STAGING WOMEN: MASOCHEAN MASOCHISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE AGENCY IN RESTORATION COMEDY, 1670–1700

by

DOMINIC BODEN-TEBBUTT

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of English, Drama and Creative Studies
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham

March 2025

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

This thesis explores how, through the application of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical construct of Masochean masochism, both male and female Restoration playwrights between 1670 and 1700 depict masculine sexual desire, insecurity, and implicit growth in female sexual agency. The object of this study is to apply Deleuze's psychological construct of erotic fantasy, pleasure of denial and tortuous need for sexual submissiveness to Restoration comedy to illuminate this period's hypocritical gender prejudices contrary to illicit masculine sexual desires. This demonstrates how playwrights challenged dominant constructions of gender in their characterisation of women: particularly through the subversion of patriarchal control and misogynistic attitudes. This research explores how frustrated masculine sexual desire, and a masochistic fetish create a male sexual identity crisis surrounding virility, marriage, and perceived female dominance.

This study considers representative plays from nine male and female playwrights from the period: John Dryden, William Wycherley, Edward Ravenscroft, Aphra Behn, Ariadne, Nathaniel Lee, John Vanbrugh, Thomas D'Urfey and E. Polwhele. Across twelve plays and five chapters, this thesis combines Deleuze's theory with historical research to consider how these playwrights' comedy acted as a mirror and counterpoint to societal change and derided the hypocrisy of morality to critique cultural concerns. This illustrates how these playwrights reflected on the real world to create an exploration of masochistic pleasure and pain to emphasise the psycho-asexual needs of men and women. Each chapter shows how different playwrights realise aspects of the masochistic relationship to illuminate how men are feminised and rendered submissive whilst women are granted sexual agency to inflict mental pain through humiliation and emasculation.

Mum, Simon, and to all those who like a risqué joke

Acknowledgments

One of the first academic lessons I learnt was to not generalise or veer into clichés, but I find myself admitting that writing this thesis has been a labour of love with many ups and downs. Throughout my journey, my supervisors have unwaveringly trusted that I have something new to say – even when I didn't think I did. For this reason, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisors: Gillian Wright, Jennie Challinor and Sebastian Mitchell for their encouragement, support and guidance. Their knowledge and passion for their subjects have been a source of inspiration and have made me a better researcher and editor. I promise that I didn't turn to gin and tonic all the time. Equally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to M4C for their belief in my research and providing financial support; without their funding this project would not have been possible. I am profoundly grateful that their continued help which has allowed me to disseminate my research at conferences, allowed me to travel abroad to complete this study, and finally, to find academic friends willing to listen to me talk endlessly about this thesis.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the English Department at the University of Birmingham, with a special mention of John Fagg for putting me at my ease, always asking me 'why', and being disappointed when out of time to ask the question. A special thanks go to the postgraduate department of the College of Arts and Law, particularly to Rachel Soron for not only patiently dealing with my myriads of queries and occasional stupid questions, but also always making me smile even in the most frustrating of times. My thanks should also go to Senate House library and the University of Birmingham library and the staff for their help and kindness. Also, I would like to acknowledge the librarians at La Bibliothèque nationale de France for being completely baffled by my research but willing to help me (my thanks go to one unnamed librarian who has given me the now infamous line: que veux-tu dire par là qu'il y a un lien entre Molière et la scène anglaise - ce n'est pas possible).

Lastly, I want to thank the 'behind the scenes' support team: my family. The thanks to my mother would never convey my indebtedness to her, she is my greatest champion – even when she didn't quite understand what I was talking about. Simon for dealing with my occasional meltdowns, giving me a gin and tonic, and making me laugh by doing a one-man performance of the plays in the voices of Sid James, Barbara Windsor or Joan Simms (to name but a few of the Carry On cast members) who sorely never got to perform a Restoration comedy. Finally, to my dad – you knew I could do it, and I've done it.

Note on Texts

I have used original editions of plays throughout this thesis and references are quoted where possible in Arabic numerals for act, scene and page numbers. When modern editions have been cited, Arabic numerals are used for act, scene and line numbers.

French drama is quoted in French in the main text, and a literal translation has been provided in the footnotes. All translations are my own, unless they exist in the form of scholarly translations.

Contents

INTRODUCTION 7

Situating Sexuality in Restoration Theatre History 10
Current scholarly understanding of Restoration Comedy 20
Methodology and Chapter Outlines 25

CHAPTER ONE 33

DELEUZE, MASOCHISM AND DESIRE

Deleuze, Philosophy, and Literature 35
Deleuze and the Symptomatology of Masochism 40
The Separation of Sadism and Masochism in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* 43
Deleuze's Masochistic Framework 48
Deleuze and Foucault: Desire and Pleasure 50

CHAPTER TWO 54

FEAR AND LOATHING: MARRIAGE, CUCKOLDRY, AND DESIRE

Tumultuous Marriages in John Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode* 56
Immoral Desires in William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* 73
Farcical Failures in Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* 90

CHAPTER THREE 111

THE MASOCHIST'S IDEAL: INDEPENDENCE, DISGUISE AND DESIRE

A Venus in Disguise: Disorder in Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans* 114
The Pain of Virtuousness in Ariadne's *She Ventures, And He Wins* 132
Indifference and Humiliation in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* 151

CHAPTER FOUR 173

LAW, DISORDER, AND THE FRENCH CONNECTION 1676–1681

Sin, Sincerity and Moralistic Law in Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* 176
Morbid Melancholy and Girl Power in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* 196
Degeneracy and Disorder in Nathaniel Lee's *The Princess of Cleve* 215

CHAPTER FIVE 233

BEYOND MASOCHISM: THE REALITY OF CONFORMITY

Guilt and Misogamy in Thomas D'Urfey's *The Marriage-Hater Match'd* 236
The Reality of Marriage in John Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* 257
Rebellion and Conformity in E. Polwhele's *The Frolicks* 274

CONCLUSION 298

Masochism in William Congreve's *The Way of the World* 304

BIBLIOGRAPHY 312

Introduction

This study's origins come from two different questions. Firstly, the joke: What did the sadist do to the masochist? Nothing. Secondly, what can this joke tell us about Restoration comedy? Whether the joke elicits laughter or groans, it provides an insight into how humour can connect with a pleasurable state of mental pain to explore desire, power and human relationships. This thesis significantly engages with Gilles Deleuze's philosophical monograph *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967) and his framework for Masochean masochistic desire as a system of pleasure and pain. My investigation specifically blends new-historicist research with a post-Freudian theoretical conceptualisation to provide a unique assessment of Restoration comedy. This thesis' focus illuminates why Deleuze's impressionistic philosophy can expose how the plays of the period subverted and challenged the established social order, as well as showing how playwrights acted as anthropologists and diagnosticians of society to reflect upon contemporaneous human issues. This discussion will assess how Deleuze's theory of Masochean masochism – its humour, power dynamics, and desire for humiliation – is congruous with late seventeenth-century comedy. This doctoral study will demonstrate that an application of the theory can reinterpret how light-hearted, farcical humour can be an effective tool for sexual subversion in theatre. From this examination there is the potential for a new understanding of how women characters – rather than being submissive – used sex or abstinence to psychologically control men to gain agency. This thesis applies Deleuze's conceptualisation to present how playwrights and their narratives used immorality and anti-authoritarianism to critique cultural concerns, historical events and socio-behaviour to transform the view of the contemporaneous world. Over the course of this analysis, I will illustrate how their

reflection upon the real world created a symbolic exploration of masochistic pleasure-pain to emphasise the complex psychological and sexual needs of men and women.

Comedy repertoire between 1670 and 1700 exhilaratingly spoke of an age of uncertainty; it reflected the social anxiety, political precariousness and sexual revolution which has come to define the plays of the period. Comedy helped to reinvigorate the theatre as a central cultural institution and in a representational world, playwrights humorously laid bare the scandalous public and private lives of overly libidinous rakes, shrewd women, witless fathers and coquettish ingenues. Ostensibly, Restoration comedies can be viewed as light-hearted and whimsical; however, the plays offer a satirical, and at times lampooning, portrayal of the manners and behaviours of the royal court, upper and merchant classes. Themes of love, marital infidelity and licentiousness held a mirror to society to critique its superficiality and hypocrisy – as John Spurr suggests, 'Wit, valour and love [and] the fickle taste of the audience, are [...] part of a wider sense of mutability. Change was in the air'.[1] These comic exposés and characterisations were a playwright's open acknowledgement of the hypocritical struggle within a society in moralistic flux, one that both revelled in sex, vice and sin, at the same time as needing to appear to uphold a façade of probity.

Beginning with the 1670–1671 theatrical season, a succession of new dramatists, including William Wycherley and Aphra Behn, began their professional careers alongside the established John Dryden and Thomas Shadwell. Playwrights throughout this thesis' period evolved stock comedy tropes to reflect and respond to a volatile moral climate, as well as engaging with its revolutionary and constitutional crises. Their depictions were advanced during an age of swift theatrical development: from personal, and theatrical company competition, the introduction of actresses, and

[1] John Spurr, *England in the 1670s* (Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 2.

the developing relationship between the stage and audience. Playwrights attempted to entertain audiences at the same time as endeavouring to offer new perspectives on the societal status-quo.

Alongside the theatrical reflection upon the significant political upheavals and societal change which defined the period 1670–1700, playwrights increasingly explored issues of gender roles and sexual relationships. This thirty-year era marked a critical time of oscillating sexual revolution: from reflecting the mores of an overtly libidinous royal court throughout the 1670s and 1680s, to the backlash of the moralistic movements of the 1690s – sex, and the societal view of sex, was an overarching theme of comedy. Playwrights trod a delicate path between exposing the instability and hypocrisy of women needing to appear virtuous. They strove to challenge traditional views on marriage, divorce and female submission. As I will discuss later, previous scholarly work on Restoration comedy has conventionally taken a singular evaluation of authorial intent which follows historical, or gender paradigms based on performance history.[2]

This thesis appraises how Deleuze's psychological theory of Masochean masochism – its construct of erotic fantasy, pleasure of denial and tortuous need for masculine submission – can be applied to Restoration comedy. There is an abundance of texts from the period which could have been examined within this thesis; however, as well as offering a consideration of both well-known and neglected works, and both

[2] Previous studies include David Robert's *Female Patronage of Restoration Drama 1660-1700* (Clarendon Press, 1989); Katherine M. Quinsey's edited volume on gender and Restoration drama, *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by. Katherine M. Quinsey (University of Kentucky, 1996); James Grantham Taylor, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Susan Staves work on relationships and culture in the late seventeenth century, Susan Staves, *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (University of Nebraska, 1979); Diana Solomon's work on the depiction of female agency in the prologues and epilogues in Restoration comedy, Diana Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater: Gender And Comedy, Performance And Print* (University of Delaware Press, 2015).

canonical and overlooked playwrights, my choice of plays reflects a snapshot of the sexual and moral ideologies of the time in which they were written or produced. Equally, these texts are representative of the changing tastes in comedy: from farce, dark comedy to proto-sentimentalism. My analysis of the plays constructs a multifaceted view of how male and female playwrights challenged gender roles. Throughout this thesis I identify and chart how the dramatists questioned traditional gender roles through their portrayal of masculine sexual desire and feminine sexual freedom. This reveals how their differing approaches to gender highlights the creative potential of pleasure and pain to show how suffering might be used to critique and redefine identity, relationships, and societal expectations. By applying Deleuze's theory to plays between 1670–1700, this thesis reveals more nuanced interpretations of character dynamics, narrative structures and themes of power and desire to reframe and join the socio-historical perspectives and feminist views of Restoration comedy together in a single investigation. This introduction outlines the broad contextual narrative which highlights the key cultural, gender and sexual anxieties of the period. This outline is interwoven with theatrical performance history to demonstrate how this has shaped and decided this thesis' selection of primary texts. Secondly, I will present and discuss current paradigmatic scholarly understanding of Restoration and post-1688 comedy.

Situating Sexuality in Restoration Theatre History

In the wake of the restoration of the monarchy, 1660–1670 was a period of tentative and exploratory freedom for the two patented theatre companies and the reopened playhouses. Creative literary production, artistic competition and the desire for entertainment would come to dominate the decade, and the defining development of

theatrical culture would be the introduction of actresses. Jennie Challinor highlights that after the hardships of the Civil War and the strict moralism and prohibitions of the Interregnum, the stage reflected and remarked 'upon the fashions, activities, and ideals of the court'.[3] She continues by suggesting that there was a glut of celebration at the return of the monarchy which issued in an era of 'healthy innovation' and dispensed 'with the moral and social rigidities of the past'.[4] Yet literary innovation in the theatre was initially fragmentary. As Derek Hughes suggests, 'tragedy was the more radical genre than comedy' during the 1660s, and fresh productions tended towards reflecting 'political culture and political contests' which 'presented and represented the monarchy' in an act of unassailable adulation towards the restored sovereign.[5] New playwrights, producing exclusively comic work, wrote intermittently for the stage but works such as John Dryden's *The Wild Gallant* (1663), Thomas Shadwell's *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) and George Etherege's *She Would if She Could* (1668) can be seen as paradoxically experimental for the time: all recalled the cavalier spirit of pre-1642, and anticipated the theatrical trends which dominated the 1670s.[6] Hughes remarks that these plays were 'not well received' during their initial runs, and 'successors were slow to appear' during the late 1660s; these playwrights set an example for the ribald comedy which would come to dominate post-1670 theatre.[7]

This study's starting point occurs during a historically quiescent period in 1670, but the year marked a significant influx of new playwrights during the 1670–1671

---

[3] Jennie Challinor, 'Introduction', in *Playing Politics: Restoration Drama and Innovation, 1670–71* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming).
[4] Jennie Challinor, 'Introduction'.
[5] Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 113; Kevin Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule: The Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660–1714* (Yale University Press, 2013), p. 83.
[6] Manuel J. Gómez-Lara, José Mora and Paula de Pando, 'Introduction', in Thomas Durfey, *The Marriage Hater-Matched,* ed. by Manuel J. Gómez-Lara, José Mora and Paula de Pando (Universitat de Barcelona, 2014), pp. 15-43 (p. 21).
[7] Hughes, p. 113.

theatrical season. Robert D. Hume notes that, 'to call 1670 and 1671 years of [theatrical] crisis may seem fanciful. Nonetheless, we can fairly say that about this time both serious and comic drama reach a critical turning point'.[8] While theatrical records are incomplete, the season would still, on the evidence available, mark a period of burgeoning innovation within the playhouses: new voices would compete with established playwrights, and would successfully become the dominant voices of the decade and beyond.[9] The King's Company and The Duke's Company competed for modern, original productions and therefore required playwrights who would satisfy the companies' demands.[10] During the season, the playwright William Wycherley would begin his professional career writing *Love in a Wood* for the King's Company, and the actor, Thomas Betterton, would turn to producing *The Amorous Widow* for the Duke's Company.[11] The Duke's Company was perhaps the more audacious of the rivals: the company's season would mark the entrance of female playwrights writing original works for the first time. Aphra Behn's *The Forc'd Marriage* and E. Polwhele's *The Faithful Virgins*, and potentially, *The Frolicks*, were staged during the year, marking a significant moment in theatrical culture by presenting a female viewpoint within a traditionally male space.[12] The veteran playwrights of the 1660s, John Dryden and Thomas Shadwell, would see their fortunes in the theatre continue to prosper during the season: Dryden extended his two-part tragedy, *The Conquest of Granada*,

[8] Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 279.
[9] Challinor, 'Introduction'.
[10] The state of the theatrical company rivalry was complex. The King's company was granted the rights to the majority of pre-1642 drama in 1660; however, their reliance on staging older heroic works by veteran playwrights became detrimental and the Duke's Company took advantage of this 'old-new' divide by producing new, and ultimately successful comedies, Riki Miyoshi, 'A Tale of Two Theatres', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660*–1700, 40 (2016), 25-44 (pp. 27-31).
[11] It should be noted that *The London Stage* estimates *The Amorous Widow* to have premiered during the 1670–1671 season but was not published until 1706, *The London Stage 1660–1700,* ed. by William Van Lennep (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. 144-176; for the purposes of this thesis, any further mentions of *The Amorous Widow* will be given the circa performance date.
[12] Helen Wilcox, 'Chronology', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. xv-xx (p. xix).

