upon the biblical mandate of man's dominion over nature.[236] He is satisfied neither with what the natural world has to offer in fruition nor in the fantastical. The shadow of emasculation hinted at by being entranced by the "empty nothing" of female genitalia looms large in the further degradation that "Alexis'" speaker envisions. Embodied women and women in fantasy alike within the all-encompassing frenzy for passion that "Alexis'" speaker pictures turn kingly men into "wretched vassalls," enslaving and impoverishing "Monarch Man." The gendered implications here diminish the possibility that the speaker is addressing a universalized, gender-neutral mankind. His repetition of the adjective "wretched" emphasizes the modifier used in the poem's declarative opening exclamation: "AH Wretched Man!" (1). Looking back on this opener, the speaker seems to have preemptively answered the rhetorical question he poses at the end of the poem about desire's capacity to overturn the social order. While Suckling's speaker dwells in ambiguity, "Alexis'" speaker seeks clarity, and, importantly, hierarchy.

[236] During the Creation, God endowed humanity with power over the earth: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Gen. 1:26-28 (King James Version).

Chastity has politicized and gendered implications in the kind of hierarchical worldview that "Alexis'" speaker espouses. Moreover, as Behn demonstrates through her own unique philosophical viewpoint, the discussions of chastity that run throughout the anti-fruition lyric subgenre inhibit the sort of desire that the love object herself could feel. Her poem offers no particular advice in favor of abstinence or sexual activity. Rather, as Janet Todd explicates, Behn's speaker "argues that women suffer from men's inability to be satisfied with any woman they can possess."[237] Behn's verse makes plain the paucity of satisfactory options for women faced with any "swain" who think as "Alexis'" speaker does. While Behn steps into a long-standing tradition of female-voiced verse warning against men's inconstancy, in the more immediate context of the fruition debate, her poem radically overturns the conventional expectations of anti-fruition verse, if not in form then in overall meaning.[238]

Behn's speaker opens her poem with a lament:

> AH hapless sex! who bear no charms,
> But what like lightning flash and are no more,
> False fires sent down for baneful harms,
> Fires which the fleeting lover feebly warms,
> And given like past debauches o'er,
> Like songs that please, though bad, when new
> But learned by heart neglected grew. (1-7)[239]

The beginning of Behn's poem reflects and refracts "Alexis'" speaker's exclamation about hapless man, though this time, Behn's speaker makes gender an immediate, central concern. She

[237] Aphra Behn, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 1.432 fn 74.
[238] That tradition encompasses works like the narrative poem "A Lover's Complaint," contained in the quarto of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, in which a young woman recalls her seduction and abandonment. Lady Mary Wroth's 1621 sonnet cycle *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* offers another example; the collection revolves around a lover's inconstancy and neglect.
[239] Aphra Behn, "To Alexis in Answer to His Poem against Fruition: Ode," in *The New Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse*, 723-24.

likens fruition to artistic expression similarly to Suckling's and Waller's speakers. Suckling's speaker, as we recall, once warned in his first anti-fruition verse that

> Women enjoyed, whate'er before they've been
> Are like romances read, or sights once seen;
> Fruition's dull, and spoils the play much more
> Than if one read or knew the plot before. ("AF [1]," 19-22)

Suckling's speaker argues that fruition is even more egregiously dull than if one were to re-read a romance, or attend a play after knowing the whole plot (pity the poor Restoration dramatic prologues to come). He aims to both emphasize the disillusionment after actually possessing the love object as opposed to idealized fantasy ("'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear" ["AF [1]," 23]) and also highlight the *rote* quality of fruition: an exercise with little surprise or novelty, a foregone conclusion that offers little engagement or thrill. We remember Waller's speaker's counterpoint that

> Plays and romances read and seen, do fall
> In our opinions; yet not seen at all,
> Whom would they please? To an heroic tale
> Would you not listen, lest it should grow stale? (43-46)

Waller's speaker does not appear to contradict Suckling's speaker's assessment that repeated experiences of artistic production pale in comparison to an original encounter. But Waller's speaker insists that even the prospect of tempered pleasure is worth pursuing; the alternative is to not to enjoy artistic expression altogether, a prospect that Waller's speaker's persistent rhetorical questions suggests is a sad, if not ludicrous, prospect indeed.

Behn's speaker uses the same metaphorical language of artistic expression to show exactly how that devaluation feels for the mistress; her lines "False fires sent down for baneful harms, / Fires which the fleeting lover feebly warms" offer a spitting consonance that emphasizes her anger at the lover's depreciation of the mistress' charms, while taking a jab at his

half-hearted efforts, the "feeble warming," to provide any satisfaction (a motif related, perhaps, to her impotency poem "The Imperfect Enjoyment") (3-4). Suckling's and Waller's speakers compare fruition to going rotten: becoming spoiled, growing stale. Behn's speaker protracts that outcome by underscoring that neglect leads to the devaluation of even a bad new song over time and through a rote experience of use (learning it by heart). Neglect rather than the repetition of fruition alone, Behn's speaker argues, leads to dissatisfaction. In that estimation, Behn's speaker warns the implicit female readership invoked at the poem's start (the "hapless sex") against the tepid seductions of inconstant men. She has appropriated the homosociality of Suckling's first "Against Fruition" poem to a network of women to offer a note of caution against the ways men would devalue them.

Behn's speaker, in the second stanza of her response to "Alexis," does share some of Suckling's speakers' concerns about the dichotomy between mental fantasy and embodied reality. Yet where Suckling's speaker decries the fact that embodiment cannot match fantasy, Behn's speaker deplores that the embodied, sexual contact is so confined, limited to one rendezvous with an inconstant male sexual partner:

> In vain the mind with brighter glories grace,
> While all our joys are stinted to the space
> Of one betraying interview,
> With one surrender to the eager will
> We're short-lived nothing, or a real ill. (10-14)

Behn's use of "Alexis'" language of "nothing" or "real ill" retroactively highlights the direction of his speech against a female mistress. Behn's speaker mourns the loss of potential for continued embodied delight as that which is truly incommensurate with fantasy. The speaker internalizes the problem as a collective one for women: "With one surrender to the eager will / We're short-lived nothing, or a real ill" (13-14). This innovation on "Alexis'" speaker's original

is especially devastating: she lays bare that what "Alexis'" speaker finds is not just "inchanting objects" but people. Because she gives a voice and a body (capable of pleasure though receiving little) to the love object, Behn's speaker underscores that anti-fruition discourse leads men to find satisfaction in neither fantasy nor object. That dissatisfaction has an impact, in turn, on women who are eager but nonetheless duped, seduced, and dumped (5). Her totalizing "we," representing the female mistresses affected by inconstant and fleeting male lovers, offers a counterpoint to the "we" of Suckling's anti-fruition verses, showing another side to the story. This first-person plural pronoun both invests the love objects that "Alexis'" speaker dismisses with their deserved humanity and also illustrates the materialist consequences of anti-fruition rhetoric.

The fantastical abstractions upon which "Alexis" and Suckling's respective speakers rely come up against the embodied female personhood featured in Behn's poetic response. Behn's speaker shares some of the same philosophical concerns about the distance between the mind and body, but in the obverse. She recognizes that a sole focus on the fantasy brewed in the imaginings of the lover's mind, perforce, leaves the embodied love object languishing. In that revelation, Behn's speaker reveals that her predecessor's speakers run the risk of following the path of a hyperbolic skepticism too far. The detachment of the mental fantasy from the tangible and the embodied precludes any chance for intersubjective connection. The end result harms women who cannot live up to the fantasy and thus are "neglected" in due course. Because, Behn's speaker argues, "man with that inconstancy was born, / To love the absent, and the present scorn," women bear the brunt of the consequences of this idealization (15-16). The speaker pulls back the curtain on the so-called "borrow'd splendours" that "Alexis'" speaker

condemns (8). She demonstrates that decking oneself out is not necessarily for "the cheat," but to attract and sustain attention for a connection that proves all too brief and unsatisfying:

> Why do we deck, why do we dress
> For such a short-lived happiness?
> Why do we put attraction on,
> Since either way 'tis we must be undone? (16-20)

The speaker goes on to address the sexual double-bind with insistent repetition: "They fly if honour take our part /…And oh! they fly us if we yield" (21, 24). The consequences do not end at the promise of being "undone." Instead, abandonment looms large in addition to the threatened loss of reputation and loss of pleasure, too.

The speaker's metaphors underscore the damage of that abandonment by reflecting the objectification that the mistress suffers at the lover's hand. The lover "No sooner kindles the designing flame / But to the next bright object bears / The trophies of his conquest and our shame" (29-31). The trophy of conquest makes plain the warfare imagery threaded throughout the poem (stanza 4 compares the lover's flight to military retreat). But it also reveals the process of objectification to which Behn's speaker remains opposed. The lover's pursuit and subsequent postcoital flight render the love object comparable to the spoils of war, those portable relics of conflict that the lover carries with him to his next rendezvous. Unlike Suckling's speaker in "Against Fruition [1]," the lover in Behn's verse seems not to have learned his lesson. Instead of resolving not to pursue further sexual relationships upon realizing the mismatch between the ideal and the real, he partakes in the frantic search that "Alexis'" speaker details in his poem.

Yet, like Suckling's poetic persona, Behn's speaker likewise takes her broader homosocial exchange and narrowly tailors it to offer advice to an individual, no longer the "fond youth" of "Against Fruition [1]" but a sister-in-arms:

> Then, heedless nymph, be ruled by me,

If e'er your swain the bliss desire:
Think like Alexis he may be,
Whose wished possession damps his fire;
The roving youth in every shade
Has left some sighing and abandoned maid,
For 'tis a fatal lesson he has learned,
After fruition ne'er to be concerned. (34-41)

Behn's speaker here recasts both "Alexis'" and Suckling's poetic personae. She suggests that their promotion of abstinence conceals a past history of seduction and desertion. If we are to assume that both Suckling's and "Alexis'" speakers make their arguments from viewpoints of experience, then both poems leave room for that possibility that they reached their philosophy after jilting their mistresses, as Behn's speaker presents it. Their respective commitments against fruition – the "fatal lesson… / After fruition ne'er to be concerned" – have indeed "left some sighing and abandoned maid" behind (39, 40-41).

However, Behn's speaker does not seem to offer much of a solution herself. The poem, after all, responds to the argument against fruition laid out by "Alexis," not necessarily as a stance *for* fruition in and of itself. Hartle suggests that Behn's speaker "can only urge the 'heedless Nymph' to sexual abstinence" in the face of male inconstancy.[240] Yet, Behn's speaker never makes such a decision or even such a suggestion to her fellow nymph. Instead, she merely cautions that nymph to remain clear-eyed about the potential harms of inconstancy and to lower any expectations for faithfulness or long-lasting pleasure. The picture, then, appears rather bleak, as Hartle observes: "The despairing entrapment of these female voices offers no escape from Suckling's double-bind – 'Shee's but an honest whore that yeelds'; the prospect of female auto-eroticism might have done so, but only the ventriloquizing male poet attempts this" in verses by

[240] Hartle, "'Fruition was the Question in Debate'," 90.

the likes of Rochester and Thomas Shadwell that feature female masturbation in crude parody.[241] I would counter, though, that such a contention occludes queer possibilities for desire elsewhere in Behn's poetic oeuvre; Behn's poetic persona crucially also experiences a level of pleasure with love objects who are not cisgender men, as her poem "To the Fair Clarinda" offers an avenue for flirtation and pleasure that critics have variously interpreted to have sapphic or more genderfluid connotations.[242]

What seems to bother Behn's speaker, then, in addition to the denial of longed-for pleasures from the inconstant lovers featured in the poem, is also a broader philosophical problem. Long an admirer of Lucretius, Behn's response to the radical skepticism inherent in "Alexis'" verse (as much as Suckling's) pertains to a materialist point of view. As expressed in her poem of praise for Thomas Creech on his 1682 translation of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* into English, Behn "shows that even seemingly unfathomable emotions have their basis in sensation, and that philosophy deludes itself whenever it denies the body and identifies rationality with pure mind."[243] Sexuality, in this schema, occupies a middle ground that defies the logics of mind-body dualism perpetuated by Descartes and his followers. Though she employed the alias "Astrea," the name familiar from D'Urfé's famous romance, as she undertook espionage duties for the Crown during the early years of the Restoration, Behn offers a response

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[241] Hartle, "'Fruition was the Question in Debate'," 90. The poems he refers to are Rochester's "Faire Cloris" about female masturbation in a pigsty. He further notes Clarinda's Maid's song in Act 4 of Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*, whose line "I without him enjoy," he suggests, is potentially masturbatory. See Hartle, "'Fruition was the Question in Debate'," 96 fn 66. We might add Rochester's "Signior Dildo" and even Suckling's punning "A Candle" to that catalogue of verses.

[242] Jennifer Frangos aptly summarizes these multiple critical strains. She points to Emma Donoghue's contention that the relationship configured in Behn's poem is between women, and notes that Ros Ballaster offers a theory that Clarinda is Behn's real-life beloved, John Hoyle, dressed in drag. Ultimately, she contends that "Focusing on the discursivity the literalness of the hermaphroditism allows us to appreciate the dynamics of the speaker's conception of and relationship with Clarinda," with the eventual aim of "revealing a non-heterocentric formulation or practice of love and desire, one that is not based on imitation so much as it is based on dynamics of difference and sameness." "Aphra Behn's Cunning Stunts: 'To the fair Clarinda'" in *The Eighteenth Century* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 21, 27, 36.

[243] Alvin Snider, "Atoms and Seeds: Aphra Behn's Lucretius," *CLIO* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 1-24 (6).

to "Alexis" that critiques Neoplatonic idealization as little more than thinly-veiled inconstancy.[244] Her stance calls to mind Donne's turn of phrase in "The Ecstasy": "Love's mysteries in souls do grow, / But yet the body is his book" (72-73). Behn's speaker makes the case for love not devoid of embodiment, not so wed to the soul's mysteries and the lure of fantasy as to preclude bodily connection and pleasure.