Thomas Shadwell wrote his comic, and controversial, critique of libertinism in *The Humorists*. As Jennie Challinor suggests, Shadwell's play was 'one of the most prescient plays of the season, looking ahead not only to the height of drama's captivation with the figure of the libertine'.[13] Their work provided a template for both praising and condemning the libertine lifestyle which would define the sex boom comedy during the decade.

As the 1670s progressed, theatrical trends would move away from the heroic comedy of the 1660s and would diversify into different comedy genres: farce, parody and dark comedy. Drama would evolve to reflect both current events and associated behaviours. The profound influence of Molière on the English stage during the early 1670s would revolutionise the nature of comedy. Molière's innovative approach to character, plot and satire would set up the key thematic and structural elements of farce, physical humour and characterisation in Restoration comedy. His works, such as *L'Amour médecin* (1665), *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) *and Le Malade imaginaire* (1673) were adapted by playwrights such as Edward Ravenscroft, John Lacy and William Wycherley in order to critique society, marriage and infidelity.[14] Both Molière's comedy and the English adaptations celebrated libertine behaviour and were marked by wit, sex and scandal in a blend of French sophistication and English irreverence.

The view of sex, vice and sin would become ostensibly the mainstay theme of London comedies and, as Jeremy Webster argues, libidinous comedies were crucial to

[13] Challinor, 'Introduction'.
[14] Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) were adapted by Edward Ravenscroft in *The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman* (1672) and again in *The Careless Lovers* (1673), John Lacy would adapt *Médecin malgré lui* and *L'amour médecin* in *The Dumb Lady: or, The Farriar Made Physician* (1672) and as will be discussed, William Wycherley would adapt Molière's *Le Misanthrope* in *The Plain-Dealer* (1676).

the development of the theatre.[15] The libertines of the royal court, such as John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Sir Charles Sedley and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham would conduct their 'excessive drinking, carnality [...] sedition, assault, and sacrilege' in full view of the public.[16] Libertine comedies, up until the mid-1670s, would reflect and measure the royal court's unabashed sensualism against the stock characterisation of the provincial moralist's anxiety and condemnation of such conduct. Behn's *The Dutch Lover* (1673), Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode* (1673) and Thomas Duffet's *The Amorous Old Woman* (1674) would deliberate current events, satirise the court's lewdness, and mock moralism. The spectre of riotous libertinism would reach a critical turning point with William Wycherley's insatiable rake Horner in *The Country Wife* (1675).

The flux between hedonistic immorality and morality became unsustainable, and the Bishop of Hereford, in exasperation, condemned the iniquity of the court in 1674. In his sermon preached before Charles II, the bishop damned the

> wretched thoughts [of] these Men of Honour [the libertines]. The steam of these Flesh-pots have so blinded our eyes, so stupified and besotted our brain, that like men bereft of common sense, we can't discern betwixt Light and Darkness, Vertue and Vice, Honour and Shame; but all is turn'd into a Chaos of Confusion.[17]

[15] Jeremy Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 35.
[16] Webster, p. 2.
[17] Right Reverend Herbert, Bishop of Hereford, *A Sermon Preached before the King at White-Hal, April the 12th 1674* (Charles Harper, 1676), p. 17.

Social tolerance of the risqué behaviour and excessive lasciviousness of the court quickly fatigued, and the libertines, as Webster puts it, became 'isolated from influence' and were left having 'to participate in society's institutions rather than reject them for pleasure'.[18] Libertinistic representation in the theatre began to lack variety, and by the late 1670s it would appear outdated. In a profound shift, playwrights had to deal with political crises and a need to depict morality in the wake of the 'emasculation and utter downfall' of the libertine.[19] William Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* (1676) and Thomas D'Urfey's *A Fond Husband* (1677) humorously critiqued the sexually wayward nature of the first half of the decade, recommending morality and marriage; whilst Nathaniel Lee's *Princess of Cleve* (c.1679) starkly depicted the rake's outrageously libidinous behaviour, only for him to end in ruination and reformation.

The 1680s was a period of political and monarchical upheaval, theatre closures and revolution – all of which marked a decline in the output of new comedies during the decade. Farce appeared out of step with contemporaneous events and playwrights found it difficult to gauge audience tastes, with as many plays failing as were successful.[20] Aphra Behn's fortunes would falter with *The Feign'd Curtizans* (1679), and Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* (1682) would mark a brief, successful return to a farcical depiction of the libidinous rake. Yet running through the comedy of the period was a subtle, significant, shift in depictions of women. With the advent of actresses on the stage, playwrights began to offer new perspectives on the role of women and gender dynamics in society. As Jean I. Marsden suggests, there was a focus on 'the impact of women on the stage and in the theatre' which examined 'the ways in

[18] Webster, p. 34.
[19] Webster, p. 35.
[20] Hume, p. 381.

which their material presence allowed the representations of women in drama and even reshaped dramatic form at a time when theatre was the most public and most debated literary venue', particularly within comedic theatre.[21]

In many ways during the period covered by this thesis, both male and female playwrights, as well as actresses, began to examine gender differences within the male dominated playhouses, which consciously or unconsciously created a shift towards an implicit view of matriarchal control. David Roberts claims that when the male playwright was 'exclusively preoccupied with the man in the pit that [women] were forgotten' and whether they were styled as 'lady, mother, miss, and mistress' it was 'common for dramatists to joke that one could no longer distinguish a lady of quality from a whore'.[22] The reputation of actresses was poor – Elizabeth Howe suggests the first actresses 'were used [...] as sexual objects, confirming, rather than challenging, the attitudes to gender', and between 1660 and 1689 a 'mere one-quarter [...] were considered to [lead] respectable lives', but it is in this view of dishonour that there was an advantageous, tangible freedom to forge a new view of female control outside the theatre.[23] Annette Kreis-Schnick argues the blend of female characterisation and realism became one of the 'most prominent structural devices of early modern comedy' which demanded male playwrights 'present, analyze, and scrutinize as well as [...] suppress, control and contain women's sexual activities' to maintain patriarchal supremacy.[24] However, Howe's more nuanced argument highlights that women became more 'vital' and 'indispensable' to the male sphere, and the works of Aphra

[21] Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660–1720* (Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 3.
[22] David Roberts, *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 29.
[23] Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 33.
[24] Annette Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theater in the Early Modern Period* (Associated University Presses, 2001), p. 23.

Behn, E. Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671) and Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* (1695) are exemplary of how female playwrights' creative freedom allowed them to change and define the view of women within a public space.[25] Howe argues that this freedom became 'increasingly accepted' in seventeenth-century theatre, and showed how men and women were 'entitled to full and adequate individuality', both inside and outside the playhouses.[26]

Playwrights had the creative freedom afforded by the introduction of actresses to focus on the lives of women and their sexuality which, as Jean I. Marsden suggests, allowed them to 'develop an ideology of gaze, gender, and desire' through their characterisations.[27] Elizabeth Howe describes how audiences 'enjoyed the spectacle of the characters and their adventures in the play' and 'they were also particularly strongly conscious of the personalities of the players behind the fiction' that created a positive environment for sexual exploration.[28] This attitude was not limited to the female playwrights mentioned above. Male playwrights increasingly began to explore female sexual autonomy and plays such as Edward Ravenscroft's *Dame Dobson* (1683) and Thomas Southerne's *The Wives Excuse* (1691) investigated how the transitionary depiction of women could influence and control men in an attempt to challenge gender stereotypes.

Discussion of women's social standing was a theme which ran throughout comedy in the 1670–1700 period. After the introduction of women on the stage, and the politically calm aftermath of post-Revolution England there was, as Howe points out, an increase in scrutiny of 'social problems concerning women, such as arranged

[25] Howe, p. 21.
[26] Howe, p. 21.
[27] Marsden, p. 40.
[28] Howe, p. 91.

marriage [and] the double standard of divorce'.[29] Howe suggests that this was not 'solely [the] consequence of a change in political and philosophical climate', but also a 'changed approach to female characters that the sexual exploitation of the actress made necessary' in a culmination of socio-sexual change which had begun during the early 1670s.[30] Female virtue and chastity were stock tropes in Restoration theatre, yet the period's drama often exposed the darkly comic hypocrisy behind male claims to sexual superiority. The 1670s saw the emergence of overt themes of cuckoldry and male sexual anxiety as defining features of Restoration comedy. While this appears to centre on the dangers of female infidelity and the threat it poses to male honour, the dramatic tension is largely sustained by male fears of emasculation and the obsessive need to maintain an appearance of virility. Sara Matthews-Grieco suggests the threat of exposure created a 'control of sexual mores' by men; nevertheless, anxiety allowed for matriarchal sexual control through men's thoughts and actions.[31] The visibility of cuckoldry and infidelity becomes perilous for both women and men – but equally becomes a form of domination for both sexes.

As previously mentioned, whilst the comedy of the 1670s was topically concerned with sex, vice and sin, there was a growing desire for the depiction of moralist reform which distinguished the 1690s from the earlier period. That is not to say there was a lack of moralism during the 1670s and 1680s. In 1675, an anonymous author explained 'why a Law should pass in England to punish *Adultery* with *Death*', describing it as 'a complication of all the *Wickedness* in *Lust, Breach* of *Faith* and *Robbery*' which broke matrimonial vows and destroyed affection.[32] David Turner

[29] Howe, pp. 64-65.
[30] Howe, p. 65.
[31] Sara Matthews-Grieco, 'Introduction', in *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe (15th–17th century)*, ed. by Sara Matthews-Grieco (Ashgate Publishing, 2014), pp.1-10 (p. 1).
[32] *A Letter To A Member of Parliament With Two Discourses Enclosed In It. I. The One shewing the Reason why a Law Should Pass to Punish Adultery With Death* ([n.pub.], 1675), p. 6.

summarises that the 'epidemic of sexual sin' and the moral backlash had always been a 'persistent feature of English pulpit oratory' and, therefore, was depicted to a degree within the theatre.[33] However, during the 1690s there was a significant move towards sententious behaviour; new playwrights, such as William Congreve, John Vanbrugh and George Farquhar appeared to be more cognizant of the link between morality, marriage, and equality between the sexes.[34] The influence of William and Mary's morally principled court led to the widely held view that moral laxity was a threat to domestic and public relations, and ultimately this view filtered into the playhouses. Playwrights consequently developed their libidinous comedies into a more nuanced, sexually tempered examination of relationships – portraying sexual transgression to answer lingering questions about women's social problems and standing.

The depiction of moralism and family unity set against the backdrop of fear of marriage, crumbling marital relationships, and the spectre of divorce became pronounced themes as the decade progressed. Divorce during the late seventeenth century was a sobering, high-profile procedure for the upper classes, obtained through parliamentary divorce bills and rarely, judicial separation: all pored over by commentators and dissected by the public. From the controversial Lord Roos divorce bill in March 1670, which Charles II described as 'better than going to a Play', the failed judicial separation of Lady Anne Boteler in 1675 for her husband's cruelty, to the Duke of Norfolk's attempted divorce for adultery in 1692, the difficulty of marital breakdown and divorce was to remain in the public consciousness.[35] In the theatre, proviso scenes

---

[33] David Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England 1660–1740* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1.
[34] Sandra Perot, 'Theatre Women and Cultural Diplomacy in the Transatlantic Anglophone World 1752-1807' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Massachusetts), p. 70.
[35] Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530–1987* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 309; *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by H. M. Margoliouth, Pierre Legouis and Elsie Elizabeth Duncan-Jones, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Clarendon Press, 1971), II, p. 303; Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England, 1660–1857* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 32–37; Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p. 313.

became more visible –notably in Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode* (1673), Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* (1696) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700).[36] Playwrights brought marriage disharmony to the fore of their productions, although they did not, or could not, offer a socio-moralistic resolution to marital problems. Throughout the period 1670–1700, the theatre would continually reflect and comment upon cultural behaviour, relationships and social change both within and outside the theatre. depiction of libidinous mischief, gender struggles and sexual anxieties provided an implicit dramatical form to question society without becoming excessively onerous or condescending.

Current scholarly understanding of Restoration Comedy

Critical understandings of Restoration comedy have developed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with scholarship increasingly attentive to its social satire, political engagement, theatrical innovation, and gender dynamics. Recent studies have revealed a period of theatrical production that is both complex and contradictory: the comedies are often light in tone and entertaining yet simultaneously offer sophisticated and nuanced critiques of a society undergoing moral and ideological transformation. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's theoretical framework, this thesis reinterprets the ways in which both male and female playwrights responded to rapid shifts in the cultural zeitgeist and how their work acted as a mirror and counterpoint to societal change – from contemporary court culture to theological differences. Robert D. Hume's *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (1976), Laura Brown's *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760:*

[36] Proviso scenes depicted couples discussing marriage as a legal transaction where certain conditions must be met before and during marriage.

An Essay in Generic History (1981) and Derek Hughes' *English Drama 1660–1700* (1996) remain critically important examinations of comedies and their relation to the tumultuous Restoration and post-Revolution historicity, shifting power dynamics and provide an insight into how class and status were negotiated in public life.[37]

My work develops Jeremy Webster's scholarship in his *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* (2005). Webster's focus on the close interplay between theatrical fiction and the humorous realities of the libidinous and hedonistic royal court is invaluable in understanding how Restoration libertinism is manifested within narrative texts. Webster examines how the dominant libertines of the royal court, including William Wycherley and George Etherege, wrote and produced a 'public' performance of their 'private pursuits' for a theatrical audience. Webster's work analyses texts to understand how the libertine authors embodied themselves in their rake characters to shape and evolve comedy in order to draw attention to themselves and push their ideology, if not vanity, and literature confirmed their libertinistic identity as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This doctoral study situates itself alongside Webster's work in examining the libertine author-protagonist paradigm and authorial intent, but I seek to expand on his examination of their psychological interdependence through the application of Deleuze's theory. My case studies, when viewed through a Deleuzian lens, identify how rake characters – rather than being consumed by lasciviousness – implicitly reveal a sexual insecurity, a desire for subversion and a need to obey authority. This invites a new understanding of the libertine as servile, anxious and flawed.

Masculine sexual anxieties and the implicit desire for submission to a woman was in direct conflict with the societal paradigm of patriarchal rule and matriarchal

[37] Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760: An Essay in Generic History* (Yale University Press, 1981).

submission. This thesis' unusual rationale of examining an inversion of established gender roles is indebted to Annette Kreis-Schnick's study *Women, Writing, and The Theatre in the Early Modern Period* (2001). My original hypothesis for this thesis began with her argument that Restoration comedies maintained a positive view of masculine sexual superiority and libertinistic freedom throughout the period to the detriment of female characters, and female playwrights. Her work focuses on the career of Aphra Behn and Suzanne Centlivre, but Kreis-Schnick's textual analysis positively illuminates the growing, oscillatory change in the interrelationship between Behn, the audience and her critical popularity. Kreis-Schnick skilfully parallels her analysis of Behn's depictions of womanhood, marriage, divorce and widowhood with suggestions of how cultural and historical influences might have shaped Behn's creative process.

Ultimately, Kreis-Schnick suggests male critics kept Behn, and other female playwrights, relegated to the sidelines of the theatre and her female characters subjugated. Nevertheless, a drawback to her research is that she does not attempt to deconstruct gender as an ideological representation in the theatre. My study parallels Kreis-Schnick's work on Behn's depictions of the stages of womanhood, but by applying Deleuze's masochistic theory I illustrate how Behn uses cultural influences to implicitly challenge gender power dynamics. Despite Kreis-Schnick's importance to this thesis, I propose that her supposition of positive masculinity needs a closer examination. By conducting a Deleuzian reading of the plays, I test Kreis-Schnick's justification for her claims and examine whether Behn's and latterly Ariadne's work highlights the negativity of masculine superiority.

My examination of male and female playwrights' attitudes towards female sexual empowerment remains crucial to provide a balanced view of authorial intent. Behn's importance to Restoration theatre as the first female professional playwright is

immeasurable, and her female point of view on sexual dynamics and equality are central to understanding the application of the Deleuzian masochistic framework to Restoration comedy. Laura Rosenthal's work argues that Behn's female characters are symbolic of a more complex and subversive stance towards female desire and agency than merely wilful characterisations.[38] Rosenthal's investigation compares Behn's work with male playwrights to suggest that they collectively reflect and critique gender dynamics during the Restoration period: particularly the portrayal of women as sexual commodities. My work continues situating Behn's plays amongst male playwrights to further Rosenthal's argument; however, this study seeks to go further by examining how women utilised sexual objectification to become subversive and agents of social and moral subversion.

The depiction of divorce and adultery in Restoration comedy serves a dual purpose: to entertain whilst critiquing the societal norms and hypocrisies of the time. Infidelity is often treated as a trivial or even inevitable part of human behaviour; marriage can be a tenuous institution, emphasising the emotional and social consequences of failed marriages and divorce. This study is indebted to Lawrence Stone's research on divorces and the societal view of divorce during the Restoration period; particularly his books *Road to Divorce: England 1530–1987* (1990) and *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England, 1660–1857* (1993). Stone's work on infidelity in *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (1982) illuminates the changing view of cuckoldry amongst the upper class – from its laudability to its shamefulness – and how this affected its representations in wider society.[39] This thesis utilises the historicity of Stone's research, but I diverge from his studies to theorise

[38] Laura Rosenthal, '"All injury's forgot": Restoration Sex Comedy and National Amnesia', *Rethinking Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama*, 42 (2008) 7-28.
[39] Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (Penguin Books, 1982).

how the contemporaneous literary representations of divorce and infidelity, when viewed from a Deleuzian standpoint, has the potential to sustain and destroy the masochistic fantasy. Indeed, this thesis explores the oscillating views of cuckoldry laid out in David Turner's examination of adultery in *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England 1660–1740* (2002). Turner's research illuminates the complex role cuckoldry has as a vehicle for social critique and as an exploration of the dynamics of power, gender and class. His study is not based on literary analysis, but Turner does offer an expository study that can be linked to the representations of infidelity in the theatre. For the purposes of my investigation, I have applied Turner's historical research to evaluate not only how the sanctity of marriage was questioned in the plays, but how the moral boundaries of sexual behaviour were portrayed both as respected and as repeatedly overstepped.

This thesis spans a wide historical period between 1670 and 1700 and whilst I cannot provide a comprehensive chronological analysis of the period, this work offers an exploration of representative plays which encapsulate an expansive microcosm of sexual revolution, orthodoxy and societal change within differing sub-genres of comedy**.** By following the evolution of the theatre between 1670 and 1700, my examination gathers several strands of thematically narrow analytical studies on performance, gender dynamics and contemporaneous events. However, there has been no previously published research which attempts to bring these theories together within a philosophical paradigm. As such, studies of Restoration comedy have predominantly been limited to specific decades, seen in isolation with contemporaneous events, playwright biographies, or in criticism of gender roles.[40]

[40] Studies include *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1670: A Catalogue*, ed. by Manuel J. Gômez-Lara, Maria José Mora, Paula de Pando, Rafael Portillo, Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, and Rafael Vêlez Núñez (Teneo Press, 2014); Douglas Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1997);

This thesis will contribute to this body of knowledge by combining this disparate scholarly work to build upon and depart from current research by providing an understanding of the relationships between these different paradigms. Only through a review of this extensive body of drama can we gain a psychologically nuanced understanding of how playwrights used the imaginative aspects of power struggles, pleasure, societal expectations and self-awareness to emphasise the creative potential of pain and desire.

Methodology and Chapter Outlines

The application of a singular theoretical approach in this study provides an analysis of the texts and offers a unique perspective for interpreting dramatic structure. Gilles Deleuze's Masochean masochistic literary theory offers an aesthetic and symbolic system where submission acts as a strategic rewriting of power dynamics through pleasure and pain. The value of this approach lies in what it reveals about individual characters, and how it reorients our understanding of theatrical relationships. Applying Deleuze's conceptualisation to theatrical works allows for a nuanced exploration of characters who engage in complex negotiations of identity and authority. The theatre, with its performative nature, is an ideal space to observe the dynamics of gender, where the text and its enactment can mirror the aesthetic and structural dimensions of Deleuze's theory of masochism. Rather than interpreting characters through a clinical psychoanalytical model, Deleuze invites us to read them

Arthur Scouten and Robert D. Hume, '"Restoration Comedy" and Its Audiences, 1660-1776', *The Year Book of English Studies*, 10 (1980) 45-69; *The Female Wits: Women and Gender in Restoration Literature and Culture*, ed by. Juan Prieto-Pablo, Zenón Luís Martínez, Pilar Cuder Domínguez (Universidad de Huelva, 2021); Jon Lance Bacon, 'Wives, Widows, and Writings in Restoration Comedy, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31 (1991) 427-443.

as participants in a masochistic contract—a space of negotiation, repetition, and transformation.

Deleuze's reading of masochism is not primarily concerned with psychology but with the masochist's sensory experience, production of 'rituals' and 'culturalist' demands that suspend dominant models of law and power.[41] This attention to the formal and symbolic aspects of desire is particularly resonant in theatre, and by applying Deleuze's framework enables a mode of inquiry which is attuned to theatricality itself: to language, to gesture, to submission and authority. Edward P. Kazarin highlights how Deleuze constructs a revolutionary dynamism of desire through the masochistic contract, which 'liberates' the masochist 'from the father's law' and separates masochism from the sadistic model of transgression'.[42] This refusal of traditional psychoanalytic binaries allows for an adaptable and transformative understanding of subjectivity. In theatrical contexts, where identities are always in flux – performed, challenged, reconstituted – such a model is invaluable. Plays, especially those that resist clear moral or structural resolutions, offer an exploration of the instability and productivity of desire. When analysed this way, the stage becomes not only a site of performance but also of philosophical experimentation with the structures of identity and control.

While Deleuze's theoretical model provides interpretive possibilities, it has its own critical history and with all such conceptual approaches, its limitations as well. Edward P. Kazarian has argued that Deleuze is 'a philosopher who affirms creativity [and] transformation' but his theory of Masochean masochism is 'ambiguous' and 'can

[41] Gilles Deleuze, 'From Sacher Masoch to Masochism', trans. by Christian Kerslake, *Angelaki*, 9 (2004), 125-132 (p. 126). This article was originally published in 1961, Gilles Deleuze, 'De Sacher Masoch au masochisme', *Arguments*, 21 (1961), 40-46.
[42] Edward P. Karzarin, 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', *SubStance*, 39 (2010), 91-106, p. 99.

lead to misunderstandings – or perhaps worse, to oversimplifications'.[43] Torkild Thanem and Louise Wallenberg have criticised Deleuze's inadequate consideration of how masochism intersects with gender constructs and the unpredictable or harmful aspects of masochistic dynamics.[44] Indeed, Deleuze's forward thinking rejection of Freudian psychoanalysis is both influential and continually contested. Lode Lauwaert and William Britt have lauded Deleuze for unmasking 'the concept of sadomasochism as a clinical nonentity', but criticise his disregard for psychoanalytical insights, such as the role of ambivalence, and oversimplification of the nature of desire.[45] Indeed, psychoanalytical literary theory has undergone significant critique during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: from New Historicist's historically grounded approaches, New Criticism's focus on textual autonomy to Poststructuralism's deconstruction of meaning and identity. Psychoanalytical readings, particularly Freudian and Lacanian, have shaped literary criticism and focused on symbolic readings of repression and the unconscious. Deleuze's work in *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967) marks a critical departure from this tradition, offering a counter-reading that situates masochism not as a symptom but as a deliberate philosophical position.[46] By using this approach, masochism reflects an awareness of these shifting theoretical landscapes.

The act of applying any theory to a text is a critical decision and has the potential to obscure a text's cultural, historical and material nature. My application of Deleuze's ideology to the plays within this thesis is not an objective or exhaustive analysis and it

---

[43] Karzarin, p. 93.
[44] Torkild Thanem and Louise Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud and Deluze: toward a queer theory of masochism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 2 (2010), 1-10 (pp. 1-2) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/figure/10.3402/jac.v2i0.4642?scroll=top&needAccess=true> [Accessed 10 May 2025].
[45] Lode Lauwaert and William Britt, 'Gilles Deleuze on Sacher-Masoch and Sade: A Bergsonian Criticism of Freudian Psychoanalysis', *Deleuze Studies*, 9 (2015), 153-184 (pp. 153-155).
[46] Karzarin, p. 93.

should be acknowledged that this singular theoretical approach has the potential to detach the play from its original context. When applying a modern theory to earlier texts, such as those examined in this thesis, there are methodological tensions. The ideological frameworks from early modern drama are significantly different from modern cultural concerns, and historical and conceptual gaps exist. Nevertheless, Deleuze's conceptualisation, particularly the foregrounding of abstract structures and aesthetic effects, is one approach to the study of literature. Other methodologies, such as historical and theatrical approaches, offer different kinds of insight that ground a play in specific moments and practices, offering a material or nuanced understanding of meaning. A queer reading of Restoration comedies might consider the instability of heterosexual identity, homosociality and the continuum of desire; whilst a historical analysis might focus on the socio-political conditions in which a play was written and first performed, or an examination of the real-life relationships between performers. Indeed, through a theatrical lens, staging, actor practices, audience reception, and the innovations of Restoration theatre brings ephemerality, embodiment, and spectacle as central interpretive tools.

Yet I suggest that other theoretical approaches are complementary to Deleuze's theory. The application of Deleuze's Masochean masochistic psychoanalytical literary theory does not impose a fixed interpretation on dramatic texts, but explores how plays stage complex negotiations of power, desire, and temporality that often exceed conventional interpretive models. Deleuze's methodology offers a way of reading that foregrounds affect, structure, and repetition – elements which are intrinsic to the theatrical form. Equally, I remain conscious of the theoretical, historical, and performative contexts that shape both the texts themselves and my analysis of them. The value of theory lies not in its ability to provide objective answers, but in how it creates new ways of viewing a play. To apply Deleuze's conceptualisation is not to

reject other approaches but to make a contribution to the ongoing conversation about how we should read and understand Restoration comedy. This study forms part of this broader discourse, and whilst I acknowledge the possibilities and limitations of Deleuze's theory, the Masochean framework is a means for uncovering implicit structures of meaning in literature.

This thesis begins by examining Gilles Deleuze's theory of masochistic ideology from his monograph *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967). Chapter one, 'Deleuze, Masochism and Desire', discusses how Deleuze's theory of masochism has the potential to be applied to Restoration comedy. This chapter clarifies the differences between the better-known psychological state of Sadism and that of Masochism to explain the importance of eroticism and sexual deviancy as a form of positive destabilisation of gender relations. My study goes on to investigate the conceptual framework of the masochistic state which creates the desire for pleasure-pain, submission and domination. Finally, I explain the differences between Deleuze and Foucault's philosophical ideology on sexual desire and pleasure; specifically, I consider how both view sex as altering the way both men and women come to view themselves – not only physically, but psychologically within prevailing social standards.