Her warning about the dangers of inconstancy at first blush appears to go against a strain of the libertine discourse popularized during the Restoration period when Behn flourished. It might seem difficult to square her poetic speaker's condemnation of sexual inconstancy with Behn's praise in verse of Rochester (the consummate rake) after his death, or even the valorization of her dramatic rake heroes like Willmore in her series of plays *The Rover Parts 1 and 2*. Yet they may share a point of consistency with Behn's speaker against "Alexis." The rake speaker in Rochester's verse, as Tilmouth argues, embraces extremity and experiential intensity "to reach beyond the writers of the 'Against Fruition' tradition for whom the indulgence of appetite could only end in the demolition of a dream."[245] Rochester takes this tradition head-on in "The Platonic Lady," a poem that employs some of Suckling and Cowley's diction while calling for a very different end.[246] The speaker of that poem admits "I hate the thing is called enjoyment," but does not preclude other forms of embodied passion:

> I love a youth will give me leave
> His body in my arms to wreathe;
> To press him gently, and to kiss;

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[244] The name Astrea has meanings that echo in its long history. Resonant with Behn's poem seeking redress for the love object, the Roman goddess of justice was also called Astraea. She also features in Book 5 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

[245] Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason*, 337.

[246] Rochester's speaker borrows the metaphor from the concluding couplet of Cowley's "Against Fruition" in likening fruition to "the bee whose sting is gone," which "Converts the owner to a drone" (11-12). The speaker likewise calls "enjoyment" a "dull employment," picking up the thread that Suckling offered in "Against Fruition [1]": "Fruition's dull." For quotations from Rochester's poem, see "The Platonic Lady," in John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *The Works of the Earl of Rochester*, ed. David M. Vieth (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 25-26.

To sigh, and look with eyes that wish
For what, if I could once obtain
I would neglect with flat disdain. (7, 13-18)

In Rochester's poem, traces of the sorts of chaste sexuality advocated for by the likes of Jonson's speaker have resurfaced, while containing the warning of inconstancy (or "neglect") that Behn's speaker underscores. The speaker of Rochester's poem, though they indicate "Our freedom should be full complete, / And nothing wanting but the feat" of full consummation, presumably, finds other sorts of freedom with the beloved. "I'd give him liberty to toy," the speaker explains, "And play with me, and count it joy" (19-20). The speaker finds space for other embodied enjoyment and places it in equilibrium with consummation: both constitute freedom, liberty. Though Rochester's speaker's gender is indeterminate, the title suggests that the poem is voiced by "The Platonic Lady" herself; even if there is a gentle mockery of Platonic convention throughout, the poem concludes on a note that advocates for female pleasure. The allure, then, for Behn becomes apparent. As Ros Ballaster aptly explicates, Behn, along with some of her female successors, find "an affinity" between Rochester's work and "their own sense of aesthetic autonomy and the pursuit of sublimity in and through the representation of acts of passion."[247] "The Platonic Lady" offers a point of corroboration for Behn's speaker that embodied passion can be possible and pleasurable.

Of course, Behn is accustomed to wearing various masks in her dramatic works, and, like Suckling before her, displays a variety of opinions in verse that do not always agree. But what Behn presents in her poem to "Alexis" seems to be an indictment of bad-faith Neoplatonism as much as bad-faith abstinence. Behn's speaker devastates the lines of thought that obfuscate the experiences of women; in her verse, the love object gets the chance to dissent.

[247] Ros Ballaster, "Rochester, Behn and Enlightenment Liberty," in *Lord Rochester in the Restoration World*, ed. Matthew C. Augustine and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 208.

And what the love object offers is an indictment of larger cultural scripts around sexual relations. Against the equation of an absolutist avoidance of embodied sexuality with an avoidance of excess, Behn's speaker offers that the consequences of pursuing the perfection of heady fantasy could be the enemy of a here-and-now good.

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If the parental figures featured in this dissertation's first chapter face crises arising from too little skepticism, Suckling's poetic speakers suffer from a crisis of too much skepticism in their treatment of sexual love and expression of sexual disinclination. Suckling's "Against Fruition" poems feature speakers who relinquish the possibility of any pleasure by prioritizing an intangible illusion. Suckling's speakers question the intersubjectivity of erotic connection. JS, as poetic persona, raises that same question, but adds to the mix the further question of what poetry can achieve amid a lyric landscape of failed imagination, frustrated creation, and personal chastisement. Such questions lead not to satisfying answers but remain unresolved in the moment of posthumous publication of Suckling's works and in the midst of the English Civil Wars. Taking up the debate after the Restoration, Behn offers her own interpretation of the matters that disturbed Suckling's poetic speakers. Yet even Behn's speaker does not go so far as to argue for fruition in response to anti-fruition rhetoric. The poets take diverging philosophical stances to arrive at a similarly unsatisfactory conclusion: Suckling the hyperbolic skeptic advocates for a kind of abstinence and devotion to fantasy that precludes embodied pleasure. Behn, whose philosophy owes much to Lucretius and his brand of Epicureanism, emphasizes the sensation of embodied pleasure. But the bind Behn's speaker articulates in response to "Alexis" is inextricable with the conditions of the post-Cartesian moment. Once an extreme form of skepticism has exploded given precepts, and even questioned the reality of embodiment, that

skeptical possibility is difficult to refute. The continued sway that hyperbolic skepticism holds, even amid the rise in empiricist philosophy in Britain, undergirds this dissertation's next chapter in the context of Jane Barker's fictionalized account of a failed courtship and her own celibacy.

In addition to her poetry, Behn authored prose fiction, the genre featured in the next and final chapter of this dissertation, which was in vogue in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Though women had long authored prose fiction in English, the professional woman writer rose in the Restoration era and beyond.[248] A liminal figure whose writing straddles the line between Restoration and Augustan sensibilities, Barker wrote professionally throughout the 1710s and 1720s as the English novel was beginning to coalesce as a form unto itself. However, as a Catholic Jacobite, Barker's political and religious leanings in favor of James II's reign bring her back in time; she sets much of her prose work in retrospect. For this reason, her biographer Kathryn R. King calls her "*Janus* Barker, an author who looks back to traditional ways of thinking and feeling as much as she looks forward to the triumph of bourgeois domesticity, a novelist whose fictions distrust the modernity they articulate."[249] These simultaneous retrospective and forward-thinking viewpoints that Barker's prose affords make her work a helpful bridge in this dissertation's analysis of the long seventeenth century; she at once lives in the past while writing the future.

Barker's semi-autobiographical persona Galesia receives central focus in *Love Intrigues* (1713), an origin story out of a trilogy that details Galesia's failed entries into the marriage market and lays the groundwork for her celibate existence. In *Love Intrigues*, Barker takes on the

[248] Lady Mary Wroth first published her prose romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* in 1621, for example.
[249] Kathryn R. King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career, 1675-1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 9.

problem of other minds in perhaps the most skeptically daring piece of literature in this dissertation.

Chapter 3
Sense and Celibacy: Perception and Knowledge-Making in Jane Barker's Prose

Before the 1713 publication of what she labeled her "little Novel" *Love Intrigues*, Jane Barker wrote laudatory verse praising "A Virgin life."[250] The poem opens with a prayer, requesting divine aid in fending off the temptation of men:

> Since gracious Heven, you have bestow'd on me
> So great a kindness for verginity,
> Suffer me not, to fall into the power,
> Of mans, almost omnipotent amour. (1-4)

Barker's speaker uplifts her affinity for virginity as heaven-sent. She hopes to preserve her virginity indefinitely unlike other women who, afraid of becoming old maids at twenty-five, rush headlong into marriage, which "oft makes happy maid turn helpless dame" (10). She likens those women who would thus "fling [them] selves away" to "harmless kids which are pursu'd by men, / For safty run into a Lyons den" (12-14). The portrait she paints of virginity throughout the rest of the poem stands in stark relief to such threats. She concludes, paraphrasing her predecessor Katherine Philips, that celibacy allows women to become integral parts of loving communities.[251] "Her whole lives business," the speaker asserts of the celibate woman, "she drives to these ends, / To serve her god, her neighbour, and her friends" (35-36). In comparison

[250] Jane Barker, *Love Intrigues*, in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660-1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 2. Unless otherwise noted, the parenthetical in-text citations for the novel will come from this edition throughout the chapter. I follow Barker's own presentation of her work in calling it a novel though the term, in our modern understanding of the word, was still in flux in the early eighteenth century. For an excellent discussion of developments in the novel form as well as its pre-eighteenth-century antecedents, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2-3. The poem appeared in manuscript and print in *Poetical Recreations* (1688) and *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723). According to the poem's *Kissing the Rod* anthology editors, "A comparison between *Poetical Recreations* and the manuscript version (c. 1701) may reflect authorial emendations of Barker's original as printed in *Poetical Recreations* or her restoration of an original altered by other hands for publication or both." See the note to Barker's "A Virgin life," in *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women*'s *Verse*, ed. Germaine Greer, et al.(New York: Noonday Press, 1989), 361. The lines quoted come from this anthology, which reprints the manuscript version of this poem.

[251] These lines echo the final couplet in Philips' "A Resvery": "Who dares not keep that Life that he can spend, / To serve his God, his Country, and his Friend." *Kissing the Rod*, 363 fn 35-6.

to the alternative dangers of men's seduction and as a palatable manner to still remain in community without entering into matrimony, Barker's speaker presents virginity as an attractive mode of living. Yet that mode of living was becoming increasingly alternative over the course of the eighteenth century. Tim Hitchcock summarizes that English demographic datapoints over the 1700s show some degree of change:

> the age at first marriage dropped significantly,…bastardy rates rose threefold over the course of the century,… the number of marriages celebrated while the female partner was pregnant grew to a third of the total, and…the percentage of the population remaining unmarried…dropped precipitately.[252]

Hitchcock cautions that marriage and birth demographic data do not fully reflect sexual culture (which, at least in the early eighteenth century, encompassed nonpenetrative sexual practices against "an increasingly phallocentric definition of sex that excluded nonpenetrative activities" from normative behaviors in the latter part of the century).[253] Nevertheless, the point remains that an unmarried woman in the eighteenth century pursuing a celibate life differed from her unmarried counterparts in the seventeenth century who made up a greater portion of the population.

Despite the praise that Barker's poetic speaker heaps upon celibate living in verse, Barker's *Love Intrigues* offers a prose portrait of virginity cast in a light much different from that of the laudatory poem abovementioned. The first in a series of novels that traces Barker's semi-autobiographical persona, Galesia, from her youth on the marriage market to her mature celibacy, *Love Intrigues* takes a retrospective glance at Galesia's first romantic disappointment. The frame narrative features Galesia and her friend Lucasia, exiled in Saint-Germain-en-Laye,

[252] Tim Hitchcock, "The Reformulation of Sexual Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century England," *Signs* 37, no. 4, Sex: A Thematic Issues (Summer 2012): 823.
[253] Hitchcock, "The Reformation of Sexual Knowledge," 826.

France, where they have followed the Catholic King James II into exile after his deposition by forces who invited his Protestant son-in-law William III and daughter Mary II to reign in his stead in 1688.[254] Lucasia hopes to "quit this melancholy Theme" of memories of the English Civil Wars, newly launched wars in Europe, and increasing partisan factionalism in their homeland, and so "desired *Galesia* to recount to her the Adventures of her early Years, of which she had already heard some Part, and therefore believed the whole to be a diverting Novel" (83). The armed conflicts mentioned in the narrative frame are supplanted by interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts arising during Galesia's complex, and ultimately failed, courtship with her kinsman Bosvil, whose ultimate treachery Barker previews through onomastics (Bosvil "suggests a combination of 'bossive,' physical deformity, and 'vile," as Carol Shiner Wilson explains).[255]

Love Intrigues' intricate psychological landscape takes its shape from that relationship between Galesia and Bosvil, staged over the course of three years, from the time she is fifteen to eighteen.[256] Interspersed with moments of Galesia's poetic creation and citation, the narrative documents her struggles to come to terms with Bosvil's cyclical pattern of alternating courtship and rejection. The initial obstacle to the pair's relationship – the understanding that Galesia's brother's friend Brafort will marry her when she comes of age (a decision he, rather disturbingly,

[254] Choosing Lucasia for Galesia's confidant's name is another allusion to Katherine Philips, who also used that name as a pseudonym for her friend Anne Owen, a member of her circle whom she represented within her poetic body of work. See "To the Excellent M[rs] A. O. upon her receiving the name of Lucasia, and adoption into our society. 29 Decemb 1651." *Kissing the Rod*, 191-93.
[255] See *Love Intrigues* in Wilson's edition of *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7 fn 1.
[256] The work's title reflects its form, as both "intrigue" and "intricate" take their root from the Latin *intricare* – "to entangle, perplex, or embarrass." The verb has its own roots in its component *tricae* meaning "trifles, toys, quirks, tricks, perplexities." The passive of the verb, *tricari*, translates to "to raise difficulties, play tricks." This constellation of these etymological associations illuminates both *Love Intrigues*' narrative style as well as the emotional content of the tortured love affair it recounts. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "intricate (adj. & n.)," December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5092378404.

reaches when she is not older than eleven, with apparent family support) – is resolved by that suitor's untimely death. However, obstacles of Bosvil's own creation soon replace that initial stumbling block. The greatest complications that arise in their fractured, torturous courtship stem from partial information, misunderstandings, half-truths, and lapses in communication that dash hopes for intimacy. The novel's first-person narrative within a frame by necessity limits perspective. Yet even though the reader is only privy to Galesia's account of events, Bosvil's protestations of love for Galesia become increasingly baffling. Galesia's reports of friends and family's suspicions about Bosvil's intentions corroborate her account. One begins to wonder whether Bosvil's inapprehensible comportment would continue to thwart any prospects of marriage, even if Galesia felt able to give voice boldly to her desires for the young man. While the first chapter of this dissertation analyzes the misapprehension of young women's virginal bodies, this final chapter investigates how a young and inexperienced woman misreads her fickle suitor amid an altered landscape of hyperbolic skepticism. The main drama of the text arises from Bosvil's vacillations and Galesia's reactions to them – and several philosophical questions emerge to elevate the stakes of a narrative with far more introspection than action. In particular, the text asks to what extent others are knowable. What is more, in an attempt to answer that question, it shows how sexuality and skepticism intertwine; knowledge-making proves an urgent question of bodily autonomy and psychological wholeness in Barker's novel.[257]

[257] In this endeavor, I am indebted to Frances Ferguson, who studies sexual assault in the eighteenth-century English novel. The novel form not only describes assault as a crystallization of "the contrast between what could be said in public and proved and what is said in private and believed." Such a crystallization "represents the novel's ability to convey, as the stage could not, private aspects of experience such as sexuality." While *Love Intrigues* does not feature a physical assault, like Richardson's novels it powerfully explores interpretative gaps within imbalanced gendered and sexual power relations. Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," *Representations* (Autumn 1987) 20, Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy: 109, 199. I am likewise indebted to Sandra Macpherson's study of the "'tragic' logic of responsibility…that conceives of persons as causes of harms that go against their best intentions, but for which they are nonetheless accountable." Her work helps to make sense of the complicated liability of both Bosvil and Galesia in the narrative. See *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 4. Stephanie Insley Hershinow has proved

To elaborate further, as a writer looking back upon the Restoration, Barker takes on that era's preoccupation with the question of other minds, especially as articulated during the Cartesian moment and persisting as a problem throughout the seventeenth century. Galesia's is a struggle with the age-old epistemological problem of external world skepticism, forcefully reanimated by Descartes in 1640s France. Descartes asked how people might trust that their interpretations of external reality are infallible. The skeptical debate raged on throughout the seventeenth century, long past the publication of Descartes' pathbreaking *Meditationes*. Beginning in the 1660s, the work of the Royal Society in England, for example, offered empirical responses to the skeptical crisis through scientific experimentation. Accepting the hypothetical groundwork upon which scientific experiments should be carried out, Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke, and Isaac Newton offered a practical way of navigating doubt through provisional knowledge.[258] Boyle was a contemporaneous associate of John Wilkins and John Glanvill, who tempered the extremity of Descartes' hyperbolic skeptical philosophy in their religious writing.[259] At Oxford in the 1650s with Wilkins and Glanvill was John Locke, who would also go on to take to task radical skepticism. While Locke agreed with Descartes that humans have some innate knowledge of our own existence, he otherwise advocated for sensory and experiential understanding of the world around us that would be sufficient for everyday living. Locke counters Descartes' dream hypothesis by underscoring that the senses can certainly distinguish a real fire from the illusion or dream of a fire:

> if he be so skeptical, as to maintain, that what I call being actually in a Fire, is nothing but a Dream; and that we cannot thereby certainly know, that any such

instructive in reading the figure of the teenaged novice in the early English novel who allows us to "linger in the possible worlds created by the irreconcilability of naïve vision and empirical reality." *Love Intrigues*' skeptical problems explode the notion of a stable "empirical reality," but, nonetheless, readers have the sense that Galesia is not able to see all that is happening around her. See Stephanie Insley Hershinow, *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Realist Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 25.