Chapter two, 'Fear and Loathing: Marriage, Cuckoldry, and Masochistic Desire', analyses how John Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode*, William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* used more sexualised humour to highlight masculine anxieties surrounding marriage, adultery, and masculine identity. This choice of texts, by male playwrights, allows me to chart how the sexual humour and masochistic desires of their male characters developed over the period 1673–1682 to offer a critique of contemporaneous socio-morality, respectability and the sexual codes of marriage. Throughout the chapter, I consider how Deleuze's theory on the foundations of masochistic desire can be conceptualised through a libertine's

or husband's fear of sexual failure and the restrictions of marriage. My research questions whether the fear of cuckoldry grew into a sexual desire for humiliation as a specific type of pleasure which was reliant on submission to women. This study analyses whether a growth in sexual anxiety can be seen as a concurrent linear movement to both husbands and cuckolder. This examination reflects upon whether a changeability in sexual desire is linked with the instability of libertinistic freedom and the contemporaneous misinterpretation of Thomas Hobbes' philosophical treatise *Leviathan* (1651).

To compare and contrast the gender bias of male playwrights in the preceding chapter, in chapter three, 'The Masochist's Ideal: Independence, Disguise and Desire', I focus on how female and female-presenting dramatists Aphra Behn and Ariadne depict female characterisation and sexual agency within the period 1677–1695. The centre of interest for this chapter is to explore the female characters' psychological depiction in respect of the Deleuzian tripartite schema of masochistic women. As I suggested in chapter one, Masochean masochists seek a particular type of women to enable their fantasy, torture, and submission. In this chapter I examine how the Deleuzian women are portrayed in Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans* and *The Rover*, alongside Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* to add psychological subtlety to the ideal female torturer. I seek to apply Deleuze's theory to these plays to understand how the female characters challenge the stereotypical contemporaneous representation of women as passive and submissive to patriarchal demands.

Chapter Four, 'Law, Disorder, and the French Connection 1676–1681', enriches scant previous scholarly work on William Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer*, Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* and Nathaniel Lee's *The Princess of Cleve*. There are scant secondary sources from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and, therefore, one can explore these plays in a fresh light. This chapter focuses on how a Deleuzian

reading illuminates the dramaturgic treatment of the male masochist's personality during the period 1676–1680. Concurrently, my work will highlight how these plays illustrate the popularity of the translation and adaptation of French literature for the English state during the latter half of the 1670s. This work builds upon the two preceding chapters to investigate how, once masochist and torturer identify each other, their relationship is formed based on a binding contract which brings order and formality to their sexual desires. Throughout the examination, I investigate the similarities and differences in the masochistic contract when formed by libertines, husbands, and fathers and how the masochistic contract has a wider implication as a desire to escape the constraints of societal expectations. The examination of Wycherley and Behn's adaptations from several of Molière's plays, and Lee's of Madame de Lafayette's novel *La Princess de Clèves* leads me to discuss the differences, considering Deleuze's hypothesis, between French and English writing. This involves a discussion of how English playwrights augment and evolve the masochistic desire from the original literature and add a psychological depth to their characters' fantasies.

The final chapter, 'Beyond Masochism: The Reality of Conformity', focuses on the period 1670–1696 and analyses Thomas D'Urfey's *The Marriage-Hater Match'd*, John Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* and E. Polwhele's *The Frolicks* to discover whether masochistic desire is sustainable, cyclical, or finite to the point where it can no longer exist. The choice of plays for this chapter provides the challenge of analysing little known or studied texts. E. Polwhele is a little-known author whose play survives as a manuscript; D'Urfey's plays have been given little critical attention, and Vanbrugh's theatrical work has received slight scholarly research during the twenty-first century and demands a fresh reassessment to challenge narrowly historically inflected readings. The examination of these plays aims to test Deleuze's theory to discover its limitations and to question whether the masochistic desire does remain

extant and if the pleasure-pain of torture grows exponentially or plateaus. The chapter continues by querying whether there is a possibility for an ending to the masochistic relationship, and what the reasons might be for its conclusion, particularly through the playwrights' depiction of guilt, socio-moralistic fear, and gender conformity. Testing this hypothesis leads me to discover what potentially exists after the conclusion of the masochistic contract and therefore the fantasy – if, indeed, anything.

In the concluding chapter I will be carrying out a case study on William Congreve's *The Way of the World* to demonstrate how the entire Deleuzian masochistic framework – from conception to conclusion – can be applied. This study will provide a clearer understanding of how Deleuze's framework can be applied to plays which have not been analysed within this thesis.

Deleuze's conceptualisation of Masochean masochism is not solely a theory of sex or a taboo. It constitutes more than the fundamental sexual desire to experience pleasure from pain, humiliation and submission: it is a psychological, physical and emotional state that reflects authority and control. Masochism subverts the way we view society; it allows us to express what cannot be said, how we internalise our anxieties and externalise our disaffections. At its heart, masochism is humorous, it is ironic, and it fantastically transports us to a different topsy-turvy world where forbidden desires can be achieved. This leads to the question in the next chapter: why should Deleuze and his framework of Masochean masochistic desire be applied to Restoration comedy?

Chapter One

Deleuze, Masochism and Desire

The concept of masochism and its representation in literature can be considered a demanding and, at times, complex theory which demands an in-depth elucidation within this thesis. The cornerstone of the exploration of masochistic ideology remains Gilles Deleuze's long essay *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), and his attempt to clarify masochistic symptomatic features based upon his analysis of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novella, *Venus in Furs* (*Venus im Pelz)* (1870). When first published in Germany and Austria, the novella was reviewed as nihilistic by the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* (1870) and Larry Wolff highlights that Sacher-Masoch was seen as a 'dangerous artistic agent' who used 'barbarism to enhance [the] fantasies of romantic cruelty and sexual slavery'.[1] However, in France, Sacher-Masoch was fêted and made a 'triumphant journey to Paris where he was decorated and entertained'.[2] Deleuze frames his hypothesis around Sacher-Masoch's novella to attempt to disentangle the popular notion that sadism and masochism, or sado-masochism, are an indistinguishable and singular psychologically perverted state.

The separation of the sado-masochism binary allowed Deleuze to create a framework through which masochism can be both diagnosed and viewed within literature. Deleuze indicated that masochism is more complex and nuanced than

[1] *Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna, 1870), cited in Michel Bernard, *Sacher-Masoch* (Editions Robert Laffont, 1989), p.181**;** Larry Wolff, 'Introduction', in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs,* (Penguin Books, 2000), pp. vii-xxviii (p. xi); *Venus in Furs* was translated into English and French (*La Vénus à la fourrure*) simultaneously in 1902 by R. Ledos de Beaufort, but as Deleuze states, the translation was 'extremely inaccurate'. Deleuze uses an updated French translation by Aude Willm in his monograph, and this translation into French from the original German is still the standard translation, Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), p.12; Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch, Avec le texte integral de La Vénus à la fourrure*, trans by Aude Willm (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967).
[2] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p.10.

sadism; the fundamental differences between sadism – that of unerotic, non-consensual violence, domination and destruction – is inherently different from the primary level of masochism which involves a complex, consensual interaction between the masochist and torturer. The masochist is not interested in experiencing physical pain, instead masochism is a psychological state where desire and pleasure are achieved through the delay or suspension of sexual gratification.

This thesis aims to illuminate the connection between the masochistic state and revolutionary attitudes towards sexuality. As I have discussed previously, the period from 1670 marked a distinct move towards depictions of the tension between promiscuity and morality. An application of Deleuze's literary theories and masochistic framework reveals an enthusiastic authorial need, for both male and female playwrights, to express the unexpressed desire for male submission and female dominance.

There is a scarcity of francophone scholarly studies on Deleuze's theory of masochism and therefore, this thesis engages exclusively with anglophone research. Ronald Bogue's significant research on Deleuze's theory highlights how the 'commonly held' misconceptions surrounding the conjoined states drove Deleuze to establish 'the importance of Sacher-Masoch and [demonstrate] that masochism is a perversion in many ways parallel to, but entirely distinct from that of sadism'.[3] Throughout this chapter, I will investigate how Deleuze links his philosophical theory of masochism with literature, and by extension, how I can apply this link to drama. Simultaneously, my study will broach how the Marquis de Sade's sadism differs from Sacher-Masoch's masochism to provide a clearer comprehension of masochism. This chapter will conclude with an examination of the importance of Deleuze's conceptualisation of the

[3] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (Routledge, 1989), p. 45.

masochistic state, sexuality and desire considering Foucault's work on the history of sexuality. This exploration of Deleuze's concept provides the groundwork on which this thesis is established: it reassesses how Restoration comedy engages with desire, power and society.

Deleuze, Philosophy, and Literature

Deleuze was to periodically return to and elucidate his work on Sacher-Masoch and masochism throughout his career, including a chapter in his final, posthumously published work *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1998). To appreciate the application of his theory of masochism to Restoration comedies, and their reflections on sexual and cultural dynamics, it is advantageous to consider how it formed a larger element of his conceptualisation of how writers 'can reconfigure the relationship between literature and philosophy' to reflect and question their contemporaneous culture.[4] Deleuze's analysis of *Venus in Furs*, and works by Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka and D.H. Lawrence form part of his attempt to link philosophical thought and authorial intent. Although Deleuze's literary analysis has focused on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, I would suggest his theory should not be considered bound to these periods. A fresh application of the Masochean masochistic framework, Deleuze's assertion that the writer acts as a cultural philosopher, allows for a new perspective on Deleuze's theoretical relevance to pre-nineteenth-century literature, and for the purposes of this thesis, Restoration comedy.

Deleuze suggests that literature is not just about the writer's psychological state at the time of writing: it is how they are the vehicle for communicating ideas, how they

[4] Bogue, pp. 35-36.

produce a text that interacts with the reader – or viewer – and how the wider cultural contexts and historical events influence the author. John Hughes highlights that 'style', or writing technique, 'was a lifetime preoccupation' for Deleuze, whereby 'creative and diagnostic powers of the mind [of authors] could intervene against culturally oppressive fictions of subjectivity' in society.[5] Hughes suggests that Deleuze's literary theory allows for an 'experimental practice' which 'brings about a qualitative shift in sensibility and thought, and makes available new precepts and affects, new passages of desire'.[6] I would suggest its application to Restoration literature is germane: playwrights could swiftly respond to events and had the power to address, if not sway, their audience's thinking through their writing. Ronald Bogue criticises Deleuze for not directly offering 'a systematic "theory" of literature', or a theory that is 'easily extrapolated from his [Deleuze's] various literary studies', but opportunely, Deleuze's indistinct and unfettered theoretical approach allows for my interpretation of both his work, and a reassessment of Restoration comedy, based upon an expository theoretical framework.[7]

Bogue argues that throughout Deleuze's work, from *Coldness and Cruelty* to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze saw the writer as a 'physician of culture, [who acted as] both a symptomatologist who reads culture's signs of sickness and health, and a therapist whose remedies promotes new possibilities of life' for its audience.[8] He stated that the writer was a doctor, or 'symptomatologist', who diagnosed and prescribed remedies which would attempt to change societal failings through literature. Daniel Smith suggests that Deleuze's interpretation of Marcel Proust's *À la*

[5] John Hughes, 'Deleuze, Style and Literature', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 21 (2010) 269-284, (p. 269).
[6] Hughes, p. 270.
[7] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* (Routledge, 2003), p. 2.
[8] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 12.

recherche du temps perdu was a 'symptomatology of various worlds of signs that mobilize the involuntary and the unconscious' in order to alter the world outside the narrative.[9] Bogue offers a compelling clarification of Deleuze's symptomatology-literature analogy – medicinal symptomatology is the interpretation of 'signs', it is the 'foundation of *la Clinique* [...] the art of diagnoses through the direct observation of patients', to which authors create a mimesis by objectively examining societal reality to diagnose its problems.[10] Deleuze's connection between medicine and art, writer as symptomatologist, would repeatedly figure throughout his work; however, the medico-artistic comparison originated in *Coldness and Cruelty*. Deleuze elucidated that 'medicine distinguishes between syndrome and symptoms, a symptom being the specific sign of an illness, and a syndrome the meeting-place [...] of manifestations issuing from very different origins and arising within variable contexts' which ultimately forms an author's artistic drive.[11]

Deleuze went further in his exposition of this drive: surmising that authors could be seen as both doctors and 'philosophers of the future' in society.[12] They were individuals 'whose critique of sense and values subsumes art and medicine [or] creation and healing' who could view, diagnose and treat through their works.[13] Deleuze suggests that the purpose of literature is to reflect society; it can highlight its strengths, criticise its failings and have the power to change its limitations. Deleuze would go on to theorise that authors are

[9] Daniel Smith, 'Introduction', in Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel Smith and Michael Greco (Verso, 1998), pp. xi-liii (p. xix).
[10] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 15.
[11] Deleuze, pp. 13-14.
[12] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 15.
[13] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 15.

> great anthropologists, of the type whose work succeeds in embracing a whole conception of man, culture and nature; they are also great artists in that they discovered new forms of expression, new ways of thinking and feeling and an entirely original language.[14]

As anthropologists, authors or playwrights were able to view the world through the interrelation of objectivity and subjectivity: rationally they view and depict what the world or society is and offer a personal view of how it can be. Ronald Bogue illuminates the authorial diagnostic process of Deleuze's symptomatology-literature theory by summarising Deleuze's framework for masochistic desire and describing the potential for its application to non-period specific literature. Bogue summarises that

> The artist begins with a personal phantasy, an obsessional 'figure' that might well form part of a neurosis, perversion or other psychological fixation, but then converts the 'figure' into a properly artistic 'problem' by determining its structure and engaging that structure as the material for artistic creation.[15]

Bogue's choice of words of 'neurosis', 'perversion' and 'fixation' allows for a duality of interpretation: as both authorial reasoning behind the depiction of masochistic desire, and the desire to utilise masochistic desire to change societal problems. Bogue continues by describing the phantasy in both general and masochistic specific terms, indicating that the phantasy forms 'the basic element of dreams and daydreams' and part of the masochistic 'imaginary *scene*' which 'tends to be transported into a theatre, a series of atmospheric tableaus' – specifics that can be transposed onto the founding

[14] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 16.
[15] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 19.

structure of a play.[16] Indeed, I would suggest this 'phantasy' can be applied to Restoration playwrights' work, not only as a reflection on illicit sexual desire, but to create and depict the need for female defiance and masculine submission to show how an egalitarian society could be fashioned.

Daniel Watt shifts Deleuze's conceptualisation of authorial intent to the theatre, suggesting authors of literature 'are obliged to be interesting, to have a certain style and wit' but these eventually infringe upon 'other boundaries [...] of genre: from fiction to fact [...] literature into theatre' to be readable'.[17] Equally, Ronald Bogue recommends that authors, 'like philosophers [...] engage in a mode of thought, but it is thought in the form of commands and descriptions, scenes, dramas, rites and actions, doubles of the world and language' to expose hypocrisy and society's failings.[18] Indeed, Bogue proposes that authors 'create a double of the world, a completely structural set of forms that counter the real, either through negation or disavowal' to create new ideologies that provide thought-provoking 'counterworlds' that depict a better, alternate society.[19] Bruce Baugh furthers Bogue's argument by suggesting that writers are create 'experiments' that 'the reader is able to make use of [interpret] personally, socially [and] politically' to reflect their 'desires, needs and objectives'.[20] Furthermore, and pertinent to my application of Deleuze's masochistic theory to Restoration comedy, Bogue remarks, using Deleuze's lexis, that authors diagnose 'civilization's illnesses by clarifying and emphasizing their structures, and each opens

[16] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 20.
[17] Daniel Watt, 'Performing, Strolling, Thinking: From Minor Literature to Theatre of the Future', in *Deleuze and Performance*, ed. by Laura Cull (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 96-97.
[18] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 21.
[19] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 21.
[20] Bruce Baugh, 'How Deleuze can help us make literature work', in *Deleuze and Literature*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and John Marks (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 36.

new possibilities for life by ironically or humorously warping and transforming these structures' into a profound, critique of society.[21]

Deleuze and the Symptomatology of Masochism

Deleuze, with perhaps uncharacteristic clarity reaffirmed this author-as-symptomatologist theory in his work *The Logic of Sense* (1969). He proposed that 'clinicians [...] review a symptomatological table to produce a work of art; [and] conversely, artists are clinical, not with respect to their own case, nor even with respect to a case in general; rather they are clinicians of civilization'; authors not only had a subjective freedom to reveal societal defects, but, in the case of masochistic desire, to diagnose a mental state.[22] Daniel Smith, in his introduction to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, argues in defence of Deleuze's medical analogy, and proposes that what 'links literature and life, in both its ontological and its ethical aspects, is the question of *health*', a question which arises from the collective's fear of the changing moral landscape, gender equality and identity that became a form of mental hypochondria.[23] Deleuze's work on Sacher-Masoch and diagnostic framework of Masochean masochism both questions and attempts to answer the question of health not only within *Venus in Furs* but also in reality.

The state, or perversion, of masochistic desire was not symptomatologically new when Sacher-Masoch published *Venus in Furs*. Indeed, the Viennese psychiatrist Richard Kraft Ebbing had begun diagnosing the symptoms of masochistic pleasure in his medico-forensic study *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). It is only with the publication

[21] Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, p. 21.
[22] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of* Sense, trans. by Constantin Boundas, Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 248.
[23] Smith, p. xv.

of Sacher-Masoch's novella that masochism became a recognisable and developed diagnosis with a name. However, Smith highlights that Deleuze was reticent about the labelling of a state of health after either a doctor or patient, and Deleuze himself claimed 'the judgment of the clinicians is prejudiced, we [the literary analysts] must take an entirely different approach, the *literary approach*, since it is from literature that stem the original definitions', and as Smith concurs, naming of an illness deserves 'careful analysis' before becoming an identifiable syndrome.[24] Whether doctor or clinician-author, they

> [do] not 'invent' the disease, but rather [are] said to 'isolate' it, […] in this way, the doctor constructs an original clinical concept for the disease: the components of the concept are the symptoms, the signs of the illness, and the concept becomes the name of the *syndrome*, which marks the meeting place of these symptoms, their point of coincidence or convergence.[25]

Both Sacher-Masoch and Kraft Ebbing can be seen as 'profound symptomatologists' who recognise the manifestation of masochism comes from 'very different origins and [arises] within variable contexts' that converge into a single diagnosis.[26] Kraft Ebbing observed and attempted to define masochistic sexual pathology, recording

> The acts to which masochists give themselves up, are performed in some cases in connection with coitus; i.e., as preparatory measures; in others, as substitutes for coitus when that is impossible. […] Almost all prostitutes agree

[24] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 14; Smith, p. xvi.
[25] Smith, p. xvi.
[26] Smith, p. xvii; Deleuze, *Masochism*, pp. 13-14.

> that there are many men who like to play 'slave,' – *i.e.*, like to be so called, and have themselves scolded and trod upon and beaten. As has been said, the number of masochists is larger than has yet to be dreamed.[27]

Kraft Ebbing's observation that the number of people who could be termed as masochists might be 'larger' than thought both implies its definition, and the desire had been extant for a sustained period before either his research, or its depiction in Sacher-Masoch's novella.

Nevertheless, there is a confused reciprocity between medicine and the philosophical approach to symptomatology: to what extent do real behaviours resemble works of fiction, or fiction of reality? As suggested above, Deleuze was reticent to name a disease after its symptomatologist and tacitly censured Kraft Ebbing for treating Sacher-Masoch 'unjustly' by naming the masochistic state after him; criticism which Kraft Ebbing had been subjected to previously, having had to defend himself in *Psychopathia Sexualis* by refuting 'the accusation that I have coupled the name of the revered author [Sacher-Masoch] with a perversion of the sexual instinct'.[28] Deleuze was perhaps contradictory in this accusation and Kraft Ebbing would ultimately feel

> justified in calling this sexual anomaly 'Masochism,' because the author *Sacher-Masoch* frequently made this perversion, which up to his time was quite unknown to the scientific world as such [and] during recent years facts have

[27] Richard von Kraft-Ebbing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (William Heinemann Medical Books, 1939), p.107.
[28] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 13; Kraft-Ebbing, p. 132

> been advanced which prove that Sacher-Masoch was not only the poet of Masochism, but that he himself was afflicted with this anomaly.[29]

Deleuze would, similarly, highlight that

> Masoch's tastes in matters of love are well known: he enjoyed pretending to be a bear or a bandit or having himself pursued, tied up and subjected to punishments [...] he was given to dressing up as a servant, making use of all kinds of fetishes and disguises [...] signing contracts with the women in his life and if need be prostituting them.[30]

Both Kraft Ebbing and Deleuze's descriptions of Sacher-Masoch's sexual desires converge at the same symptomatology, but with no firm conclusive stance on a similar diagnosis. It is author and doctor who intersect with their own mimetic subjectivity to reduce, elevate and validate masochism as a literary characteristic. Deleuze, as philosopher, creates and elucidates upon their symptomatology to structure a framework on which the state of masochism is depicted within a text.

The Separation of Sadism and Masochism in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*

As I previously stated in the introduction to this chapter, Deleuze felt compelled to separate the conjoined clinical states of Sadism and Masochism in his critical monograph on *Venus in Furs*. Deleuze principally viewed masochism as a complete

[29] Kraft-Ebbing, p. 132.
[30] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 10.

opposite to sadism and as an independent, distinct phenomenon with its own unique dynamics and logic. Deleuze criticised the use of the term sadomasochism, suggesting that clinical studies of sadism were 'considerably enriched' by 'literary research on the work of Sade', whilst 'even the best writing on masochism [shows] a surprising ignorance of [Sacher-Masoch's] work'.[31] For Deleuze, these states of perversion, named after the authors, were inherently different and 'ought to be split up into irreducible causal chains', whilst simultaneously having 'something essential to teach us' about sexuality and life.[32] He continues by suggesting that Sacher-Masoch's 'universe has nothing to do with that of Sade. Their techniques differ, and their problems, their concerns and their intentions are entirely dissimilar' within their works.[33]

Deleuze believed Sacher-Masoch's writing was 'important and unusual', and his use of 'folklore, history, politics, mysticism, eroticism, nationalism and perversion [were] closely intermingled' to create 'a nebula around [...] scenes of flagellation' within his novella.[34] Deleuze's use of the word 'flagellation' might lead the reader to cursorily understand the novella as mere titillation or sadistic pornography; however, it is a nuanced examination of psychological desire, power and submission. Sacher-Masoch's plot follows the desires, obsessions and power dynamics of the relationship between Severin von Kusiemski and Wanda von Dunajew. The novel is framed around the unnamed narrator's dream of being mercilessly taunted by Venus, dressed in furs. The narrator, when visiting Severin, sees a painting of Severin cowering at the feet of a woman, who holds a whip and is treading on his neck. In wonderment, the narrator tells Severin that it is pictorially the same as his dream. Severin gives the narrator a

[31] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 13.
[32] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 13.
[33] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 13.
[34] Deleuze, *Masochism*, pp. 10-11.

book, *Confessions of a Suprasensual Man*, telling him that it details Severin's affair with Wanda, and it will stop his desire to be tormented by a cruel woman. It details a journey where Severin's lustful obsession with Venus grows – he buys a picture of her, and writes devotional poetry on its back; finally, he is caught worshipping a statue of Venus. In a comedic mistake, Wanda discovers Severin's poetry and cruelly dresses the statue of Venus in furs. When Severin sees the statue, it comes to life and chases him around the garden.

Afterwards, Severin talks to Wanda about his life: his mistreatment in childhood and broken relationships which have left him disillusioned. He tells Wanda that he wants a woman who can torment him into feeling desire, and she admits a need to be dominated. Severin asks Wanda to marry him in the hope of becoming her slave; she agrees on the conditions that they wait a year; she will only love him for two months and will command him for one year. Wanda becomes abusive and demands Severin sign a contract which obliges him to become her slave, and she can treat him in any way she wants. He is resistant to this, believing Wanda will break the contract and find another man, but she persuades him by reminding him they are in love. Wanda begins psychologically torturing Severin – treating him as a servant, flirting with other men, and persuading a trio of women to help her torture him. Nevertheless, she believes Severin has completely corrupted her. Later, she confirms Severin's fear by beginning an affair with a painter, who agrees to paint the picture of the kneeling Severin.

Wanda is more barbarous towards Severin; she becomes disenchanted with him and confesses that she does not love him, and he is free to leave her. Severin declines and watches Wanda begin an affair with the domineering Alexis Papodopolis. Severin begs Wanda to marry him instead of Alexis, but she no longer has any desire for him, and to placate Severin, Wanda tricks him into thinking she wants to whip him

by tying him to a bed post. In a cruel twist, Wanda gives the whip to Alexis, who brutally lashes Severin whilst she watches. Severin finally leaves Wanda, and he receives his painting from her in the post. At the denouement of the novel, Severin tells the narrator that his desire for submission has been cured by Wanda, and violent women and weak men are inherent to humanity.

Symptomatically, the novella provides a darkly humorous, if not at times, hyperbolically comedic outline for the cycle of the masochistic state rather than sadistic. During the narrator's dream, he and Venus sum up the hypocritical masculine need for female sexual submission when he tells her:

> 'I do not wish to reproach you. You are undoubtedly a divine woman, but above all you are a woman and, like every member of your sex, cruel in matters of love.'
>
> 'What you call cruelty,' the goddess of Love retorted, 'is the very substance of sensual and natural love. It is a woman's true nature to give herself wherever she loves and to love whatever pleases her.'
>
> 'But can there be a greater cruelty for a lover than a beloved's infidelity?'
>
> 'Alas,' she replied, 'woman is faithful as long as she loves, but you demand that she be faithful without love and give herself without enjoyment. Who is cruel then, woman or man? You northerners take love too seriously. You speak of duty where it is purely a question of pleasure.'[35]

Deleuze would highlight the 'dialectical spirit' of Sacher-Masoch's characters, and how their 'eroticism is able to act as a mirror to the world by reflecting its excesses, drawing

[35] Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, trans. by Jean McNeil, in Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), pp. 143-293 (pp. 144-145).

out its violence and even conferring a "spiritual" quality on these phenomena by the very fact that it puts them at the service of the senses' in attempt to mirror and change societal behaviour through a sexual perspective.[36] For this reason, Deleuze veers away from the assumption that either Sacher-Masoch or de Sade use eroticism as mere pornographers, instead he describes them as writing '"pornology" because [their] erotic language cannot be reduced to the elementary functions of ordering and describing' in a perfunctorily sexual manner.[37] Pornologists are analytical in their depicitions of eroticism. The sadist requires, according to Deleuze, 'institutions' and the masochist 'contractual relations' to achieve either a physical or mental sexual pleasure.[38] Ronald Bogue summarises that 'Sade's universe is one of rational delirium, ironic demonstration and reiterated mechanical movement, whereas Masoch's is one of imagination of phantasy, humorous education and frozen suspension' in a clear symptomatic diagnosis of the differing psycho-sexual states.[39] Sacher-Masoch himself perhaps provides a clear differentiation between Sadism and Masochism by ending *Venus in Furs* didactically: Severin accepts that 'the moral of the tale [is] whoever allows himself to be whipped deserves to be whipped' (p.271) .

The plots, characterisations and actions within Restoration comedies are similar, if not a pre-cursor to the humour and sexual games of Sacher-Masoch's novella. The plays reflect and comment humorously on society, its hypocrisy and the struggle between morality and immorality. Restoration plays and the novella share the homogenous themes of gender subversion, female empowerment, and sexual and immoral desire. Whether a light-hearted or dark comedy – men desire women but cannot possess them, they can possess them but cannot control them – sexual

[36] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 22; Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 37.
[37] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 18.
[38] Deleuze, *Masochism*, pp. 20-21.
[39] Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*, p. 13.

frustration becomes self-destructive and out of this anguish the masochistic desire is created. The masochist's pleasure becomes the need for dominance, humiliation and submission to an unattainable woman.

Deleuze's Masochistic Framework

Deleuze follows the plot of Sacher-Masoch's novella to create a framework for the development of masochistic desire, highlighting the aesthetic aspect of masochism, particularly its manifestation in literature. Deleuze focuses on the symbolic, ritualistic aspects of submission and domination, which is central to his diagnosis of masochism. He emphasises the use of role-play, disguises, and settings which structure the masochist's tortuous fantasy world. Deleuze argued that masochism is rooted in this fantasy which creates a desire or need for ordered psychological pain through a structured masochistic-torturer relationship. The masochist seeks to be dominated under conditions they can both orchestrate and control; ultimately, the masochist gives consent to his psychological abuse and dictates the terms of the experience through an implicit or explicit contract. However, Deleuze suggests this contracted humiliation is not painful, it is about creating a condition of anticipation, tension and control through submission to his torturer.[40]

For Deleuze, the role of time, and delayed gratification, are pivotal to the masochistic state. The deferral of pleasure is essential to the masochist's need to prolong their submission, and this is at the core of masochistic eroticism; the torturer's suspension, or control of when pleasure is received becomes the masochist's sexual stimulation and must necessarily last for the duration of their masochistic contract.

[40] Deleuze, *Masochism*, pp. 91-102.