[258] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 216-17.

[259] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 209-10, 212.

> thing as Fire actually exists without us: I answer, That we certainly finding, that Pleasure or Pain follows upon the application of certain Objects to us, whose Existence we perceive, or dream that we perceive, by our Senses, this certainty is as great as our Happiness, or Misery, beyond which, we have no concernment to know, or to be.[260]

Locke counters the hyperbolic skeptical hypothesis that reality is an illusion with embodied sensation. The experience of contact with fire causes pain; to concern ourselves with the hypothetical in such a situation does not materially concern us so much as putting out that fire.

He applies a similar argument to the problem of other minds, the skeptical issue at the heart of this chapter's analysis of Barker's novel. Locke uses a hypothetical premise that two men calling to mind a violet might be thinking about two entirely different plants: "That *the same Object should produce in several Men's Minds different* Ideas at the same time; *v.g.* if the *Idea*, that a *Violet* produced in one Man's Mind by his Eyes, were the same that a *Marigold* produced in another Man's, and *vice versâ*."[261] The problem is not resolvable, in Locke's estimation, "because one Man's Mind could not pass into another Man's Body, to perceive, what Appearances were produced by those Organs; neither the *Ideas* hereby, nor the Names, would be at all confounded, or any *Falshood* be in either."[262] Instead of addressing the implications of that subjective quandary or the consequences thereof, Locke insists that

> I am nevertheless very apt to think, that the sensible *Ideas*, produced by any Object in different Men's Minds, are most commonly very near and undiscernibly alike…the contrary Supposition, if it could be proved, is of little use, either for the Improvement of our Knowledge, or Conveniency of Life; and so we need not trouble our selves to examine it.[263]

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[260] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Pauline Phemister (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), IV.ii § 14 (p. 342).
[261] Locke, *An Essay*, II.xxxii § 15 (p. 245).
[262] Locke, *An Essay*, II.xxxii § 15 (p. 245).
[263] Locke, *An Essay*, II.xxxii § 15 (p. 246).

Locke thus acknowledges that other minds are inapprehensible to us. Yet he sweeps away the radical skeptical concern arising from the example of establishing a shared criterion of truth between two subjective minds' diverging ideas of a certain flower. To dwell on the skeptical implications of that problem of other minds, Locke argues, hinders the practicalities of everyday living.

However, Barker's treatment of the problem of other minds shows that the case is not closed, as much as Locke may like it to be; the problem of reconciling visions of violets and marigolds seems less complicated when compared to Galesia's inability to apprehend Bosvil's mind in the realm of courtship. Her sensory perception of their repeated encounters over a series of years do not provide her with reliable information of his plans for matrimony; his inconstancy becomes a test case of hyperbolic skepticism with which Locke could not do away, try as he might. Barker's novel chimes rather more with views propounded by Rochester, who takes up this continued question of finding certain meaning in his "Upon Nothing": "Great Negative, how vainly would the wise / Inquire, define, distinguish, teach, devise, / Didst thou not stand to point their blind philosophies!" (28-30).[264] His cynical and sarcastic mode underscores a fundamental uncertainty that persists even amid philosophical debate, in which multiple methods fail to overcome the basic fact of unknowability at the core of much of our existence. Galesia herself, despite her best efforts at inquiry to distinguish Bosvil's multiple meanings, comes up short in her pursuit of understanding him with certainty.

This chapter will analyze *Love Intrigues*' action as it clusters around five reports of encounters between Galesia and Bosvil. These encounters follow iterative patterns of alternating attraction and repulsion. Bosvil employs a variety of tactics to entice and spurn Galesia. She, in

[264] Rochester, *The Works*, 118-20.

turn, largely sticks to established conventions of modest feminine behavior until the near end of the narrative, where she (though hiding behind the cloak of anonymity) expresses herself in writing and even in long-distance pranks with ever increasing boldness. This chapter's slow and careful close-readings of these encounters combine to demonstrate how Galesia's sense perception (her reading and interpretation of visual clues and sensibilia) proves fallible in the long run. She can make no more coherent sense out of Bosvil's body language and words than she can out of the tangible "proof" of his affection, up to and including a marriage certificate. Even the reports at second and third hand about Bosvil's behavior and commentary from friends and family only intensify Galesia's sense of confusion. They, like Galesia herself, find evidence of Bosvil's attraction to her; if her sense of perception is faulty, then theirs must be as well. In sum, all attempts at knowledge-making (whether through direct sense perception, one-on-one communication, or indirect communication) fail for Galesia amid Bosvil's inconstancy. As a result, I argue that the text thus explores a profoundly skeptical problem of how one might attain any level of certainty regarding the truth of other minds in the particular social milieu of courtship, without leaving its readers any clear answers.[265] Such a conclusion nuances received critical notions of Barker's relationship to celibacy and her faith as uncomplicated or absolute.

1. Beginnings

By its very title, *Love Intrigues* would appear to promise the titillations of romance. Yet Galesia's narrative nevertheless begins with confusion and sexual disinclination in her young years. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, Galesia's brother's friend Brafort intends to wed her. She tells Lucasia that Brafort took "such a Liking to Miss, (for I was not yet past that

[265] In this endeavor, Barker follows in the footsteps of Lady Mary Wroth, whose poetry and romance *Urania* explore similar questions surrounding an inapprehensible and inconstant lover.

Title) that he resolved to have no other Wife, though he was already a Man, and I but a Child; which he not only said but demonstrated, in refusing all Proposals of that kind, always alleging that he would stay for *Galesia*" (84). In his endeavor, Brafort presents himself as the solution to several problems. He could alleviate Galesia's family's relative genteel poverty after they suffered a social decline due to their support of the unsuccessful Royalist cause during the Civil Wars. Brafort could place her in line to live "a Country Gentlewoman's Life, for which, in all Probability, I was destined," according to Galesia's mother (who removed Galesia from school to bring her up to such a lifestyle) (84). While early arrangements for marriage were certainly not unprecedented in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Brafort's attentions towards a girl not above eleven years of age prompts concern.[266] Brafort's courtship perhaps lends context as to why Galesia had "armed [her] Thoughts with a thousand Resolutions against Love" (84). The model for marriage does not take into regard her wishes; she faces the prospect of a one-sided courtship in which Brafort offers affection Galesia does not reciprocate against the backdrop of her family's strong financial motives to see her wed to this man of some means.

However, Bosvil's arrival and Galesia's attraction to him throws into confusion Brafort's courtship. While she contends that there is little to recommend Bosvil, at least physically, Galesia nonetheless feels an undeniable (though unnamable) sexual frisson at their first encounter. She recalls that "I was scarce arrived to those Years in which we begin to distinguish between Friendship and Affection; but I became sensible of the latter towards a Kinsman of ours, one Mr. *Bosvil*." Despite her professed disinclination to marry (quite possibly in response to Brafort's pursuit), "the first Moment I saw [Bosvil] I loved him" (84). What makes Galesia's

[266] For more on the age of marriage in the seventeenth century, see ch. 1 of this dissertation. Wendy Moore likewise offers a helpful account in her overview of the changes to marriage over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See "Love and Marriage in 18th-Century Britain," *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 3 (June 2009): 8.

attraction all the more remarkable to her is that she does not understand what draws her to Bosvil. She explains that "though he had nothing extraordinary in Person or Parts, to excite such an Affection; nevertheless, the Moment that his Eyes met mine, my Heart was sensible of an Emotion it had never felt before" (85). Galesia's account thus reflects the dichotomy between reason and passion that she recounts at coming to some moment of maturation (perhaps puberty), a moment when "we no sooner know that we have a Being and rejoice that we are the noblest Part of Creation, but Passion takes Root in our Hearts, and very often outgrows and smothers our Rational Faculties" (84). Her intellectual reservations against love collapse under the influence of an intimate if not wholly explainable sensory knowledge through sight. The rest of the text points to Bosvil's exceeding social eligibility – his station in life, legal profession, and decent fortune. Brafort, however, would also be such a match. What proves most dangerous to Galesia, it seems, is that passion, the mysteries of attraction, can overcome both the "reasonable" socially sanctioned qualities that one might look for in a prospective husband.

As Galesia's burgeoning attraction towards Bosvil goes unspoken, Brafort remains undeterred in pursuing her. When Galesia plans to visit her Aunt Martial in London at the age of fifteen, Brafort fantasizes about the trip amid his (still rather troubling) impatience to wed her. Galesia recalls that "He suppos[ed] this Voyage would ripen my Understanding and Knowledge of the World, which was yet very green, wanting Experience and Conversation to ripen, and bring to Maturity those Parts wherewith Nature had endued me. In the meantime declaring to his Relations that he intended to marry me at my Return" (85). His eagerness for the "green" Galesia to "ripen" both "Conversation" (a synonym for sexual congress in eighteenth-century fiction) and "Experience" almost seem to echo the eagerness for early matrimony among the

matchmaking parents studied in this dissertation's first chapter.[267] On all of these fronts, Brafort appears quick to sexualize Galesia. Amid Galesia's reports of Brafort's somewhat disquieting efforts to wed her, Bosvil stands out as an eminently promising alternative suitor – one for whom she feels an undeniable attraction, not to mention one undertaking a legal education that would help him provide for a wife and household of his own.

Yet after their initial encounters in the country, Galesia's first meeting with Bosvil in the capital starts with the sorts of misdirection and miscommunication that will come to dominate their relationship. Bosvil informs Galesia that he understands her arrival in London is in preparation for a wedding to Brafort: "This he affirmed with such an Air as left me no Room to suppose it Jest or Banter" (85). Already, Galesia interprets Bosvil's speech as sincere and serious. After she advises him that Brafort is merely her "reputed lover," Galesia notes that Bosvil "from Time to Time made me understand by his Looks and Gestures that his Visits proceeded rather from Passion than Friendship; and that he was drawn to my Aunt's House by other Cords than those of consanguinity to me, or Respect to her Ladyship" (85). Just as Galesia interprets Bosvil's words with some degree of certainty, she likewise insists that her reading of Bosvil's bodily signs of attraction is sound. She maintains that his "Looks and Gestures" result from passion, and yet the picture remains unclear of just what those signs are (85). The ambiguity of Bosvil's words and gestures will only intensify over the course of the pair's prolonged acquaintance. While readers hope to put trust in Galesia-as-narrator, they are quick to learn that it appears hard to trust any single character's perception of any other.

[267] The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the use of the term "conversation" in sense 3 as a correlative to sexual intercourse or sexual intimacy to about 1510. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "conversation (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1997277413.

That mistrust extends beyond Galesia, however, as others appear to share her interpretation of Bosvil. Galesia's "vigilant Aunt soon perceived" the supposedly amorous motive underpinning Bosvil's visits. Galesia describes that her aunt "(as the Proverb is) looked through her Fingers; and under the Cloak of a Kinsman, gave the Lover just so much Opportunity as served to blow up his Flame, without too far engaging my young and unexperienced Heart." After all, Bosvil has prospects that prove attractive to Galesia's aunt: "his Estate, besides his Pretensions to the Law, rendered him an advantageous Party" (85). Aunt Martial thus carefully manages these meetings, finding in them enough innocence to encourage amorous affection without crossing an unnamed boundary of propriety. In this way, Aunt Martial's actions add a point of corroboration to Galesia's own sense perception. While readers do not receive verbal confirmation from Aunt Martial herself that she sees what Galesia sees, her frequent invitations to Bosvil – more often than would be customary – lend support for Galesia's interpretation of his interest.

It would be easy to imagine this being a rather dangerous point in a novel by, say, Barker's contemporary Eliza Haywood – the overindulgent London guardian who winks at such a courtship seems a prime character among eighteenth-century literary figures to facilitate an illicit love affair.[268] Yet *Love Intrigues* features many instances where Galesia's narrative could (and, indeed, we expect it to) veer into such dangerous territory, and yet it does not. Barker distinguishes her work by internalizing the tumult we might expect to be externalized in other

[268] An figure for comparison might be the Young Lady's aunt in *Fantomina* (1725). After her first sexual rendezvous with Beauplaisir in the disguise of Fantomina, the Young Lady returns home "where she easily excused to an unsuspecting Aunt, with whom she boarded, her having been abroad all Night, saying, she went with a Gentleman and his lady in a Barge, to a little Country Seat of theirs up the River…" The Young Lady's aunt's ignorance only magnifies Aunt Martial's active participation in Bosvil's courtship. See Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina*, in *Fantomina and Other Works*, ed. Alexander Petit, Margaret Case Croskery, and Anna Patchias (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004), 49.

early eighteenth-century novels, in the recessive mode articulated by Anne-Lise François.[269] For example, the resulting shame and pain of Galesia's love for Bosvil does not result in dire consequences as in Haywood's *Fantomina*, published just twelve years after *Love Intrigues*. Haywood's heroine, the unnamed Young Lady, encourages repeated trysts with the rakish Beauplaisir, and, as a result, faces unintended pregnancy and ultimately flight from social life in London.[270] By contrast, Barker's earlier heroine absorbs emotional pain as Bosvil will eventually wreak a far more psychic kind of havoc.