Deleuze emphasises the role of the mother figure in masochism, which he contrasts with the paternal authority present in sadism. In masochism, there is a cold, distant, but idealised female figure who represents a symbolic power which drives the masochist to seek a particular woman to become his torturer.[41]

For the masochist there is a humour, or irony, in his state of humiliation which subverts the sovereignty and restrictive nature of the law. The masochist uses humour to destabilise the view that the law is commensurate with the repression of desire; nevertheless, they do not undermine the law with subversion, but by adhering to it in a validation and permission for their contractual submission. Deleuze suggests masochistic desire highlights the law's absurdity: the masochist appears to obey the law and in doing so creates a mockery of it. The classical law's punishment of forbidden desire allows for the masochist's satisfaction that is made possible by the legal restrictions imposed upon them.[42]

Deleuze's theory can be seen as a framework of how pleasure and pain become deconstructed and experienced in masochism. They are no longer experienced in their conventional forms, but are restructured into a unique structure of power, desire, and submission. The masochist reorganises the relationship between desire and pain, and focuses their attention on tortuous control through surrender, and an eroticisation of tension and deferral of pleasure. It involves an intricate interplay between fantasy, consent, and delayed gratification which emphasises the masochist's creation of a controlled experience of submission.

[41] Deleuze, *Masochism*, pp. 47-80.
[42] Deleuze, *Masochism*, pp. 81-90.

Deleuze and Foucault: Desire and Pleasure

Deleuze's work focuses on the desire and power of the masochist; however, another prominent figure in twentieth-century philosophy, Michel Foucault, is possibly better known for his work on sexual desire in the *History of Sexuality* (1976). Both philosophers address masochism in their works, but their conceptualisations and perspectives are radically different. Foucault approaches masochism as a form of moralistic regulation and repression of desire; Deleuze views it as a positive force that is creative and frees the individual from moral constraints. This section's examination of their respective views gives a clearer insight into Deleuze's relevance to this doctoral study, rather than the work of Foucault. Both Deleuze and Foucault offer distinct, but complementary understandings of sexuality and desire which are connected to their broader theories of power and subjectivity. Deleuze and Foucault share similar theories on desire, which Frida Beckman suggests have 'the potential to identify, dismantle and revolutionise' the theory of sexuality.[43] It is their work on desire and sexuality which marked 'the beginning of a rift between them', particularly how the role of power shapes both the individual and society which put Deleuze and Foucault in direct conflict with each other. [44]

Foucault's work is less about the nature of desire itself and more about how it is shaped and regulated through discussion and control. His work addresses how 'desire has been very firmly situated in relation to power' and it is this relationship which 'controls and restricts pleasure' through discipline and subjectivity.[45] In Foucault's view, desire is always intertwined with power and it cannot exist

[43] Frida Beckman, *Between Desire and Pleasure* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 16.
[44] Beckman, p. 17.
[45] Beckman, p. 23.

independently. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argued sexuality and desire are not repressed by power but are, in fact, shaped and brought into being through institutions; for example, the law.[46] Foucault theorises the law does not simply repress desire, it can 'exclude, block, disallow and separate sexuality into binary systems of licit and the illicit' that produces forms of knowledge about sexuality, which in turn shapes how individuals experience and understand their desires.[47]

For Foucault, desire has a 'direct link with the power of the law', which needs to be escaped from 'if we are to find a more rewarding way of analysing the history of sexuality'.[48] Foucault critiques what he terms as the repressive hypothesis, the idea that modern societies have repressed sexual desire since the nineteenth century.[49] As Beckman highlights, sexuality secures 'the means to govern the behaviours of the subjects of society [and] to interpret desire as part of the nature of their very being'.[50] Indeed, Foucault suggests that desire is an inherent human process which allows individuals to understand their identity and sexuality within the bounds of society.[51]

As I have highlighted previously in this chapter, Deleuze suggests that desire follows the law, but 'threatens its very being' by freeing desire from repression.[52] This theory was first conceptualised within *Coldness and Cruelty*, but Deleuze's theory of desire is most fully described in his collaboration with Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). Deleuze and Guattari suggest desire 'is revolutionary', and it is 'of vital importance for a society to repress desire [...] so that repression, hierarchy, exploitation, and servitude are themselves desired' to be productive and constructive

[46] Beckman, pp. 23-24.
[47] Beckman, p. 24.
[48] Beckman, p. 24.
[49] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (Penguin Random House, 2020), pp. 17-49.
[50] Beckman, p. 24.
[51] Foucault, pp. 17-49.
[52] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seam and Helen R. Lane (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 139.

within society.[53] Deleuze and Guattari create the term 'desiring-production' to emphasise that desire generates new realities which are intertwined with all aspects of life,[54] rather than the narrow Foucauldian understanding of desire. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari suggest 'desire does not "want" revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as though involuntary, by wanting what it wants'; it is a positive force which constantly seeks to break free from social constraints.[55] Ultimately, for Deleuze, 'social production and desiring production are one and the same [...] production exercises an essential repression of desiring production – a "real" desire – is potentially capable of demolishing the social form'.[56]

Deleuze and Foucault's differing understanding of desire and pleasure is at the core of my application of Deleuze's masochistic theory. Whilst both philosophers have complementary conceptualisations, Beckman succinctly identifies their differences – Deleuze 'vehemently rejects the notion of pleasure [and] Foucault feels an equally strong aversion to the notion of desire'.[57] Deleuze would suggest there is 'no positive value to pleasure because pleasure seems to me to interrupt the immanent process of desire; pleasure seems to me to be on the side of strata and organization' in an act of repression.[58] Ultimately, Deleuze himself offers a humorous comparison between his and Foucault's differing stances on desire and pleasure, stating

> it is not by chance that Michel [Foucault] attaches a certain importance to Sade, and myself on the contrary to Masoch. It would not be enough to say that I am

[53] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 139.
[54] Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 11-66.
[55] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 140.
[56] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 140.
[57] Beckman, p. 19.
[58] Gilles Deleuze, 'Desire and Pleasure', in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith, ed. by Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 264-274 (p. 271).

> masochistic, and Michel sadistic. That would be nice but not true. What interests me in Masoch are not the pains but the idea that pleasure interrupts the positivity of desire.[59]

The application of Deleuze's theory of Masochean masochism to Restoration comedy proffers an opportunity to reassess what it can tell the modern viewer about gender, sex, and morality during the period 1670–1700. By viewing comedy through the Deleuzian framework of masochism, and its wider application to cultural and societal contexts, the concept of desire allows a reinterpretation of a playwright's authorial intent within the theatre: how they chose to challenge authority, hypocrisy and repression to advocate for a better, fairer society. The point of departure in chapter two is the examination of how the core of Deleuze's framework – the fantasy – was depicted in Restoration comedy.

[59] Deleuze, *Desire and Pleasure*, pp. 271-272.

Chapter Two

Fear and Loathing: Marriage, Cuckoldry, and Desire

Any framework must have a foundation, and Deleuze's Masochean masochistic conceptualisation begins with the creation of the fantasy. It is an illusory world that becomes a tool for the exploration of desires, a space for pleasure and a location for identity formation. The masochistic fantasy is borne out of the need for the psychological control of anxieties surrounding infidelity, sexual failure and repression of desire. The fantasy is a vehicle for a reversal in gender power dynamics: the masochist submits to a torturer for the pleasure of humiliation, degradation and domination. This desire is an act of power and a symbolic surrender which allows the masochist freedom from sexual constraints.

Throughout the early years of the Restoration period, marriage, infidelity and libertinistic freedom were both condemned and celebrated in the theatre. After the restoration of Charles II there was a marked rise in licentiousness amongst the aristocracy: sex, infidelity and sin – the struggle between morality and immorality – became a defining theme of comedy. On the stage, libertines feared the sexual repression of monogamy and husbands feared the damage cuckoldry had on the sanctity of their marriages. Both stances critiqued the hypocrisy of matrimony, respectability and society. This chapter focuses on how John Dryden, William Wycherley and Edward Ravenscroft responded incisively to the rapidly changing attitudes towards marriage, immorality and patriarchal anxieties in their respective plays: *Marriage a-la-Mode* (1673), *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The London Cuckolds* (1682). This examination allows for a Deleuzian interpretation of the narratives to illuminate how the masochistic fantasy is born out of repression,

cuckoldry and sexual failure. I will evaluate the methods in which the masochistic desire provides an escape from the reality of these masculine concerns, and how it leads to the masochistic desire for humiliation and submission. Concurrently, there will be a focus on how the depiction of this masochistic impulse creates a need for female empowerment to ensure sexual freedom and pleasure-pain.

Marriage a-la-Mode, The Country Wife and *The London Cuckolds* chart the rise and fall of sex boom comedy in the theatre during the 1670s and early 1680s. I suggest that during this period there was a distinct move towards the derision of monogamous marriage and a celebration of infidelity and new sexual ideals. Derek Hughes argues that at the beginning of the decade 'traditional [...] ideals are now very much confined to the margins' of the theatre.[1] Sexual humour which offered a critique on socio-morality began with Thomas Betterton's libidinous sex comedy *The Amorous Widow* (*c.*1670). Robert D. Hume suggests Betterton's play was 'seminal [...] in the development of sex comedy', and his opinion is useful to understand how libertinism and chaotic marriage mirrored the rampant sexual, immoral activity which had come to define Charles II's Court.[2] Thomas Shadwell retains the bawdiness of Betterton's play but offers an implicitly moralistic tone towards sexual impropriety and monogamy in *Epsom Wells* (1672). It is against this background that Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode* expresses a critique of societal hypocrisy, sexuality, and the potential incompatibility of marriage with erotic freedom and desire. As will be seen, it is out of this disarray, hypocrisy and incompatibility that Dryden depicts the masochistic fantasy.

[1] Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 115.
[2] Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 299.

Tumultuous Marriages in John Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode*

John Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1673) has received sustained critical attention, particularly for Dryden's reflection and critique of the moral and libertine conventions of upper-class society. This section seeks to deepen that understanding by examining how Dryden engages with libertine hostility toward institutional authority — specifically, how he portrays the sanctity of marriage as a source of repression, sexual frustration, and a constraint that ultimately undermines masculine identity. The examination of the libertinistic rejection of authority serves as a foundation for this study's application of Gilles Deleuze's theory of masochism, particularly the concept of the fantasy, as a complex construct of desire shaped by rebellion, oppression, and frustration. Focusing on the comedic plotline, this analysis will explore how Dryden, writing during a time of theatrical and moral ambiguity, uses a dual narrative structure both to initially obscure and eventually illuminate his position on self-determination, infidelity, and the inherent instability of marriage.

The play was written during a heated period of political and socio-moralistic discord in England.[3] The anxieties surrounding the advent of the bitter Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–1674), alongside the artistic rivalry between the London theatre troupes were channelled into a humorous confrontation with the hypocrisy of Restoration societal values by Dryden.[4] With many upper-class men away at the war, the 1671–1672 theatre season marked a period where playwrights had to entertain a

[3] There is some disagreement as to the date of the first performance of *Marriage-a-la-Mode*. The play was not published until 1673, and *The London Stage* notes that the premiere of *Marriage a-la-Mode* is 'most uncertain', but the first confirmed performance was on 1st April 1672, *The London Stage 1660–1700,* ed. by William Van Lennep (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 194. However, Robert D. Hume suggests that the play premiered earlier in 1671, Robert D. Hume, 'The Date of Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode*', in *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 21 (1973), 53-58 (p. 161).
[4] Richard Kroll, 'Instituting Empiricism: Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode'*, in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, ed. by Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne (The University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 39-66 (p. 39).

smaller, different class of audience to the usual mass of 'royalty, quality, gallants, citizens [and] whores' who came to the theatre for diversion.[5] As described earlier, the theatrical rivalry between the King's Company and the Duke's Company created a radical strategy of artistic competitiveness which drove increasing stylistic changes in order to capture the audience's attention.[6]

As outlined in this chapter's introduction, the early 1670s marked a shift in theatrical representation — from moralistic depictions to increasingly libidinous portrayals of sex on stage. This transformation mirrored the overt promiscuity of certain aristocratic circles, particularly those who rejected religious and moral conventions. Lawrence Stone's research on sex and marriage in seventeenth-century England underscores this cultural shift. He notes that after Charles II's restoration there was a release of sexual, openly non-monogamous tension amongst the court which became 'absorbed in an endless game of sexual musical chairs' where traditional institutions like marriage were increasingly disregarded.[7] Libertines were critical of the role that strict religious doctrines had on dictating socio-behavioural rules and dismissed the moral constraints placed upon them in favour of hedonistic freedom. Warren Chernaik highlights that libertines during the early Restoration period created a 'fashionable atheism and scorn for the dullness of conservative belief [which] served as badges of acceptance' for freedom of sexual desire.[8] Sexual licentiousness, for the libertine, became a state of being, a byword for escaping the constraints of religious authority, socio-moralism and the 'matrimonial chastity' of marriage.[9]

---

[5] Hume, *The Development of English Drama,* pp. 26-29.
[6] Riki Miyoshi, 'A Tale of Two Theatres', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660–1700*, 40 (2016), 25-44, (p. 39).
[7] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Penguin Books, 1979), p. 238; Stone, p. 328.
[8] Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 22; Chernaik, p. 24.
[9] Stone, p. 314; Douglas Young, *The Feminist Voices in Restoration Comedy* (University Press of America Inc, 1997), p. 11.

Perhaps conversely, there remained a desire for authoritative legitimacy for the libertine's sexual freedom: their motivations needed to be qualified by a tangible authority which came from the exploitation and reinterpretation of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes' philosophy, in brief, focused on the maintenance of social order within society. He explained that human nature is inherently self-interested, and without the authority of a sovereign figure, society would descend into chaos. Hobbes suggests that the sovereign must have absolute power – including over religion – to maintain a balance in society, and without governance, society would collapse into a 'war of every man against every man'.[10] This state is ruled by the individual's egocentrism and their desires for pleasure: leading to a state of insecurity, a constant war of 'every man against every man', which Hobbes argues is a life that is 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.[11] The libertines corrupted and recontextualised Hobbes' philosophy to their own individualist advantage; some believed that submission to a higher authority repressed their natural freedoms and sexual desires.[12] Unbridled pleasure, for the libertine, was the true authority that controlled their society.