When Bosvil ultimately confesses "his everlasting Love" and seeks "to sue the same" of Galesia (presumably stealing a moment out from under Aunt Martial's partially watchful gaze), for all her innocence, Galesia does show herself well-versed in the inherent risks for women in pursuing such a love match as this, one unsanctioned by parental authority. She recalls,

> I dreaded to launch on so dangerous a Sea, thinking each sign a Storm to overset one's Reputation; which too often proves true in Fact, especially if the Amour be secret, or without Parents' Consent, that good Pilot which conducts young Lovers to the safe Harbour of Matrimony. Without which, we can hope for little but Shipwreck of our Fortunes and Quiet. (86)

Galesia's eloquent and extended command of metaphor evinces a well-considered assessment of her situation with Bosvil. The figurative language chimes perhaps with the sort one might expect to find in a sermon or conduct literature, but Galesia's meaning is simultaneously literal. Without

[269] Anne-Lise François' theory of "recessive action" also helped to make sense of the form of Barker's novel. I would propose adding it to the catalogue of works united by what François observes as a shared "ethos of attending to unobserved, not-for-profit experience rather than results entered on the public record, of defining action as a matter of timing and form rather than consequence, and of measuring difference not by what an action materially produces but by the imaginative possibilities revelation may either open or eclipse." *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 21.
[270] Haywood, *Fantomina*, 68-71.

a good match, a daughter's fortune might quite literally be wrecked, not just through the risk of partnering with a spendthrift but also through the real possibility of disinheritance.[271]

Prompted by her caution, Galesia fears the reputation of London love affairs and Bosvil's social milieu – " I had heard so ill a Character of the Town Amours, as being all Libertinism, and more especially the Inns of Court" (86). While the source of such knowledge-gathering remains obscure – whether she heard this character through rumor, literature, or the history of family or acquaintances – Galesia has taken the reputation of London and Bosvil's sort alike as sufficient enough to urge herself to tread quite carefully. In brief, Galesia presents herself and her studied actions with a curious mix of naïveté and knowingness. Her knowledge of the Inns of Court's reputation and the town fashions for vice complicate her earlier self-presentation as something of an ingénue. She shows perspicacity in considering her future, and performs her gendered role – with the ultimate aim to protect her chaste feminine reputation – with aplomb.

In that performance, Galesia finely treads the line between coquetry and modesty, as she presents it in recollections to Lucasia. She pretended "to take all he said for Banter, or youthful Gallantry. In fine, I put him off with one little Shuffle, or other." For his part, Bosvil "pretended to hope [this] was only the Effect of Modesty, till such time as we should come into the Country; and there be authorized by our Parents to make him happy. In the interim he resolved to demean himself so as to merit their Consent" (86). Her "shuffling," or evasion, is one of the first of many instances of Galesia's "pretending."[272] She conceals her own feelings just enough to make room

[271] The Harlowes often threaten Clarissa with such financial disinheritance should she pursue a courtship with Lovelace, whom they detest, even going against the express wishes of her grandfather who left Clarissa a fortune on his death. In the seventh letter of the novel's first volume, Clarissa writes to her friend Anna of the request from "my uncle *Antony*, in his rougher manner, that I would not give them reason to apprehend that I thought my grandfather's favour to me had made me independent of them all—If I did, he could tell me, the will *could* be set aside, and *should*." Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), 60.

[272] In its historic usage, "shuffling" is defined as "Shifty or evasive dealing or conduct." *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "shuffling (n.), sense 4," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1600521902.

for subtle interpretations of the truth, and all with apparent ease. The verb "pretend" has a bivalent etymology. It can especially mean to "allege or declare falsely or with intent to deceive" but just as well may denote simple assertion or even claiming a right (as the Jacobite claimants' nicknames as the Old and Young Pretender demonstrate).[273] This latter usage illuminates Galesia's confident assertion that Bosvil "pretends" to understand the motivation of her behavior as merely the culturally correct and socially sanctioned presentations of feminine modesty. Through this diction, Galesia blurs the lines between these two meanings, between feigning and claiming truth, by her multiple usages of this verb. The question arises as to how deep the pretending and the confidence of understanding go for both parties. Bosvil seems too worldly-wise to not pick up on some subtle clues of Galesia's interest in him; his promises to seek her parents' approval indicate as much. This sense of promise certainly undercuts any sense that Bosvil might innocently take Galesia's demurring at face value. Yet it also shows the double-bind in which Galesia finds herself: if she speaks her heart, she will risk her reputation. If she remains silent, she may miss her chance at happiness. To make matters worse, she has a sense that the man whom she loves spells danger for her future hopes; this is an unwinnable and untenable romance, as she will discover after leaving London.

2. Turns and Counter Turns

Recalled from her mother to the country from the capital, Galesia encounters major changes in her situation. Brafort, the man who had pursued her so ardently, sickens and quickly dies. Thinking the way clear for Bosvil to make his intentions clear to her parents, Galesia feels surprised by his chilly reception when the pair next meet: "instead of bringing with him the Caresses of an overjoyed Lover, or at least the Addresses of a fond Admirer, nothing

[273] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "pretend (v.)," December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6863817475.

accompanied his Conversation but a certain cold Respect, scarce surmounting common Civility." Further, Bosvil indicates interest in another young woman, even involving Galesia's father in the matter: "Instead of engaging my Parents to intercede on his Behalf with me their Darling Child, he, in my Presence, consulted my Father about a certain Neighbouring Gentlewoman, who was proposed him in Marriage" (87). Galesia is clear-eyed about the gradations of behavior she might have expected from Bosvil based on the evidence of their prior interactions in London. Though her report of entertaining potential "Caresses" shows her sexual appetite for more than just words of love from Bosvil, she reasonably anticipates that, at the very least, he might offer polite verbal confirmation of his continued romantic interest. Both sense perception and direct communication, then, coalesce to contradict all of Galesia's initial impressions of Bosvil's attachment.

Yet in keeping with previous displays of modesty and good manners, Galesia offers a staid response to Bosvil's news: "This Discourse I heard with seeming Tranquility, and praised the young Lady, wishing she might be so sensible of his Merit, as to make him speedily happy." Despite expressing her good wishes, Galesia inwardly suffers, as she admits to Lucasia that "Truth and Sincerity were supplanted by a certain Tincture of Modesty, and Pride; for no Mouth spoke more directly against the Sentiments of a Heart, than mine did at that time" (87). Galesia's "seeming" here contrasts with her "pretending" before; she still adheres to a very specific social script, but the presence of a third party (her father) adds pressure to the scene. She cannot suggest any looseness of behavior from her time in London. Nor can she slander someone who might be a perfectly fine neighbor. Instead, Galesia remains trapped between the demands of polite, feminine sociability and her heart's desires. She makes sense of what she perceives as her own fault through a religious idiom, noting to Lucasia that "this is one of the finest spun Snares

wherewith the Devil entraps us; when he makes us abandon one Virtue to idolize another." Overcompensating with performative piety after Bosvil's seeming change of heart, Galesia compares herself to the "Learned Casuists [who] contend for Faith, to the Breach of Charity" or the "Enthusiastics, [who] in their fantastic Raptures, neglect the common Duties of Human Life." Though precisely which virtue she sacrifices for another remains unsaid; presumably, she sacrifices the virtue of truth-telling for that literalized "Virtue" of feminine shamefacedness and chastity. For this she criticizes her past self: "Thus I, silly Maid, set up a pretended Indifferency, to which false Idol I sacrificed all my Satisfaction" (87). Though Barker has garnered a critical reputation as chaste and severe, Galesia here, in a rather ironic twist, chastises herself for being *too* chaste, echoing the degrees of chastity enumerated in this dissertation's introduction and first chapter's exploration of historic courtship practices.[274]

Throughout this episode of her love story with Bosvil, a confused, internalized sense that Galesia has inhibited her own sexual pleasure, even though she knows that such a capitulation might lead to her own ruin, abides. She admits that "in *Bosvil*'s Presence I made a shift to keep up this Outside of a seeming Insensibility of Love," yet she owns that "interiorly I was tormented with a thousand Anxieties, which made me seek Solitude where I might without Witness or Controul, disburden my overcharged Heart of Sighs and Tears" (87). Galesia's craving for solitude, apart from the "Witness or Controul" of familial and community surveillance and self-policing respectively, demonstrates the lengths to which she feels bound by the strictures of

[274] James Grantham Turner, for example, introduces his monograph *Libertines and Radicals* with Jane Barker as an author emblematic of a prudish anti-libertine strain. Quoting the introduction to Barker's *Exilius*, he notes her opposition to the novel's promotion of "Interest and loose Gallantry" over the romance's devotion to ideals of "Heroick Love." He places her among a number of "libertine opponents" resisting the loosening sexual mores of the Restoration age. However, to Grantham Turner's credit, he does also helpfully situate Barker and other female authors' engagement in "critiques of masculine 'free' sexuality and 'debauched' wit" in the context of sexuality's "own politics of domination and dissolution." *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ix, x, xv.

polite sociability. In the walks she takes to ease her torment, Galesia experiences an alternative kind of passion: "In the Spring methought the Earth was dressed in new Apparel, the soft Meadow Grass was as a Robe of green Velvet, embroidered with Pearls and Diamonds, composed of the Evening Dew, which the sun's Morning Rays made bright and sparkling; all the Borders curiously laced, by the checkered Work of Sun and Shade, caused by the Trees and Hedges" (87-88). Underscored by heightened diction, Galesia's sensory engagement with the lush material of the natural setting blends into the outright sensual, which stands in stark contrast to the austerity of the behavioral codes to which Galesia feels compelled to subscribe. Barker employs time-honored conventions of the wretched lover seeking refuge in the natural world (we might recall Petrarch's poetic speaker roaming "Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi," alone and pensive in the most deserted fields), placing Galesia in a lineage of the broken-hearted.[275]

Even amid these efforts to console herself, Galesia slips into deeper stages of mourning that do not escape her loved ones' notice; when not rambling throughout the natural world surrounding her family home, she devotes herself to poetry and medical learning, explaining that "I followed my Study close, betook myself to a plain kind of Habit: quitted all Point, Lace, Ribbons, and fine Clothes" (89). Her family considers the dress to be indicative of her grief for the late Brafort, and Galesia does nothing to undermine that interpretation: "This their Fancy of my Affection for Mr. *Brafort* I did not contradict, it being a proper Cur-feu to that Flame I had for *Bosvil*" (92). Like the trope of the hypersexualized nun available in literature from works by Behn to common pornographic seventeenth-century stories, a dichotomy emerges between Galesia's outward figuration as an ascetic, chaste monastic and her internal experience of fierce

[275] Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 95.

desire and appetites.[276] Perhaps, then, Galesia succeeds to an extent in her efforts at pretending. Though failing in preserving an outward appearance of good humor, she excels in concealing the root cause of her despair.[277] She takes one lesson from her relations' misunderstanding of her exterior show of sadness:

> Thus we see how easily we are deceived by outward Appearances, and what Care we ought to take of censuring, judging, or condemning Things, or Persons without knowing the true and genuine Cause of Contingencies; which are often very hard to be understood; for according to the Fable, the Ass seems valiant in the Lion's Skin, and the Crow glorious in her borrowed Plumes. (92)

Here, Galesia alludes to Aesop's fable of the donkey wearing a lion's skin in order to imitate the beast. In different versions of the tale, the donkey's true identity is betrayed either by his ears or because he brays when he tries instead to roar.[278] The question the fable raises of the recognizability of Galesia's own authorial voice under various guises will resurface throughout the chapter.[279] Yet for the time being, it will suffice to consider that, in this assessment at least and through the fable, Galesia proves herself quite capable of registering how her outward

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[276] For example, Behn's *The Fair Jilt* features Miranda (who has taken temporary monastic vows) in pursuit of Henrick, even accusing him of assault in the sacristy. See Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works*, ed. Janet Todd, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 2003). For an example of the pornographic representation of nuns, see Jean Barrin (?), *Venus in the Cloister; or, The Nun in Her Smock*, trans. Robert Samber, in *Fantomina and Other Works*.

[277] Galesia's nun-like presentation might be an inverse correlative of Behn's *Feign'd Curtizans*, in which virtuous sisters dress as courtesans to pursue their own freedom. For Behn, as Shakespeare before her and Oliver Goldsmith after her, female disguise often has a liberatory component that ultimately overcomes misunderstandings. For Barker, disguise only widens the gap of perception and understanding with no such resolution.

[278] On these multiple variations, see Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 207 fn 40.

[279] Annabel Patterson and Lewis (see footnote above) have explicated the political power of the fable throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in the wake of political revolution. "Built into the poetics of the fable," writes Patterson, "as Sir Roger L'Estrange then put it, 'by Hints, and Glances,' is the notion that the fable had from its origins functioned as a self-protective mode of communication, whether by a slave addressing the Master society, or by an aristocrat whose political party is currently in defeat." *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 5. Lewis builds upon Patterson's work and demonstrates that the fable as genre gained especial recognition after the skeptical crisis fueled concerns over making meaning more broadly, and the factionalism apparent around the Civil Wars intensified concerns about figurative language. Their morals "close gaps between tangible matter and culturally constitutive signs, they promise to resolve seemingly irreconcilable differences within a single set of assumptions about signification," but, paradoxically, "harbor little reverence toward their own pretense that signs naturally point to a single meaning." *The English Fable*, 9, 7. This slippery quality to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fable suits Barker's text's ambiguities.

appearances differ with others' interpretations of those appearances. However, she does not seem as adept at understanding how Bosvil's appearances potentially differ from his interior, which obscures his motives.

Nevertheless, Galesia has an increasing body of evidence pointing towards Bosvil's incredible inconsistency in matters of the heart. Further encounters with Bosvil raise her hopes and shatter them in turn. Crucially, her contemporaries and friends begin to take notice of Bosvil's attentions, and, in a more forthright manner than Aunt Martial, confront Galesia to discover the truth of the matter. This next segment of *Love Intrigues* evinces Bosvil's duplicitousness, all while lending credence to Galesia's interpretations of his attentions. That others acquainted with the pair are beginning to notice Bosvil's advances demonstrates a kind of approbation confirming Galesia has not erred in her perception. The more sinister implication of that approbation suggests that, worse, Bosvil's deception is so great that it undermines not just Galesia's sense perception and knowledge-making but also that of her neighbors and friends, upsetting a continuum of communal understanding.

When Galesia's close family friend and his wife – a sister of the deceased Brafort – visit, they display marked curiosity about Bosvil and Galesia's attachment. The husband explains that he "had a great Desire to inform himself of the Secret between me and Bosvil." Galesia reports that the couple "being much in our Company, could not but remark something in [Bosvil's] Carriage towards me" (91). An insinuating whiff of scandal hangs over Galesia's friend's remark that she and Bosvil share a conspiratorial romantic secret with one another. Notwithstanding the potential that this close friend is gossip-mongering, his observations indicate that Galesia's interpretation of Bosvil's behavior is not entirely in her head, especially when combined with the corroborating evidence of Aunt Martial's behavior. As Galesia relays it to Lucasia, Bosvil's

comportment would not escape notice during his "frequent Visits." She recalls that "though he made no formal or direct Address to me, yet his Eyes darted Love, his Lips smiled Love, his Heart sighed Love, his Tongue was the only part silent in the Declaration of a violent Passion." Despite appearing to strike a note of conviction, Galesia's reports go on to raise some doubts as to Bosvil's sincerity. She notes the opposition between "his cold Silence and his Sunshine Looks," which made her "like the Traveller in the Fable; the warm Rays of his Eyes made me cast away that Garment of firm Resolution, which the Coldness of his Silence had made me to wrap close about my Heart" (90). Here as before, Galesia relies on fables to make sense of her experience. Such a reliance calls to mind Charlotte Lennox's 1752 novel *The Female Quixote*. Unlike Lennox's Arabella, who reads the world through romance, Barker's Galesia reads the world through axiomatic literature. Though the fables purport to clarify and make meaning by distilling ethical problems, they ultimately fail to help her in the moment.[280] Indeed, as Galesia makes interpretative claims about Bosvil's gestures – using a climactic series of statements on how his eyes, smile, and "sighing" heart all spell love, dashed off in an fervid asyndeton to match the frenzy of her passion – they remain rather vague.

In spite of those signs' ambiguity, another report seems to validate Galesia's analysis. When another eponymous suitor from the extended Brafort family tries to court Galesia, Bosvil warns him to refrain, "saying that he designed his Cousin *Galesia* for himself; and was so far from introducing any body to her on that score, that he should be very careful to keep off all Pretenders. Upon which Mr. Brafort remained satisfied, and laid all Thoughts of me aside." Galesia receives this word "by a third hand," saying that the news "gave me a strong Belief of

[280] Of course, as Lewis asserts, the fable's moral is less clear-cut than it may first appear. She explains, "As obvious as it is covert, a fable hotly pursues a single, highly interested perspective at the same time that it invites appropriation by competing interests." *The English Fable*, 3.

Bosvil's Sincerity and made me interpret every little dubious Word, which he sometimes mixed with his fond Actions, to be Demonstrations of a real Passion" (91). Equipped with the knowledge that Bosvil has been instructing other men to keep their distance from her, Galesia has a basis for her interpretation of Bosvil's behavior as indicative of his interest, reading between the lines of his verbal and corporeal language. "Attributing this Delay to his Prudence in acquainting himself with my Humour and Inclinations before he gave himself irrevocably to me," Galesia works to regulate her "Behaviour with the discreetest Precautions my poor unexperienced Thoughts could dictate" (91). This might have been the space into which greater doubt could have, and perhaps should have, crept in. Rather than suspect the discrepancy between the reports of Bosvil's words and his apparent hesitance, or outright reluctance, to act upon those words, Galesia bridges the semantic gap based on the third-party information she has received.

Moreover, Galesia appears to grow in confidence in her assessment. She reports that she does not "doub[t] but a little time would ripen the same [i.e., his passion] into an open Declaration to my Parents, as well as formerly to me, and now lately to young *Brafort*." So, too, did her initial suitor not doubt that she would "ripen" into his ideal bride, but that match likewise proved fruitless. However, Galesia prepares in hopefulness for an engagement: "the only syntax I studied, was how to make suitable Answers to my Father, and him, when the longed-for Question should be proposed; that I might not betray my Weakness in a too ready Compliance, nor ruin my Satisfaction in too rigid an Opposition" (91). Like Juliet's recital on her balcony of some of the expectations for young women to be coy in courtship (expectations that she quickly abandons when opening up her heart to Romeo), Galesia demonstrates that she is capable of treading the socially sanctioned middle line of discretion between unconstrained flirting and

shutting Bosvil entirely out (even if she does not openly declare herself as her predecessor Juliet).[281]

However, Galesia's married friends go on to reveal devastating new information to Galesia that provokes profound doubt in herself, in Bosvil, and in her ability to judge the intentions of others based on outward signs. The couple nudge Bosvil towards matrimony, remarking that as the sole heir to his parents' fortune, and with a successful legal career, the time is ripe for him to "fix on a Wife; thereby to establish his Family, and make his aged Parents happy." Bosvil's answer comes as a surprise to the friend: "That Affair is not undone, replied *Bosvil*, till this time of Day, for I am fixed on my Neighbour Mr. *Lowland's* Daughter; and hope shortly to enjoy your good Company, with the rest of my Friends and Relations, at the Celebration of our Marriage" (91). Given their observation of Bosvil's intimacies with Galesia and his frequent visits to the family, it is little wonder that Bosvil's rather determined declaration to wed Mrs. Lowland comes as a shock.

The friend admits that Bosvil "took the first Opportunity to tell me, which he did, in a frank, jocose manner, not seeming to suspect how great my concern was, which indeed was the greatest in the World" (91). Galesia believes that she has so thoroughly concealed her feelings for Bosvil that her friend would find it appropriate to joke about his seeming interest in marrying her. Equally, though, the friend's humor might mask an attempt to probe Galesia's sentiments or even as a means to soften the blow of impending rejection. In any event, this report, more than the coldness of his visit to her parents' country home from London, represents a clear break for Galesia in her attempts to decipher Bosvil. What could have been interpreted as the teasing delay of an interested but careful suitor now appears to be all-out treachery. Further, paying attention

[281] To recall Juliet's lines, she tells Romeo, "if thou thinkest I am too quickly won, / I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay / So thou wilt woo" (2.1.138-39).

to the onomastic impulses in Barker's novel, it should not escape notice that Bosvil's alleged intended is one Mrs. *Low*land (emphasis mine), just as he sinks further down into duplicity.

3. An Escalation

Though the friend takes Bosvil's engagement to Mrs. Lowland as concrete fact, Bosvil's third reported encounter with Galesia undercuts their mutual friend's confident announcement of Bosvil's impending nuptials. Though separated over a matter of weeks during which Bosvil falls ill and recovers, he returns to make further protestations of his love to Galesia, even redoubling his efforts by going to greater rhetorical lengths to convince her of his passion. "If before he admired, esteemed, or had a Passion for me, he now doted, adored, and died for me!" Galesia exclaims. She reports that he "Vowed a thousand times, that he could not live without me that his Passion had been the Cause of his late Indisposition and would be of his Death, if he did not apply the Salutary Remedy of *Hymen's* Rites" (93). Bosvil draws upon the tropes of lovesickness in his attempt to persuade Galesia of his devotion to her and wish to wed her; marriage – and attendant connubial sexuality, both of which are figured in the evocation of Hymen/hymen, and the wordplay on the lover's little death and his bodily illness – will cure what ails him.

This escalated rhetoric matches escalated action as Bosvil produces a prop: "he had brought a License with him; and therewithal took it out of his Pocket, and showed it to me."[282] With this tangible proof of intent, Bosvil has moved from offering knowing looks to putting the weight of the Church and the law behind his heretofore largely insinuated affection. This goes

[282] It is worth noting that Lovelace likewise brings a marriage license to Clarissa as a means to persuade her to wed. Throughout much of his letter to John Belford in which he copies out the license's contents, he points out loopholes in which he might get him out of the contract as it is worded. See Richardson, *Clarissa*, 871. We get a greater detail of the fraud of the marriage license through Lovelace's report; again, with the limitations of perspective that Barker explores, we cannot tell if the license Bosvil procured was fraudulent or what of its contents Galesia even saw to confirm its authenticity

above and beyond asking for the blessing of her parents, which Galesia had previously expected with hopeful anticipation. As much as the marriage license should concretize, both figuratively and literally, his intentions to marry Galesia, his motive remains unclear. If the license is authentic, he has sought the sanction of a priest but not the approval of Galesia's parents before marriage, raising the question of how properly Bosvil would want to manage affairs. Additionally, as explored in this dissertation's first chapter, the banns would have to be read on three consecutive Sundays to follow correct procedure. Thus Bosvil seems poised to pursue a problematic clandestine marriage, a topic of feverish political debate that would lead towards the reform of marriage law midcentury.[283] Even the physical evidence here does not necessarily translate to a clear and clean expression of motive or intent, which highlights a similarity between Barker's skeptically motivated narrative and Middleton's play in this dissertation's first chapter.

At the sight of the marriage license Galesia expresses understandable amazement: "All which so astonished, pleased, and confounded me, that I knew not what to reply! But, with Tears in my Eyes, told him, that I was wholly non-plussed, and knew not what Interpretation to make of all that had passed between him and me!" Admitting her own interpretative struggle, Galesia acknowledges forthrightly that he has given her cause for confusion verbally, and the overflow of her tears signals passion overcoming her customary, studied reserve. While Bosvil readily owns his inconsistency – "'Tis true, replied he, I have been extremely remiss in my Devoirs towards you" – Galesia rather surprisingly insists that Bosvil "has done nothing to offend" her, when instead his behavior brought her to misery so profound that it appeared to her loved ones as mourning. Nonetheless, she hesitates in her reply to Bosvil to offer him anything greater than

[283] Moore, "Love and Marriage," 8. In this regard, Bosvil looks more like a trainee of Richardson's anti-hero Mr. B from *Pamela* (1740) or his villain Lovelace from *Clarissa* (1748), rather than a scrupulous adherent of tradition.

friendship or familial affection, even though Bosvil insists that if she loves him, she must "testify the same in saving my Life" through "consenting to a speedy Marriage" (93). One wonders I,f through their prodding, his friends succeeded in their efforts to convince Bosvil to wed, even though it seems that the target of his affections is a moving one.

While Galesia certainly has reasons to struggle to interpret Bosvil's signs, he claims that he *himself* has been the one to suffer through puzzling out her true intentions from her reserved demeanor. "It Is this reserved Mien, Madam, which has often deterred me, and commanded my Tongue to a respectful Silence," Bosvil explains before insisting, "whilst my poor Heart, over-charged with Passion, only eased itself with Sighs, and my Looks were the only Language whereby to express my interiour Thoughts" (94). It hardly stands to reason that an experienced man about town might claim ignorance of feminine modesty, and indeed, Bosvil admits that he has perfectly understood and, further, matched Galesia's chaste behavior with behavioral modifications of his own. Following her lead, he alleges, Bosvil has operated within a sign system that she might understand to provide a muted declaration of his affection. Referring to his sighs and looks as revelatory external expressions of his internal lovesick anguish, Bosvil implicitly suggests that Galesia has in fact correctly interpreted his behavior, even though circumstance and the most recent reports of mutual friends might indicate Bosvil's disinterest. And yet, with his continued pattern of alternating courtship and rejection, it remains difficult to ascertain whether or not Bosvil is speaking truthfully even here in this admission, or if he is rather aptly playing the mere part of a lover.

Galesia comes close to flatly rejecting Bosvil, though for the reader it seems initially unclear if her protestations arise from a genuine charge of heart; the creeping feeling of uncertainty over the truthfulness of Bosvil's professed affection; or an attempt at an experienced

display of coyness. For she tells him "How far your Silence has been guilty of your suffering…is not easy for me to penetrate; but I believe the Insincerity of this Declaration, might prove very obnoxious to my Quiet, if my preengaged Resolution of a single Life, did not secure me from those Dangers, to which my Youth, and your Merit might betray me" (94). Her vow to remain single collapses rather quickly when Bosvil protests, "The great God of Heaven that created us, knows what I say is true, when I say I love you above all things in the World!" He promises to marry no one other than Galesia herself and further contends, "I denied myself all the Diversions of the Town for your sake" (94). If he had thought of nothing but Galesia, why would he need to deny himself the diversions of London? This kind of slippage plants further seeds of doubt as to Bosvil's sincerity. After the convoluted excuses for his behavior, and his qualified stance on resisting temptation in Galesia's name, he purports to have an answer to Galesia's friend's report about the courtship with Mrs. Lowland. Galesia tells Lucasia that Bosvil "told me that all he had then said, was only to put a stop to his [friend's] Curiosity, not thinking it proper to name me as the Object of his designed Espousals, without my Leave" (95). The mask may have slipped, even if briefly, in Bosvil's discussion of resisting all the temptations of the flesh that London has to offer; but it is firmly in place when he gives this rather convenient excuse for the Lowland news. His inscrutability will only increase as the novel lurches towards its conclusion.