Marriage a-la-Mode follows two separate plot lines which comment on the chaotic philosophical and religious confrontations surrounding the view of marriage and its repression of desire during the period, or as Dryden viewed it, marriage 'a la mode'. His tragicomic 'heroic plot' focuses primarily on the view of romance before marriage, and what happens to that love when one does and does not submit to a higher authority.[13] Dryden contrasts this heroic plot with that of his comedic plot. The

[10] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Clarendon Press, 2012), II, p. 300.
[11] Hobbes, p. 192.
[12] Chernaik, p. 38.
[13] Laura Rosenthal, '"All injury's forgot": Restoration Sex Comedy and National Amnesia', *Comparative Drama*, 42 (2008), 7-28, (p. 8).

characterisation of the quartet of characters: Rhodophil, Doralice, Palamede and Melantha collectively express the view that physical desire and romantic love within a marriage is not sustainable. After two years of marriage, Rhodophil and Doralice are on the verge of breakdown due to uninterest and the lack of erotic pleasure; Rhodophil seeks solace with Palamede's betrothed Melantha, and Doralice with Palamede. Humorously, the lovers' secret assignations always end in frustration as they choose the same time and place to meet one other. Eventually, their actions are discovered by each other, and Rhodophil and Palamede decide to return to the socio-moralistic status quo: Rhodophil remains with Doralice, and Palamede marries Melantha.

Dryden's juxtaposed dual narrative perhaps reflects the moralistic indecision within the theatres about satisfying the growing desire for depictions of sex and sin on the stage. Dryden's structure highlights morality in one plot line to critique the immoral licentiousness in the other; as Derek Hughes argues, Dryden 'pushes to extremes the popular avantgarde theme of identity divided and destabilized by the conflict between social regulation and private desire' within the play.[14] Dryden parallels wittily two contrasting genres – the heroic tragicomedy and the sex comedy – to carefully consider the effects of libertinistic behaviour. Whilst these genres are disparate, John Loftis and David Stuart Rhodes suggest there is an 'obsessive mutual interest in themes and language' between the two narratives; the heroic plot is a serious counterpoint to the comedic action, allowing a view of the contrast between morality and immorality side by side within a legitimate space for discourse – the playhouse.[15]

[14] Hughes, p. 168; It should be noted that Dryden dedicates *Marriage a-la-Mode* to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester.
[15] John Loftis and David Stuart Rodes, 'Commentary: *Marriage A-la-Mode*', in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by John Loftis and David Stuart Rhodes Rodes, 20 vols (University of California Press, 1978), XI, pp. 460-505 (pp. 477-478).

The questioning of sexual values and conduct within *Marriage a-la-Mode* was part of a wider discourse on the inviolability of marriage and infidelity both within and outside the theatre.[16] Eric Rothstein and Frances Kavenik argue that during the Restoration period, theatre relied on the depiction of marriages that 'work badly'.[17] I would suggest that Robenstein and Kavenik's view is perhaps an overgeneralisation of comedy throughout the period 1670–1700: destructive marriages form the central core of many comedies but successful and respectful marriages did appear as minor plot lines.[18] Yet the licentiousness of the court and libertinistic ideology would continue to filter down into the theatre. As described above, libertines were inherently sceptical of religious authority and its restriction on their independence. The sanctity of marriage was seen by them as an artificiality. It functioned as a mechanism of control that enforced social conformity and operated as a tool of oppression, embodying societal demands for respectability, discretion, and fidelity: demands that directly suppressed individual sexual desire.

As examined above, Dryden's split narrative offers two views of the same issue: marriage can be virtuous, idealised and romantic, but it is a flawed, if not superficial institution. Derek Hughes has suggested that there is an ambivalence to Dryden's work – the play is neither a 'tolerantly open-minded survey of two opposed sexual codes nor a vindication of one at the expense of the other', but I would assert that Dryden's Dryden's comic plot offers a subtle psychological insight into the inherent conflict between desire, sexual freedom, and the constraints of marriage.[19] Dryden reveals this

[16] Eric Rothstein and Frances Kavenik, *The Designs of Carolean Comedy* (Southern Illinois University, 1988), p. 12.
[17] Rothstein, p.9; Susan Staves, *Players' Sceptres: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (University of Nebraska, 1979), p. 136.
[18] These include Lady Fulbank and Mr Manly from William Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* (1676), as well as Sir Fopling Flutter and Mrs Loveit in George Etherge's *The Man of Mode* (1676).
[19] Derek Hughes, 'The Unity of Dryden's *Marriage A-La-Mode*', *Philological Quarterly*, 61 (1982), 125-142, (p. 125).

conflict by presenting two unhappy couples who see infidelity as a means of escaping their marriage vows. The state of marital love is tainted, limited by constitutive inequality and lack of freedom which can only be remedied by infidelity – and as Douglas Young summarises, the comedic plot is a 'full expression of pleasure' which celebrates the autonomous, sexually free libertinistic ideology.[20] Although Dryden ensures that libertinistic pleasure does not run smoothly within the comedic plot, in contrast to the heroic plot the couples fail to achieve a life of unhindered pleasure, but there is an authenticity in the comedy: Dryden recognises that humans are naturally fallible, incapable of remaining controlled by a higher power and will seek freedom from marriage constraints.

Dryden's unsuccessful couples and representations of idealised marriage reflects how he writes within the confines of socio-respectability. His exaggerated, humorous depiction of the shortcomings of marriage, in contrast to the moralising stable marriage, creates a chance for a suspension of reality: it opens an autonomous, fantastical world that permits sexual freedom. In the prologue, Dryden invites the spectator to

> […] *follow the new Mode which they* [the aristocracy] *begin,*
> *And treat 'em with a Room, and Couch within:*
> *For that's one way, how e're the Play fall short,*
> *T'oblige the Town, the City, and the Court.*
>
> (prologue. sig. A1v) [21]

[20] Young, p. 10.
[21] John Dryden, *Marriage A- la-Mode. A Comedy* (Henry Herringman, 1673).

Ostensibly, the prologue suggests that Dryden is merely transposing the ideology of physical comfort and transportation into a play-world, but I would suggest that there is a subtextual play on his lexis; the '*Couch within*' suggests a place to rest and enjoy one's sexual fantasies in a permissible way – like the libertines of the court. This '*new Mode*' will allow any viewer an illusory space to consider the ideology of marriage. Dryden simultaneously allows the audience to view and understand traditional repression of sexual freedom and offers a new approach to sexual desires through his characterisations who examine their own individualistic sexual boundaries.

This space can be more fully understood through Deleuze's conceptualisation of the masochistic fantasy as the foundational structure of masochism. Deleuze theorises that the fantasy is a place where the masochist can '"put on wings" and escape into the world of dreams' so that they can be 'suspended in fantasy' to experience sexual freedom.[22] Deleuze expands his concept of the fantasy by arguing that it is born out of a 'desire for scientific observation, [...] and a state of mystical contemplation' where the boundaries of reality and illusion blur.[23] The creation of the fantasy for the masochist is a reactionary choice: masochism cannot exist without the controlling, repressive nature of reality; therefore, the fantasy must remove them from the constraints of reality where they can create and control their autonomous sexual desires in preparation for their humiliation, submission and eventual pleasure and pain.

From a Deleuzian perspective, Dryden's comic plot reveals how the quartet's desire for sexual freedom, in a morally constrained world, generates a masochistic fantasy marked by both pain and pleasure. The quartet are permitted to exist within a world driven by desire and imagination that is based on a psychological masochistic

[22] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), p. 32.
[23] Deleuze, p. 33.

pain. This state of pleasure, according to Chernaik, is 'a ceaseless pursuit of what cannot be fully achieved'.[24] Doralice's song at the beginning of Act 1 immediately establishes her misery and pain at being trapped within

a foolish Marriage Vow
Which long ago was made,
Oblige us to each other now
When passion is decay'd?
We lov'd, and we lov'd, as long as we cou'd,
Till our love was lov'd out in us both:
But our Marriage is dead, when the Pleasure is fled:
'Twas Pleasure first made it an Oath.

(1.1.sig. B1r)

The song neatly encapsulates the frustrations at the decay and death of a marriage contract in which the couple must remain.[25] Rather than a stereotypically arranged marriage between Rhodophil and her, Dryden depicts them as a couple who 'lov'd, as long as we cou'd'. Doralice's hyperbolic, lamenting repetition of 'love' suggests her desire to return to a place of conjugal happiness and displays her resentful acceptance of defeat in which the erotic nature of their relationship has disappeared, and their marriage cannot survive without it.

Deleuze engages with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical concepts of sadism and masochism throughout his monograph *Coldness and Cruelty*. Deleuze is somewhat critical of Freud's framing of masochism as guilt and punishment; he

[24] Chernaik, p. 34.
[25] Young, p. 12.

emphasises the centrality of Freud's concepts of Eros and Thanatos – life and death – as the driving instinct of masochistic desire.[26] Freud suggests love and marriage are Life Drive, or 'Eros' which enables these as prosocial actions that were essential for the sustaining of the life of the individual.[27] Similar to the Hobbesian theory of the state of nature, Freud's Eros behaviours support both individual well-being and the existence of a cooperative and healthy society – the sexual energy it creates becomes the 'libido'. As seen above, Doralice asserts that pleasure and love give life, but later in Act 3, scene 1, she considers whether she should 'stab, hang, or drown' (3.1.p.30) herself to negate the choking confines of a loveless marriage. Doralice's emotional pain, and the libertine's fear of getting married can be linked to Freud's Death Drive or 'Thanatos'. Freud theorises that Thanatos consists of destructive impulses typically directed outward, often manifesting as aggression to manage or displace sexual frustration — a pattern actively exhibited by the quartet. Thanatos, when repressed, directed inwards, results in a consciously self-inflicted, painful reality where marriage becomes seen by Palamede as 'such an unreasonable thing, to impose upon me […] 'tis hurrying a man to execution, without giving him time to say his pray'rs' (5.1.p.69).

Although the pleasure drive is seen by Freud as the 'primary operation level [that] is never anything but useless', it is the perceptual unpleasure of reality that drives the beginnings of the formation of a fantasy world created with a desire for pain; as Doralice suggests in her song, it is '*madness that he* [Rhodophil] */ Should be jealous of me, / Or that I shou'd bar him of another*' (1.1.p.2).[28] Nevertheless, Doralice has the agency to voice plainly the destructive and immuring aspects of marriage: she is not 'deceived by appearances' and does not view herself as being mentally tortured and

[26] Deleuze, pp. 103-134.
[27] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 132-195 (p. 183).
[28] Freud, p. 135.

would freely grant sexual freedom to Rhodophil had she the agency so to do.[29] Doralice places the responsibility for monogamy and becoming trapped in a marriage on men – it is they who create a self-induced madness in which women are passive participants who merely view the masculine self-punishment from the side-lines. This marriage creates a stagnating, vicious circle: by not vocalising publicly her desire for freedom for both parties from a loveless marriage or in granting permission for sexual emancipation, she drives Rhodophil further into a form of repression, failure, and misery through her constant antagonistic attitude towards him.

The lack of female autonomy creates a contradiction: at the beginning of Act 1, Doralice is repeatedly vocal in her desire to grant freedom to Rhodophil to commit infidelity; however, with no agency, she must disguise what cannot publicly be said as her 'bad singing' (1.1.p.2). Conversely, it is Rhodophil and Palamede who have agency to grant sexual freedom to Doralice and Melantha, but they do not. The instinct for self-preservation or desire to remain within the bounds of respectability propels the male characters to crave libertinistic freedom and eventually their sexually frustrated plight drives them into a state of madness. Both Rhodophil and Palamede's belief that they lack sexual freedom drives their desire to gain it. Palamede's suggestion that Rhodophil is 'like a Gamester, who has lost his estate' (1.1.p.6) illustrates that like a losing gambler who keeps attempting to win, Rhodophil takes pleasure from his endless cycle of sexual desire, and as his win eludes him, that pleasure becomes greater.

Although Doralice and Melantha lack formal agency within their relationships, they demonstrate a strong psychological control over their loveless situations. After Doralice and Rhodophil feign affection in Act 3, Scene 1, solely to maintain

[29] Young, p. 1.

appearances, Doralice pointedly remarks, 'if men cannot fall too and eat heartily, the fault is theirs; and 'tis pity, me-thinks, that the good creature should be lost, when many a poor sinner would be glad on't' (3.1, p. 33), before deliberately walking away from Rhodophil. By metaphorically equating the act of serving food with the idea of a woman as an equal partner, Doralice suggests that her freedom, if acknowledged by Rhodophil as a natural desire, could reconcile rational self-governance with a libertinistic freedom.[30]

Instead, both Rhodophil and Palamede believe that marriage defines their identity: their personal autonomy, virility and sexual freedom are formed by the marriage contracts that they have entered. In a return to Act 1, scene 1, Palamede laments to Doralice that he is 'to be marry'd within these three days. Marry'd past redemption, to a young, fair, rich and vertuous Lady: And, it shall go hard, but I will love my Wife as little, as I perceive you do your Husband' (1.1.pp.3-4) which illuminates the tension between the need for sexual freedom and social expectations of respectability. This stress creates a restless, subconscious drive in the male characters to create a fantasy for how life should be, one that can only be sanctioned through the formation of a

> Palamede: blessed community betwixt us four, for the solace of the women, and relief of the men? Methinks it would be a pleasant kind of life: Wife and Husband for the standing Dish, and Mistris and Gallant for the Desert.
>
> Rhodophil: But suppose the Wife and Mistris should both long for the standing Dish, how should they be satisfi'd together?

[30] The eating of food is seen as part of the life instincts and is therefore necessary for the creation of libido.

(5.1.p.79)

This 'blessed community' becomes the imaginary space to which the duo goes to explore what lies beyond the contemporaneous belief in marriage as a boring 'standing Dish', or indeed, what exists if there is no libertinistic desire for 'Desert'. By doing so, Dryden places them within an imaginary space that Deleuze suggests is where the masochist is not 'destroying the world nor [...] idealising: what [they do] is to disavow and thus suspend it, in order to secure an ideal [...] which is itself suspended in fantasy'.[31]

Such a move to a private community can be considered as the quartet's formation of a Masochean fantasy which allows their desire for sexual freedom. Rhodophil's proposition to Doralice that they should

> stand upon our terms, [let] us make our selves as merry as we can with our misfortunes. Why there's the devil on't! if thou couldst make my enjoying thee but a little less easie, or a little more unlawful, thou shouldst see, what a Termagant Lover I would prove. I have taken such pains to enjoy thee, *Doralice*.
>
> (3.1.pp.32-33)

Rhodophil's desire to rely on 'our terms' suggests a concern for how they are both situated within his deteriorating masochistic fantasy – he suggests that, at best, a limited pleasure can be gained from their 'misfortunes'. His masochistic fantasy can only be made real if Doralice is 'a little less easy' and her sexual desire a 'little more unlawful'. Rhodophil will only be able to prove himself as a turbulent lover if his

[31] Deleuze, pp. 32-33.

masochistic pleasure-pain is caused by Doralice as his wife rather than a lover. Nevertheless, Rhodophil states that his imagination is 'quite jaded' (3.1.p.33) and his desire for a masochistic fantasy which includes Doralice exceeds the constraints of socio-propriety and cannot exist without their eroticism. Instead, he becomes tortured by the knowledge of a past sexual freedom and craves a return to it. It is within this 'place of pain' that the masochistic fantasy is created: Rhodophil's accusation that Doralice 'art a Wife, and thou wilt be a Wife, and I can make thee another no longer' (3.1.p.33) suggests the dream of infidelity and a return to a sexual freedom ultimately becomes both painful and pleasurable.