4. An End to the Bosvil Match

The final meetings in *Love Intrigues* between Bosvil and Galesia precipitate and sustain a break-down of the prior attachment they had. Before this ultimate implosion, Bosvil leaves Galesia with a grand speech: "my Senses take Pleasure in nothing but you, even Reason loses her Regency; and I rave on nothing but my absent Galesia. Ah! that I might call you truly mine." In this utterance, Bosvil appeals to the same logic with which Galesia introduced her entire story, in

which passion overwhelms reason. Bosvil takes the point further, claiming a kind of psychic control of Galesia:

> our Souls have subtle ways of corresponding, they will converse, when these terrestrial Organs know nothing of the Matter: Then breathe a Sigh, and bid it go to your Bosvil, it will meet whole Legions of mine, which will surround it, and bring it safe to my Heart unmixed with common air; and, when you are in your solitary Walks, whisper that you want your Bosvil's Company, and some little waiting Spirit appointed by my good Genius, to attend you, shall quickly bring it to his Master, and I shall in a Moment, by a secret Inspiration, know my Galesia's Desires; and so be happy at a Distance…this is the way by which Souls converse, independent of these heavy Tenements in which they are imprisoned…(97)[284]

Bosvil keeps a virtual kind of grasp on Galesia through subjective interpenetration. He offers an odd mix of the kind of rarified Platonic idealization of a love poem (the pity, banishment, sighing, and distance) with an emphasis on the body (organs and matter, the "Tenements" of corporeal form) and innuendo of "conversation" (which, again, in its eighteenth-century context could have all to do with sexual congress and little to do with speech). Bosvil's ultimately rather confusing and confused moment of leave-taking not only raises Galesia's hopes but also feigns a

[284] Bosvil's extravagant, flowery language almost seems a parody of poetry from the likes of Donne or Philips, teleporting the soul correspondence that the latter poets' speakers find in proximity to their beloveds. Philips' "A Retired Friendship, to Ardelia" features the speaker's invitation to Ardelia to a bower: "Where kindly mingling souls a while, / Let's innocently spend an hour" (1-3). In *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry, 1603-1660*, 660-61. Donne's "The Ecstasy" offers a vision of lovers holding hands, staring into each other's eyes, in which their "souls negotiate there" (17). In *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry*, 37-39. Cavendish and Haywood might offer prose predecessors and successors. Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) offers a lengthy meditation among the Empress and her attendant "Immaterial Spirits" about the nature of the soul and the body, noting that "there may be numerous material souls in one composed body, by reason every material part has a material natural soul; for nature is but one infinite self-moving, living and self-knowing body, consisting of the three degrees of inanimate, sensitive and rational Matter, so intermixed together, that no part of nature, were it an atom, can be without any of these three degrees; the sensitive is the life, the rational the soul, and the inanimate part, the body of infinite nature." *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*, in *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin, 2004), 175-76. Haywood's 1719-20 novel *Love In Excess* sees the rake D'Elmont writing to Amena that "I yet may love you, tho' in a different way from what I once pretended to; and believe me, that the love of souls, as it is the most uncommon, especially in our sex, so 'tis the most refined and noble of all passions, and such a love shall be for ever yours." *Love in Excess*, ed. David Oakleaf, 2nd ed. (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000), 95. Bosvil's "soul correspondence" likewise prefigures the potential for a more sinister side of the man of feeling, the icon of sensibility culture that would come to dominate eighteenth-century fiction Bosvil's behavior calls to mind Parson Yorick in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768), who grasps (or gropes) the hand of a young Frenchwoman. In Barker's configuration, Bosvil keeps a virtual kind of grasp on Galesia through subjective interpenetration.

closer, mutual psychological bond than the one Bosvil and Galesia really have. His protestations are enough to cause Galesia agony as she contemplates what she must say to Bosvil's father and her own mother on the matter – further evincing that Galesia is conducting courtship business by the book based on Bosvil's speeches, even if Bosvil is not (97). Conversely, Bosvil's repeated insistence that he must ask his father, rather than *hers*, for permission to wed seems a stark departure from convention.

While in this moment of leave-taking Bosvil seems more ardent than ever, when he next returns he appears to Galesia "with greater Coldness and Indifferency than ever!" (98). So extreme is the change that Galesia assumes it must be a "Disguise," and that "the *Mumming* went too far." Yet this brief consideration of the possibility of Bosvil's feigning instead gives way to a greater crisis of self, in which Galesia, plagued with doubts, muses, "Much I studied, but could think of nothing that could have disobliged him…I reflected on all things, from the beginning, to the end; but could find nothing hereof to accuse myself…Thus I ran divisions in my Fancy, which made but harsh Music to my Interiour" (98). Her brief moment of skepticism about Bosvil's motives is swamped by her self-doubt. She ultimately finds relief in the notion of her innocence, that she had done nothing untoward or indiscreet, and thus faces no social ruin: "I had squared my Actions by the exact Rules of Virtue and Modesty; yet I did not exclude Civility and good Nature; for I always stayed in his Company, heard him, laughed, fooled, and jested with him; yet not so freely as to transgress good Manners." She admits that all of her comportment "might assure a Person less judicious than himself, that neither his Person, nor Proposals, were disagreeable" (98). Attributing judiciousness to Bosvil – that he might be interpreting rather literally her behavior – seems quite generous. In the end, Galesia resorts to the language of Platonic poetry to make sense of her predicament: "*Bosvil* perhaps was my Idol, and rivaled

Heaven in my Affections, that I might say to him, as *Cowley* to his *Mistress*" (98). The reference to Cowley's mode is particularly eye-catching when we recall his "Against Fruition" poem from this dissertation's second chapter, predicated on distance from the mistress.

By walking the middle line between "Coyness" and "Kindness," Galesia likewise exposes the double-bind that Suckling and Behn highlighted in the verses studied in this dissertation's second chapter. If overly coy, Galesia risks losing Bosvil's interest; if overly kind, she risks losing the chance of a respectable marital match. She has mastered the choreography of love – the smiles and sighs chief among the prescribed moves – and deftly performed it. Yet Bosvil baffles the script by embracing the one vice that writers like Behn warned all men were subject to: inconstancy. Perhaps, in a way, Bosvil is performing his own script, too, as a rake. But he leaves Galesia without any satisfaction in doing so. She gives Bosvil the benefit of the doubt that his lack of "judiciousness" may mean her subtle acceptance of his overtures has evaded his understanding – even though she has also tried to convince herself that as a "passed Graduate amongst the Town Amours" he should have understood the meaning behind her "broken Words, stolen Sighs, suppressed Tears, that the merest Freshman in Love's Academy could not but read and understand" (95). The novel's ambiguous mode, in addition to Galesia's contradictory analyses of Bosvil's behavior, leaves readers on shaky epistemological ground. The skepticism goes both ways in an endless feedback loop, asking the reader whom to believe and if people *can* ever be believed.

That sense of confusion only escalates when Galesia learns that Bosvil, Bosvil's friend, and Galesia's own father have met over a drink for Bosvil to propose a match between his friend and Galesia. Her father joyfully accepts and takes Galesia's hesitation upon hearing the news for "a little Virgin Surprize" (100). That her surprise is instead rooted in the depths of her desire for

Bosvil complicates her father's reading of Galesia's modesty. Assumptions and misreading of social signs here extends from the young lovers to the parental generation as well, in another iteration of the patriarchal model that prompted the misreading of the virginal body explored in this dissertation's first chapter.[285] Galesia's father similarly misunderstands Galesia's feelings, but the love she bears for another is entirely internalized.

By proposing marital arrangements on Galesia's behalf, Bosvil's cruel tactics have escalated. Yet so, too, do Galesia's sentiments intensify as she strays further from the normative expectations of chastity, silence, and obedience. She indulges in a revenge fantasy in which she kills Bosvil so that he can do no more harm to women, and eventually longs for her own death, yet fears that even that would "render *Bosvil* too happy" (100). That she goes so far as to indulge in the momentary fantasy of killing Bosvil, borne out of quite a degree of rage, exceeds the boundaries of polite femininity to which Galesia has heretofore ascribed, marking a break in one strain of her gendered performance. By "allow[ing] her heroine to indulge the vengeance fantasy while simultaneously condemning it," Earla Wilputte suggests, Barker creates a milieu in which "one cannot help but sympathize with the desire for heroic action to set things right" after Bosvil's treachery.[286] Against the backdrop of this despair, then, Galesia exercises her full imaginative powers and comes into writing, planning to record "the whole Scene of his Treachery" – an early preview of *Love Intrigues* itself in a moment where the distinction between author and persona momentarily blurs. Those plans change after a fitful slumber; waking inspired, she writes him a letter decrying what she interprets as a joke proposal to marry

[285] Another connection to *Clarissa* might be her parents' insistence, in the early days of her correspondence with Lovelace, not understanding her heart and accusing her of an attachment (the oft cited "prepossession") to the man that she clearly does not feel herself. Yet unlike Galesia, Clarissa directly confronts her mother to clarify her romantic preferences. See Richardson, *Clarissa*, 96.
[286] Earla Wilputte, "Harridans and Heroes: Female Revenge and the Masculine Duel in Jane Barker, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood," *Eighteenth-Century Women: Studies in Their Lives, Work, and Culture* 4 (2006): 29, 33.

her off to his friend, indicating that she is resolved against marriage altogether. She begs Bosvil to keep away from her "till Fortune commission you by the Change of your condition" (101). Any ounce of defiance in the letter, though, serves solely to return Galesia, if briefly, to the script she thinks she should follow.

Even though the gendered dynamics of the revenge fantasy briefly complicate Galesia's sexual politics, she nonetheless commends herself for acting the more normative feminine role of the withholding mistress. She acknowledges that "I pleased myself I had taken this Occasion, at once to command his Absence, and in a covert manner testify my Affection; for I knew that was the natural Interpretation of these Words, See me no more. For nothing but a real Mistress could pretend to use them" (101). Given Bosvil's proper interpretation of her initial performances of modesty in London, it stands to reason that he should be able to read in between the lines of this communication. Imagining the effects of her words, Galesia figures that "if he came to me after such a Prohibition, he must come upon the Pikes of my Anger, which he could not pretend to appease by any other Atonement, but that of his everlasting Love in Marriage-Vows." Moreover, the conditions Galesia places upon his return indicate that her request is not for permanent banishment, if we are to read her letter literally.

The results are more painful than pleasing; Bosvil replies with expressions of shock, but pledges to stay away from Galesia out of his alleged adoration. Her resulting pain is raw and visceral: "This his complying with seeing me no more gave me the same Satisfaction that a Patient has when his Limbs are cutting off, the Remedy, and the Disease being both grievous" (102). Much as Bosvil used the language of illness to make his plea for Galesia to marry him and provide a cure for his lovesickness, Galesia now uses medicalized language to describe the pains of a love that Bosvil has thwarted. As much as Galesia aims for piety and as much as she hopes

to escape the traps of her attachment and the pressures to marry, she is not above continuing to feel keenly the smart of Bosvil's betrayal. Nevertheless, she launches into another prolonged moment of trying other gendered scripts. After Bosvil's latest rejection, Galesia now undertakes land management as opposed to resuming her studies. She elevates the pursuit into the realm of the pastoral, comparing herself to an "*Arcadian* Shepherdess." What gratifies Galesia's "Vanity" is "that I could perform things above my Age and Sex" (102). By remaining single, then, she has gained an astonishing amount of power and autonomy. She declares that the busyness she finds in her newfound occupation puts off any thoughts of Bosvil, much to the recovery of her own happiness (103). The sense of Galesia's increasing otherness as a young woman with murky prospects on the marriage market only intensifies when her brother returns from travels in France and describes the convents there. The description so pleases Galesia that, she explains to Lucasia, "I wished for such Places in England, which if there had been, 'tis certain I had then become a Nun, and under a holy Veil buried all my Thoughts of Bosvil" (103). Yet to enter into holy orders with the main purpose of forgetting Bosvil demonstrates that Galesia is not as free from him as she would like to think herself.

Though she resolves to not think of Bosvil, Galesia's yearning for revenge lingers until a fit occasion presents itself in which she can act out those desires. When Mrs. Lowland marries a man other than Bosvil, Galesia, like the donkey in the lion's skin of the fable mentioned earlier, "wrote him a Letter in a counterfeit Character, and withal sent him a willow-Garland, to crown the forsaken Lover" (104). Though the anonymity of the guise emboldens Galesia, the result is as ineffective as the donkey's attempts to roar in the disguise of the lion's pelt. She learns from friends that the letter and garland only prompted Bosvil to laugh and fortify himself in anticipation of a speedy marriage to a young gentlewoman of his acquaintance in London. While

Bosvil fails to register – or, perhaps, fails to admit – who sent him the letter, other members of their social circle are surprised by his plans. Bosvil relays his resolve to Towrissa, a kinswoman to both himself and Galesia. For Towrissa's part, she "with many others, mistrusted him of an Amour with [Galesia]." Galesia remembers that Towrissa "and everybody of our Acquaintance was amazed at [Bosvil's] long Absence from our House, and asked him the Cause; to which he answered indirectly, and with divers shuffles." Upon confrontation, Bosvil only admits that "his Cousin *Galesia* had forbid him" from contacting her (104). Surprisingly, Bosvil, with his misdirection and "divers shuffles," mirrors the sort of behavior Galesia herself has employed in their early interactions. Yet Galesia employed misdirection and "shuffling" as shows of socially sanctioned modesty; Bosvil either deploys them in order to cover up plans, or, perhaps, as an unconscious display of discomfort with his situation. The crucial point remains that others have taken notice of Bosvil's attentions, lending support to Galesia's interpretation of Bosvil's interest in her. The tacit understanding of friends and relations about a potential relationship between Bosvil and Galesia emphasizes how even a "private" love affair may not remain strictly private. Even so, Galesia has acted like the paragon of discretion; Towrissa chooses to believe Galesia implicitly out of habit (she would disclose a love affair as all other things). All told, chastity is a matter of and for public consumption; the opinions and judgments of others have the capacity to render a person unchaste or chaste no matter their actual behavior.

Despite the false starts at various points in the narrative, Bosvil's plans to wed take concrete shape. After a year's absence from Galesia, Bosvil meets her in a final encounter brokered by Towrissa. During this meeting, Galesia finds a continued, curious mirroring of behavior with Bosvil: "we trembled, blushed, and flattered in our Words; that it was with utmost difficulty we performed the Civilities of the Occasion. After being seated, I remember he gazed

with all the Eagerness, or rather Distraction of youthful Eyes, instigated by a tender Passion" (105). Even though one wonders if Bosvil's blushing could arise as much from embarrassment as from desire, as he has finally been caught out, Galesia interprets his countenance as showing passion. Such a reading seems bolstered by his sudden verbal and physical outburst: "he gave the first Shot by a deep sigh, saying, O cursed Love, that will never leave a Man; and rose from his Seat, as it were, to disperse those Vapours which seemed to oppress him." The juxtaposition of Bosvil's seeming proclamation of love for Galesia with Towrissa's report of his plans to marry either casts doubt on Galesia's interpretation of said outburst or demonstrates the lengths of Bosvil's treachery – that he is able to bemoan a supposed continued love for Galesia after actively pushing her away and brokering (apparently several different) matches with other women who, indeed, might even be better placed to marry than Galesia and with possibly more significant dowries.

At this point, after Galesia tries her best to feign laughter and lightness in her reply, Towrissa announces Bosvil's plans to wed, urging her to "get your self Dancing-Shoes, if you mean to be a Bridesmaid," while her mother (also present for the encounter) commends Bosvil for the great happiness he will bring his parents "to see him their only Child well settled." By focusing on the social rituals of marriage as well as the familial politics of inheritance, the overarching norms surrounding marriage loom large in this discussion. If Galesia is not to be the bride of choice, she must comply and perform a supporting role to uphold the institution towards which she alternately feels pulled and from which she feels pushed. Yet again, Galesia shows herself masterful at the art of feigning (laughing to hide sighing) but struggles to envision others' ability to do the same. As if to underscore this point of the interpretive disjuncture between minds, her mother's enthusiastic interjection in support of Bosvil's match stands at a remove

from her own daughter's preferences, the repercussions of which echo toward the end of the narrative when Galesia laments not disclosing her feelings about Bosvil to her mother.

This startling encounter precipitates Galesia's most severe crisis of self. She tells Lucasia, "What a Shock this Discourse gave me I cannot describe," and laments that "all my Resolutions, and fancied Indifferency;…all my Anger, Fury, Scorn, Revenge, prohibiting him to see me, the fancied Satisfaction I took in his Absence" have come to naught, "even just as much as the Lord Rochester says of Court Promises, and Whores Vows, which all End in Nothing" (105). By citing Rochester's "Upon Nothing," discussed earlier in this chapter, Galesia curiously adopts the very emblematic voice of libertinism that she had previously shunned in her description of "Town Amours" (86). Such a citation complicates the notion of Barker-as-author's prudishness or even Galesia-as-persona's overscrupulous chastity. Rochester would certainly act as an avatar of the Restoration age for which Galesia, as a devotee of the house of Stuart, nostalgically yearns. Yet I would suggest that the libertine and a woman that others might consider excessively chaste are surprisingly alike in that both take abiding sexual scripts' precepts to such extremes that those same scripts bend under pressure. The libertine takes the virility expected of men outside the bounds of wedded constancy, exploding that tenet. Likewise, the celibate woman refuses to make virginity the transitional state that normative pressures would dictate.

Galesia goes on to give voice to her utter alienation from her very self and judgment: "these my Resolutions were all mere Gossamers, composed of Vapours, and carried about with airy Fancy, and next Day reduced to Nothing; but thus it is in most things of Human Life, we know not ourselves, nor our own Incapacity" (105). This latest expression of Galesia's skepticism has escalated earlier sentiments that indicated her inability to know others. Yet now Galesia has turned this sentiment inward towards herself. Amid this tortured unknowing and

unknowability, and hoping that Bosvil's announced marriage might turn out like the Lowland affair, Galesia copes as she always does, turning to poetry and study once more. Within this portion of the narrative Barker embeds a revised "A Virgin life," the manuscript poem that opened this dissertation chapter. The *Love Intrigues* version of the poem, however, shows Galesia praising chastity within marriage rather than chaste singlehood in and of itself: "But Hea'n knows all, and knows my higher Soul, / Did ev'ry meaner end of Love controul, / Knows the just Schemes of my intended Life, / The Chaste, the Cheerful, and the Virtuous Wife" (106). She has not entirely given up on the possibility of matrimony herself, it seems, and she certainly remains attached to Bosvil.

Yet when she hears word that Bosvil has fallen gravely ill, the prospects of such a possibility dim. Galesia's imagination runs rampant; she fantasizes that her name is the last word on his dying lips before the picture shifts and "my Fancy would open another Scene, and make me think I saw him alive, and happy in the Arms of his London Mistress, living in all the Felicities that a happy Espousal could procure" (108). This very last fantasy contains an interesting sexual voyeurism here that matches the eroticized "soul transport" that Bosvil earlier suggested. Such a picture also complicates a received notion of chastity as unilaterally cold or undesiring, if we recall Vives' admonitions from this dissertation's introduction. What is more, the fantasies in total serve to show the firm grip Bosvil holds on Galesia's imagination. The only redemption offered by these and other imagined scenes is that, out of her immense pain, Galesia takes the first substantial steps into the authorship that first presented itself to her during her first sorrow with Bosvil: "in some of these solitary Walks…my rolling Thoughts turned themselves into…Verses," she recalls to Lucasia (88). In the end, Galesia does not have to choose between romance and art, but uses art to make her way through a doomed romance.

When Galesia sends a servant to inquire after Bosvil's health, the connection is missed. It is entirely possible that the miscommunication was intentional, showing how divorced Bosvil may be from the prospect of marrying her. Galesia relays that Bosvil's eventual "Recovery was a Death to all my Hopes, for the first Use he made of his new restored Health, was to go marry his Mistress at London, making our House in the way, and me the Auditor of that horrid News" (108-9). Galesia goes on to explain that "I have been told since, that in his Sickness he gave all he had to me, and recommended me to his Parents as their proper Child; and they promised to receive me as such" (109). One wonders who exactly gave her the news of his plans to bequeath property to her, but in any event, it would seem an admission of a greater attachment to Galesia than he owned in times of better health. Perhaps this attempt to leave her a bequest, much as his plans to marry his London mistress, show Bosvil trying to do the right thing by the women in his life. Yet, in the process, this effort exposes the entanglements in which he has found himself ensnared through his own inconstancy.

If Galesia has grappled with the bounds of normative femininity and chastity in thought (through a range of fantasies from revenge to voyeurism) and in deed (from vows to remain single to her dedication to verbal arts), her last act with Bosvil marks the apex of her boldness and the nadir of their relationship all at once. Escalating her pranks, Galesia reasons that "as I had sent him a Willow-Garland upon the Marriage of his pretended Mrs. *Lowland*; so now I sent him a pretty Pair of Horns, neatly made of Bugles, by which I meant to joke and Banter him on his pretended Marriage." Unfortunately for Galesia, this marriage (unlike the Lowland match) turns out to be all the more real, and the horns arrive on the day of the wedding, in the presence of Bosvil's bride and all of their guests. The bawdy implication of the horns is that they are fashioned into a headband, symbolizing the "most sovereign Remedy for the Headache, to which

married Men are often very subject. Especially those that are wedded to Coquets" (109). In short, Galesia implies that Bosvil will likely find himself wearing the cuckold's horns, and in her act joins a lineage of other pranksters, some of whom were prosecuted for their actions through the church courts from the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries.[287] An action she exclaims "was without the least Design of Malice" (because she "only rendered Jest for Jest") would have been easily punishable fifty years prior (109). The severity with which these sorts of pranks were once judged before the ecclesiastical courts coupled with the fact that the "jest" maligned Bosvil's unknown bride more than Bosvil himself make Galesia's gesture all the more disturbing. The jest demonstrates the culmination of Galesia's increasingly bold breaks with the decorum that prevented her from initially speaking her mind with Bosvil.

Concluding that Bosvil must know that she sent the horns, Galesia observes that her encounters with him after his marriage are marked by physical distance. However, "a Confident of his assured me the contrary, and that Bosvil had told him, that Love had taken such firm Root in his Soul, that in spite of all his Efforts, even Marriage itself, he could not eradicate it; and therefore avoided my Presence, because he could not see me with Indifferency" (109). This rather convenient excuse, delivered by an intermediary, is just the beginning of Bosvil's account of their entire relationship that stands in striking opposition to Galesia's interpretations. Galesia recalls that the said "Confident" continues that when Bosvil found "that I had taken no notice of him" and had treated him with "Indifference" and "never showed any Kindness," he invented the Lowland plot "to try if Jealousy would work upon me but all my Conduct had been with so much

[287] As an example, Cressy notes a 1639 case when "Robert Brooke of Arlington, Sussex, was…charged with disorderly behavior…'for wearing a great pair of horns upon his head in the churchyard when Henry Hall and his wife were going to be married, showing thereby that the said Hall was like to be a cuckold'. Often used to comment on discordant relationships within marriage, the charivari tradition was here used to publicize irregularities at the beginning." *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 369.

Caution and Circumspection, quite different from Passion or Tenderness, that he thought (with others) that all amorous Inclinations were buried with Brafort" (109). On the face of it, it might be tempting to conclude that Galesia's "shuffling" might be enough to dissuade a suitor; but, as ever, she played the game of courtship according to accepted rules.

In the end, Galesia interprets Bosvil's recapitulation of their attachment and his motives with some clarity:

> How far all this was sincere or pretended, I know not, I rather think he made it a Handle for his own Falsehood for Love is apt to interpret things in its own Favour; and Men believe Women to be forwarder than they really are, taking even complaisance and Civilities for Affection; but he thought fit to take hold of another Handle, the better to stifle his own Falsehood and hide it from the sight of his Friends, by laying the Blame on me. (110)

If, as Galesia claims, men are apt to take women as more forward than they let on, then surely Bosvil should have been able to over-correct in his interpretation of Galesia's modesty. His praise of her discretion would seem to suggest this. However, he could have spun an elaborate tale to cover up his own inconstancy. While Lucasia gently chides Galesia for not revealing her feelings for Bosvil to her family, Galesia answers that she could hardly do so and still conform to courtship norms: "I often reflected on that, but thought it his Business, or his Parents, to discover it to mine and always expected such an Address; for if I had told my Father and Mother, I should but have embarrassed them in a disagreeable Business, for it ill befitted them to proffer their Daughter in Marriage" (110).[288] In hindsight, however, she wished she had disclosed what had

[288] The problems explored in this exchange would be canvassed again exactly a century after *Love Intrigues*' publication in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The conversation chimes with Charlotte Lucas' later advice for Jane Bennet that she relays to Elizabeth: "'It may perhaps be pleasant,' replied Charlotte, 'to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all *begin* freely—a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew *more* affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never

happened, “for I believe wiser Heads than mine would have been nonplused in a Case so Bizarre, and found enough to do to pass through such a Labyrinth as Bosvil’s subtle Turnings had composed” (110-11). The bells ringing a call to prayer put an end Galesia’s narrative.

The ending of the tale calls to mind and acts as a foil for *Fantomina* – the abovementioned story of another daughter who conceals from her female relations the truth of her romance. The Young Lady of Haywood’s novel faces more extreme social consequences – pregnancy out of wedlock – and enforced retreat to a French convent, where the novel ends with a wink at its supposedly pious final setting. Galesia, on the other hand, finds that in her own French exile she has the physical and temporal distance from events to freely voice her story. The bells for Catholic mass chime as a reassertion of her (readers can presume) path of celibacy, sanctioned by the Church. She has, in a way, gotten her wish for a kind of convent existence – just not in England.

5. Coming to Terms

The labyrinth is certainly an apt figure that Galesia uses to metaphorize Bosvil’s inscrutable twisting and turning of intention and action. So, too, does the image aptly concretize Barker’s narrative at large. In *Love Intrigues*, all feasible forms of knowledge-making – sense perception, direct communication, and indirect communication – prove unreliable, showing that the attempts to contain the hyperbolic skeptical crisis do not resolve that crisis. Galesia’s interpretations of Bosvil’s inconstancy diminish the sense that there is a criterion for truth upon which she might rely. The inconsistency between Bosvil’s actions and speech either evince that he is duplicitous or Galesia is thoroughly deluded. However, the presence of second- and third-

do more than like her, if she does not help him on.’” *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Donald Gray. 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 15.

party interpretations that mirror Galesia's own conclusion that Bosvil has a romantic interest in her support the possibility that her interpretation is not incorrect.

This classic problem of skeptical philosophy that was a repeated object of inquiry throughout the early modern period – whether or not consensus achieves certainty – would apply to Galesia's situation. Karen Bloom Gevirtz maintains that "Bosvil's self as it comes to Galesia through the evidence or interpretation of others is as confusing as what she perceives herself." And while she further considers Barker's "rais[ing] the possibility that Bosvil does not fully understand Galesia," Gevirtz ultimately concludes that "because there is so much that Galesia admits that she does not understand or know, her own assertions of what Bosvil knew or must have known cannot be relied upon."[289] And yet, Gevirtz's analysis of *Love Intrigues* asserts a "communal model of knowing and of the self that uses aggregate perception and interpretation to compensate for the limits of the knowable and the limits of the individual knower." She finds continued evidence of that model, especially in the polyvocal narrative methods of Barker's successive fictions in the Galesia trilogy, *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723) and *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726).[290]

Love Intrigues' sequels demonstrate that while wounds remain for Galesia from the Bosvil affair, he becomes something of a footnote in her personal history of celibacy. As a matter of fact, Bosvil entirely drops out of frame entirely in the third narrative of the Galesia trilogy. For direct attention to Galesia's biography and the role of Bosvil in particular, the second work of the trilogy deserves a brief look in what remains of this chapter. In particular, Galesia's understanding of Bosvil receives further support from a likeminded friend, bolstering her

[289] Karen Bloom Gevirtz, *Women, the Novel, and Natural Philosophy, 1660-1727* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 80.
[290] Gevirtz, *Women, The Novel, and Natural Philosophy*, 84.

interpretation. Inset miniature narratives reinforce Galesia's growing sense of disinclination towards marriage after the disaster with Bosvil and affirm her path of celibacy. While her mother attempts to cajole Galesia into marriage, the behavior of the suitors who court Galesia after Bosvil make that earlier affair's implosion seem tame by comparison. Moreover, ruined women dot the narrative – both ingénues seduced by adulterous and lecherous London tradesmen and also high-flying "harlots." The stories of their betrayal at the hands of beaux who hide ill intent extends Barker's skeptical project. Scratching even just a bit beneath the surface gives Galesia cause enough for alarm to resist marriage. In turn, readers ask just how Galesia's mother could advocate for her daughter's marriage when the appearances of suitors and couples alike undermine the values their relationships purport to uphold. While *Patch-Work Screen* ends on a rather resounding note of Christian confidence, at least at face value, it nevertheless raises continued questions regarding the limitations of sense perception and the incomprehensibility of certain knowledge throughout. That skeptical undercurrent challenges the finality of the novel's concluding poem. Thus the philosophical problem of sense perception's reliability that Bosvil raised with his inconsistent attractions and attentions lingers far longer in terms of narrative time than the three years in which he alternately pursued and scorned the teenaged Galesia.

Galesia invokes Bosvil's name and the memory of their tortured courtship on several crucial occasions in *Patch-Work Screen*, which features another instance of Galesia's interpolated storytelling. On this narrative occasion, Galesia, back in England and on the road, finds her coach overturned. She seeks respite in what turns out to be the park of a country estate, where she meets the Gentlewoman who gives her shelter. In the house, Galesia offers her story as she contributes papers containing her verse to the Gentlewoman's project of creating a patch-work screen for the fireplace. She begins by noting that "Having disengag'd my Thoughts from

Bosvil…I had nothing to disturb my Tranquility, or hinder me from being Happy, but the Absence of my dear Brother," then studying at Leiden (75). She does go on to contradict this assertion when she admits that her brother's return "rais'd my drooping Spirits, and dispers'd those Clouds of Sorrow gather'd in my Heart by *Bosvil's* Falshood" (82). Those lingering clouds indicate a lasting attachment to Bosvil, even after his marriage. Yet that sorrow appears surmountable: with continued medical study and pleasant walks, Galesia "began to forget and scorn *Bosvil*. If I thought on him at all, it was with Contempt; and I wonder'd how it came to pass that I ever lov'd him, and thought myself secure the rest of my Days from that Weakness" (82). It is hard to believe that Bosvil, who had previously occupied such a prime place in Galesia's mental landscape, becomes a mere afterthought. But Galesia, who unfortunately loses her brother, has a thought as to why that may be the case. She explains that her brother's untimely death "was such a Grief as I had never felt; for though I had suffer'd much in the Transactions of *Bosvil;* yet those Sorrows were allay'd, in some degree, by the Mixture of other Passions, as Hope, Fear, Anger, Scorn, Revenge, *&c.* But this was Grief in Abstract, Sorrow in pure Element" (83-84). The depth of sadness Galesia feels at her brother's passing eclipses her suffering at Bosvil's hands. She does not negate that experience, indeed enumerating the varying emotions that it provoked, but almost seems to hint at an immaturity inherent in her love for Bosvil as opposed to the more profound attachment she has to her brother.

At this point, Bosvil drops out of the narrative almost entirely. He gains a fleeting mention in Galesia's conversation with one of the friends she makes among a group of Cambridge students. While Galesia internally cringes for violating gendered boundaries by taking a man into her confidence about her romantic past (an "Indiscretion I can hardly forgive my self," she says), this seems a redemptive moment nevertheless (92). Galesia at long last

speaks her mind, and her family does not disapprove of this exchange with another man. What is more, the Cambridge friend "instead of despising my Foible, valued my Frankness, and abhorr'd *Bosvil's* Unworthiness" (93). We might juxtapose this development with her studied quiet around Bosvil and her sense of alienation from her own family during that failed and protracted courtship. Further, the friend takes her side and condemns Bosvil's behavior, lending some additional credence to Galesia's sense that her interpretations of Bosvil's comportment were correct. Greater consensus is achieved during another moment of inset narration, when Galesia moved to London in her youth and encountered a jilted lover, Belinda. When discussing Belinda's own treacherous suitor, Belinda deploys language Galesia once used herself to describe Bosvil, particularly that "His Looks and Gestures demonstrated a violent Passion" (130). This exchange both universalizes Galesia's struggle and bolsters the reader's sense that Bosvil was indeed treacherous after all, contrary to the way he portrays their courtship in the apologia he offers at the end of *Love Intrigues*.

Ultimately, Galesia expresses shockingly little regret or remorse over Bosvil in particular. At one point in the narrative, she even gives thanks that the Bosvil match imploded because she has gained the chance to pursue her passions for poetry and medicine without him ("False *Strephon* too, I almost now cou'd bless, / Whose Crimes conduc'd to this my Happiness," she exclaims in interpolated verse [117]). On the whole, Bosvil, though he occupies greater prominence in the earlier portions of the *Patch-Work Screen* narrative, eventually fades out after only a mere six references. More complicated are Galesia's feelings towards her own chastity and towards desire more generally. Marriage and romance are the things that remain out of reach for Galesia by her own admission. While that gap is a source of joy at times in that it frees her for her medicinal and poetic pursuits, at other times she expresses that she feels fated to a single

life, with varying shades of acceptance and sorrow. It is her interlocutor, the unnamed Gentlewoman, who pronounces her single life more definitively as something for the good. Yet complicating matters further still, *Patch-Work Screen* is replete with inset narratives about the perils of bad romantic couplings: whether the various suitors proposed for Galesia (all of which end in, to borrow her word, "Disappointment" to varying degrees of extremity), or the "ruined" women Galesia encounters off the streets of London. By juxtaposition, Galesia's status as a celibate spinster, though complex, seems comparatively better. Readers receive further acclamation for her choices from other sources, especially her Cambridge friend, who affirms Galesia's assessment of her situation with Bosvil. This agreement might retroactively establish some kind of truth claim to Galesia's interpretations in *Love Intrigues*.

It would be remarkable for so very many people around her, and Galesia herself, to all be wrong – despite several critical accounts that seem almost eager to paint her as an exceptionally bad reader. Haskell Hinnant leads off with a common refrain that focuses primarily on Galesia's alleged faults: "Instead of sustaining a vision that would portray her as innocent victim and abandoned mistress, the novella encourages us to recognize her complicity in the rupture that costs her the man she desires." Hinnant continues that "In concealing her true feelings from Bosvil, she proves to be as adroit at dissembling…but is bitterly remorseful afterwards."[291] Such analysis prompts the question of how much of Galesia's behavior is genuine deceit, and how much her concealment of her feelings stems from abiding by the strict codes of comportment that social mores dictate. For instance, while she does not outright confess love for Bosvil, she works to give him the acceptable signs like sighs, and sometimes exhibits involuntary ones like blushes, to subtly alert Bosvil to her desires. Hinnant does at least hint at these sorts of codes that might

[291] Haskell Hinnant, "*Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and First-Person Female Narratives: Models and Prototypes," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 4 (2004): 46-47.

inhibit Galesia. He writes, "Within *Love Intrigues*, the realistic clash between two shy young lovers with differing expectations and the ideological conflict between virtuous decorum and passionate sincerity are presented simultaneously."[292] While I agree with the portrait Hinnant offers of the "ideological conflict" staged in the novel, I find his omission of the gendered implications of that conflict less convincing. Bosvil is able to open his heart and passion to Galesia in a way she feels that she cannot – and he appears anything other than shy. His quick marriage to the London mistress betrays any notion that he is an innocent sort of suitor. Hinnant likewise mischaracterizes Galesia as a totally unknowing ingénue, that she "often seems to know less than those around her, so that we are encouraged to penetrate beneath appearances, to take note of what she fails to recognize."[293] True, she knows less about Bosvil's plans and intentions than some others to whom he has disclosed such information, but, again, her friends and family appear as baffled as she is by his constant change of direction and seemingly inscrutable motivations.

I agree in part with King's conclusion that "The effect of Barker's subversive narrative…is to expose feminine modesty and prudence as forms of self-suppression as likely to breed shame and humiliation as to ensure personal happiness and a well-ordered household." I also agree in part with her assertion that "Galesia is the victim not of male sexual predators but of a too fastidious adherence to codes of female virtue."[294] However, I would counter that Bosvil exhibits a mode of sexual predation that may not be loud and physical but is still insidious – whether through a brand of coercive control over Galesia's mental state or inconsistent behavioral patterns that could constitute breach of promise. Ashley Tauchert acknowledges

[292] Hinnant, "*Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and First-Person Female Narratives," 47.
[293] Hinnant, "*Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and First-Person Female Narratives," 48.
[294] King, *Jane Barker, Exile*, 192.

Galesia's "faults" while not excusing Bosvil for his own. In so doing, Tauchert aptly points to the novel's preoccupation with women's expression: "the tale revolves around the heroine's unwillingness to communicate her own desire. But it can be read also beyond this plea for freedom of expression for female desire, since Galesia is always under the impression that she had made her feelings quite clear." Implicit in this summary is the notion that the linguistic and social system within which Galesia has been raised has produced the sort of confusion that bedevils her courtship with Bosvil.[295]

As much as I appreciate King and Tauchert's nuanced readings, I maintain that at the center of this novel is a baffling void that illustrates the staying power of the problem of other minds in the hyperbolic skeptical strain. Bosvil's motives remain at their root unknowable to confidants and Galesia alike. His ability to frame his actions and his own narrative would serve to disempower Galesia.[296] However, Galesia's story proves a counter-narrative that undermines the omnipotence of a character who centers his own preferences and experiences to his own inscrutable ends. Additionally, critics point to communities of female affinity and connection in Galesia's interaction with Lucasia in *Love Intrigues* and Galesia's conversation with the Gentlewoman of *Patch-Work Screen* against the vacuum of meaning in which Galesia tries to make sense of Bosvil's indecipherable behavior.[297]

In her assessment of Barker's 1719 edition of *Love Intrigues*, King asserts that Barker revised with "a view toward elevating and generalizing what must have seemed, in print, even

[295] Ashley Tauchert, "Writing Like a Girl: Revisiting Women's Literary History," *Critical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (April 2002): 66.
[296] See especially Lecture I for J. L. Austin's theory of the actionability of language in the marriage contract, in *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 5-8.
[297] See especially Misty G. Anderson, "Tactile Places: Materializing Desire in Margaret Cavendish and Jane Barker," *Textual Practice* 13, no. 2 (1999): 330.

with its already strong sense of didactic purpose, an indecorously personal account."[298] In the revised edition, Barker "ends with an affirmation of trust in providence that rounds itself off on a note of pious formality."[299] While the first edition concludes ambiguously with a bell calling the faithful to prayer and thus breaking off Galesia's tale, the second ends with Galesia's moralizing note: "But where we take Vertue for our Guide, God and our good Angels helps us thro'; and tho' we meet with many Rubs to make us stumble or reel, yet the good Hand of Providence is ready to lend Support, that we shall not fall into Ruin or Confusion."[300] In King's eyes, the original ending had been "abrupt, spare, and uninstructive," and yet concludes that the new elevated and "moralized" framework of the revision only casts into starker relief Galesia's "vulnerabilities" and "the darker, less respectable elements of her personality, including her rage and sexuality."[301]

It could be tempting to follow King's logic in declaring that faith is the solution. Barker's conversion to Catholicism, her translation of works by the French Catholic archbishop François Fénelon into English, and commitment later in life to the canonization of James II would seem to support such a theory.[302] Yet even Barker's devout poetry shows her wrangling with religious doubts. Her Fidelia verses in particular introduce a vein of uncertainty (which is rather in keeping with Catholic Counter Reformation tradition) into her theology. While the revised end to

[298] King, *Jane Barker, Exile*, 186.
[299] King, *Jane Barker, Exile*, 186-87.
[300] Jane Barker, *Bosvil and Galesia*, in *The Entertaining Novels of Mrs. Jane Barker.* (London: A. Bettesworth and E. Curll, 1719), 46-7.
[301] King, *Jane Barker, Exile*, 187.
[302] Barker translated Fénelon's Lenten devotional into English. Though curiously Fénelon would himself disprove of women's engagement with the novel form in which Barker otherwise wrote: "in his *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, translated into English in 1713, [Fénelon] warned of the dangers of girls reading 'romances' and then being 'astonished, not to find in the World real Persons who may not answer to these Romantick Heroes.'" Moore, "Love and Marriage," 8. Barker's efforts to corroborate James II's canonization in 1730 consisted of a letter with the remains of "a tumour expelled years earlier from her breast." King, *Jane Barker, Exile*, 103. Thus even into her ninth decade, Barker remained invested in the questions of physical and verbal proofs.

Love Intrigues might lend greater closure to Galesia's romance with Bosvil, it is not entirely airtight. I remain cautious of drawing any conclusions about Barker's own sense of certainty from this particular instance of revision, particularly given in the discourses around faith, sexuality, and the body present in Barker's later writings. In these, the sorts of unknowability that Galesia experienced with Bosvil extend out to other characters, and indeed to Barker's own poetic persona. Some of the initial lines of her "Fidelia arguing with her self on the difficulty of finding the true Religion" are replete with unknowing: "So many ages pass, yet no experience shows, / From whence man comes, nor after where he goes" (5-6).[303] Throughout the poem, she tries to understand the truth of biblical authority, and while she concludes she will renew her baptismal vows, it is not without agony:

> Thus I by doubts, and hopes, and fears am toss'd,
> And in the labyrinth of disputes am lost;
> Unhappy, who with any doubts are curss'd
> But of all doubts, Religious doubts are worst. (52-55)

Whether in matters of love or in matters of religion, the labyrinth remains the defining symbol of Barker's work's insistence upon overwhelming skeptical doubts.

* * *

Throughout this dissertation, I have striven to demonstrate the transformation of virginity and chastity as particular and pressing during the watershed post-Reformation moment, of which we are the inheritors in modern-day Anglo-American culture. It is one especially formational origin point for our present-day conceptualization of chastity, which is having tangible impacts not just on our culture but also on our very rights and freedoms. As Jessica Valenti presciently

[303] Jane Barker, "Fidelia arguing with her self on the difficulty of finding the true Religion." *Kissing the Rod*, 355-60.

indicated in 2009, discourses on sexual purity in particular have profound medical and legal consequences:

> there's no separating virginity, violence, and control over women's bodies. When it comes to women who are perceived as "impure," there's a narrative of punishment that underscores U.S. policy and public discourse—be it legislation that limits reproductive rights through the assumption that women should be chaste before marriage, or a media that demonizes victims of sexual violence.[304]

The Supreme Court of the United States' overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June of 2022 seems the fulfillment of the sort of limitations that Valenti so clearly saw when she wrote her book over a decade before the Court handed down its decision. As Hanne Blank contends, "no matter where our changing culture takes us, and no matter how our notions of virginity change, as long as sex is important in the slightest, virginity and virgins will continue to matter profoundly to us all."[305] The literary works studied throughout have served as test cases to chart the changing conceptualization of chastity in an especially tumultuous historical moment. In this dissertation, I have emphasized the necessity of placing the study of sexuality broadly and chastity especially as necessary to understanding the philosophical history of skepticism, and vice versa. Skepticism provides a bedrock foundation for chastity to exist as a concept; because virginity is not a biological feature, as Blank has aptly demonstrated, chastity as a social marker of a virgin state becomes necessary – and in the process spurs anxieties.

Whether or not virginity or chastity are foundational to one's sense of self, my hope is that this dissertation's exploration of a particular culture in a particular moment in time wrangling with questions about the received wisdom about virginity through a skeptical lens trained on the fact that we all have our own subjectivities has demonstrated the constructed

[304] Valenti, *The Purity Myth*, 14.
[305] Blank, *Virgin*, 256-57.

nature of chastity. What can be constructed is malleable; able to be formed and shaped to our own ends – even recuperative ones, should we so choose.

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