Dryden implicitly focuses this pleasure-pain fantasy around Hobbes' philosophy surrounding the incompatibility of individual freedom and rational governance. Hobbes suggests that

> By LIBERTY, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgement, and reason shall dictate to him.[32]

Hobbes' 'externall Impediments' can be read typically as a form of government or monarchy, but as Quentin Skinner highlights, Hobbes' *narrow definition of liberty leads to a* 'lack [of] criterion for distinguishing between inherent limitations upon our powers themselves, and positive constraints upon our freedom to exercise or forbear

[32] Hobbes, p. 198.

from exercising powers in accordance with our will and desires'.[33] Indeed, J. Roland Pennock suggests that Hobbes is lead 'occasionally into confusion or inconsistency, and more frequently tends to confuse the reader and so to [...] make an unsound conclusion appear sound, by means of specious reasoning'.[34] I suggest that the limitations of Hobbes's theory allow Rhodophil and Palamede to perceive marriage not only as a restriction on their liberty, but paradoxically as a framework through which they construct their own version of personal freedom. It is this which enables them to disavow their reality and seek a Masochean masochistic torturer.

The idea of the masochistic fantasy raises the issue of masculine identity and the differences within the relationship between the self and other – particularly when it comes to erotic love, libertinistic desire and masculine insecurity. For Rhodophil and Palamede this mixture creates an imaginary 'otherness' of a sexual fantasy that makes a competing, seductive claim which both inhibits and attacks the traditional, stereotypical view of a monogamous marriage. It is this otherness that, when combined with the constraints of reality, invests 'the heroic characters with a perplexing succession of identities, so the changing impulses of sexual desire repeatedly transform the fancied identity of the mate'.[35] The changing and repeating nature of Rhodophil and Palamede's identities and misdirection becomes a compulsion, as Freud suggests this is 'something [...] more primal, more elemental, more deeply instinctual than the pleasure principle, which it simply thrusts aside' as part of their death drive.[36]

---

[33] Quentin Skinner, 'Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty: The Prothero Lecture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 40 (1990), 121-151 (p. 127).
[34] James Roland Pennock, 'Hobbes's Confusing "Clarity" – The Case of "Liberty"', *The American Political Science Review*, 54 (1960), 428-436 (p. 428).
[35] Hughes, *The Unity of Dryden*, p. 127.
[36] Freud, p. 150.

There remains a sense of constraint to Rhodophil and Palamede's sense of self and other. According to Deleuze, for a masochistic fantasy to be created there must be a double suspension of reality: on the one hand the subject is 'aware of reality but suspends this awareness; on the other the subject clings to his ideal' – the ideal being a desire to submit and a redefinition of power; therefore, only the reality of societal pressures can augment their fantasy and create the masochistic drive.[37] Eventually, this fantasy must become reality: expressed through the disguise and obfuscation of a masquerade ball. Dryden's depiction of the ball in Act 4, scene 1 allows for, what Hughes argues is the removal of all 'objective tokens of identity, creating uncharacterised and unindividualized partners' – the suspension of reality allows the men to populate their world with their torturers.[38] It is during this scene that Palamede reasons that

> Masquerade is Vizor-masque in debauch; and I like it the better for't: for, with a Vizor-masque, we fool our selves into courtship, for the sake of an eye that glanc'd; or a hand that stole it self out of the glove sometimes, to give us a sample of the skin: but in Masquerade there is nothing to be known, she's all *Terra incognita*, and the bold discoverer leaps ashoar, and takes his lot among the wild *Indians* and *Savages*, without the vile consideration of safety to his person, or of beauty, or wholesomeness in his Mistris.
>
> (4.1.p.53)

Palamede demonstrates his view that masquerade is a space in which men can hide and explore their sexual desires: suspended in both fantasy and reality. Allowing

[37] Deleuze, p. 33.
[38] Hughes, *The Unity of Dryden*, p. 128.

himself to create an outward, socially acceptable place where enjoyment is part of self-concealment, Palamede can enact his masochistic fantasy while hiding in plain sight. His mask in 'debauch' acts as a freedom to empower his pleasure-pain fantasy. This goes beyond the desire for mere infidelity that steals 'out of the glove sometimes' to one for the formation of a female torturer and his eventual submission. Comparing himself with a 'bold discoverer' he announces a willingness to explore an illicit and undefined sexual desire, the '*Terra incognita*' of masochism. Palamede understands that this new sexual freedom, when made real, is uncharted territory; taking his place amongst the 'wild *Indians* and *Savages*' implies an exotic otherness, perhaps a savage sexual deviancy that he should be fearful of, yet it is something he has an intense desire to be part of. Masochean fantasy becomes neither a religious nor Hobbesian ruled world, the freedom to experience pain for pleasure's sake becomes the final act of submission. Palamede abandons all propriety and commits himself 'without vile considerations' to his masochistic torturer, his indecent 'mistress'.

The masquerade fantasy must come to an end eventually, and the denouement returns the quartet back to the patricentric ideal that upholds monogamy and respectability within marriage. Doralice will remain with Rhodophil, Palamede will marry Melanthe, and in an act of Freudian repetition Palamede will

> cherish my [own] body as much as I can upon that hope [that Doralice outlives Rhodophil]. 'Tis true, I would not directly murder the wife of my bosom; but to kill her civilly, by the way of kindness, I'll put as fair as another man: I'll begin to morrow night, and be very wrathful with her, that's resolv'd on.
>
> (5.1.p.77)

Nevertheless, Dryden does not completely shut the door on the idea of continuing to explore sexuality and giving women the potential for gaining masochistic power. Doralice's final words of the play are to add

> but one *Proviso*, That who ever breaks the League, either by war abroad, or by neglect at home, both the Women shall revenge themselves, by the help of the other party.
>
> (5.1.p.80)

It is her 'one *Proviso*' that the 'League' remains committed to the continuance of the masochistic fantasy; Doralice recognises that she is not about to surrender the agency of her own desires and will continue to be master of Rhodophil's sexual pleasure in 'revenge' as both his wife and masochistic torturer. Ultimately, the institution of marriage is full of pretence and hypocrisy, but it is a state with its own terms and conditions. Openly, it is a respectable state, but out of sight, this is merely illusory, and its rules can be autonomously interpreted by husband and wife; the independence of desire and personal pleasure remains negotiable: eroticism, pleasure and pain are transactional within a partnership. Marriage – whether successful, monogamous or sexually repressive – forms the cornerstone of the masochistic fantasy in Restoration comedy. The sexual constraints of marriage would continue to be questioned in the playhouses, but as will be seen in *The Country Wife*, the battleground between desire and moralistic conventions would become farcical as the decade progressed.

Immoral Desires in William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*

The key quality of sexual and moralistic uncertainty was to linger throughout the development of comedy in the 1670s. Although Dryden's tone towards the sexual codes of the period was ambiguous, William Wycherley's bawdy, 'sex boom' humour challenges bluntly the false virtue and patriarchal control of marriage.[39] This section will examine how Wycherley continues Dryden's exploration of sexuality and his social critique of the hypocrisy and unsustainability of marriage in *The Country Wife* (1675). The above discussion of Dryden suggested that marriage constrains desire and sexual freedom, and it is far from the ideal view of a sacred or romantic state. My analysis has shown that when this is seen from a Deleuzian standpoint, the masochistic fantasy is born out of this repression of desire and autonomy. The restrictions imposed by the state of marriage are intricately tied to the power dynamics, sexual fantasies and freedom that the masochist desires for his pleasure and pain. Marriage and its monogamous restrictions shape the identity of the masochist, their illicit desires and how they control the construction of their fantasy.

In this section of the chapter, I will investigate how Wycherley continues to explore sexual desires and explicitly revels in libertinistic, anti-authoritarian pleasure. This analysis will discuss concurrently how the primordial fear of cuckoldry exposes the farcically restrictive nature of marriage and helps to create a reality that permits the enjoyment of both pleasure and humiliation. This examination of marriage will provide a clearer understanding of how masculine anxieties surrounding cuckoldry, impotence and emasculation help to shape the masochistic fantasy. This study will

[39] Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, p. 97; This doctoral thesis aims to expand on the research on representations of love in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* for my master's dissertation, Dominic Boden-Tebbutt, 'Masochean Masochism in Restoration Comedy', (unpublished master's dissertation, Queen Mary University of London, 2020).

show particularly how cuckoldry is intricately linked to fantasy – and how infidelity allows for a control of the conditions of suffering.

Wycherley reflects the libertine philosophy of freedom, pleasure and desire: he rejects authority and depicts marriage as a risible, corrupt institution where love and trust have ceased to exist, demolishing the traditional morality that had insisted on the sanctity of marriage and the denial of sexual freedom.[40] Robert D. Hume suggests that Wycherley, like Dryden, 'gives the audience a choice between patriarchal constraints and the exploration of sexual boundaries that favours neither course', but I would suggest that there is an acuity to Wycherley's view on marriage that subsumes any defence of the idealisation of marriage.[41] Indeed, Wycherley's humour veers towards an outright attack on socio-morality and embraces sexual liberation.

The act of being cuckolded was thought the greatest threat to marriage, and a substantial cause of male anxiety; Lawrence Stone suggests that to become a cuckolded husband was seen as a 'slur on both the man's virility and his capacity to rule his own household'.[42] The depiction of cuckoldry within the playhouses was not a novel trope during the seventeenth century, but there was a broad move away, by 1675, from the representations of sexual monogamy based on truth and morality.[43] Within the theatre, marriage became synonymous with lies and betrayal of trust.[44] Although libertinistic philosophy focused on sexual freedom, to be cuckolded, and seen to be cuckolded, remained a 'serious sexual insult' and a matter of personal shame.[45]

---

[40] Gorman Beauchamp, 'The Amorous Machiavellism of "*The Country Wife*"', *Comparative Drama,* 11 (1977-78) 316-330 (p. 318).
[41] Hume, *The Development of English Drama,* p. 99; Wycherley coolly depicts a marriage subplot between Alithea and Sparkish; however, the play ends with her having fallen in love with Harcourt.
[42] Stone, pp. 316-317.
[43] David Gelineau, '*The Country Wife*: Dance of the Cuckolds', *Comparative Drama,* 48 (2014), 277-305 (p.284).
[44]Gelineau, p. 284.
[45] Kellye Corcoran, 'Cuckoldry as Performance', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (2012), 543-559 (p. 543).

Libertinistic hedonism became an uncontrollable sexual freedom that disregarded the traditional monogamy of marriage.[46]

Wycherley's skilful use of three interweaving plot lines depicts superficially a 'right way-wrong way' view of marriage.[47] The play principally follows the consequences of the libertine Horner's pretence of being impotent in order to illicitly sleep with the wives of society men. The reformed libertine Pinchwife arrives and tells Horner that he has married a girl from the country – Margery, but he worries that she will cuckold him. At Pinchwife's house Margery complains that she is being shut away and cannot enjoy the pleasures of London. Pinchwife overhears this and punishes her by locking her in her room. Ultimately, Margery forces Pinchwife to take her to the theatre and he agrees but only if she dresses as a man. Horner sees the disguised Margery and then disappears with her. Later, Pinchwife questions Margery about her time with Horner, and she admits that Horner kissed her. Pinchwife, in a rage makes Margery write to Horner to say she is repulsed by him. However, Margery tricks Pinchwife by writing a second letter where confesses she loves Horner. She disguises herself as Alithea and deceives Pinchwife into taking her to see Horner. At the denouement of the play, Pinchwife uncovers Margery's deception and he is horrified at being cuckolded.

Each of the characters within the play, and their actions, serve to give the audience a comically inclusive view of how one can, or cannot, conduct one's life. Firstly, the characterisation of Horner as the unmarried, libertinistic, devil-may-care cuckolder; secondly, the ex-libertine Pinchwife, with his obsessive fear of cuckoldry and cynical marriage to the simplistic Margery; thirdly, Alithea's attempt at marriage

[46] Corcoran, p. 543.
[47] Norman Holland, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 80.

for love; and finally, Lady Fidget's, Mrs Dainty Fidget's and Mrs Squeamish's attempt to conceal their libidinous desires under a virtuous public image. This study's focus on the characters of Horner and Pinchwife as libertine versus reformed whoremaster, and their interactions with the others allows us to see how Wycherley broaches a discussion on the pleasurable need for infidelity.

When seen from a Deleuzian standpoint, Horner's need to cuckold to satiate his sexual desire and Pinchwife's fear of being cuckolded form the Masochean masochistic fantasy. As previously discussed in the study of *Marriage a-la-Mode*, the creation of a masochistic fantasy space allows for sexual boundaries to be questioned and explored: it is a space where a masochist controls the power dynamic, directs their own desires and constructs their identity. The creation of Horner's and Pinchwife's fantasies allows Wycherley to symbolically discuss his alternative, if not radical, views on sexual freedom, and as Helen Burke contends, Wycherley attempts to have these 'accepted' by the audience.[48]

Wycherley, in the spirit of autonomy, contradictorily presents the audience with a critical, fearful view of libertinism and its consequences, but he celebratorily depicts the success of Horner's sexual voraciousness. Jeremy Webster suggests that there is a subtle difference between Dryden's handling of infidelity, and the suggestive characterisation of libertinistic repercussions in *The Country Wife*.[49] I would argue that Wycherley clearly depicts the difference between morality and immorality in his characterisations of Horner and Pinchwife. By displaying openly a libertine's desire to cuckold as both a want and need, rather than the virtues of marriage, Wycherley creates a masochistic fantasy that 'succeeds in embracing a whole conception of man,

[48]Helen Burke, 'Wycherley's "Tendentious Joke": The discourse of alterity in "*The Country Wife*"', *The Eighteenth Century*, 29 (1988), 227-241 (p. 235).
[49] Jeremy Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 67.

culture and nature [one that discovers] new forms of expression, new ways of thinking and feeling and an entirely original language'.[50] Within the opening discussion between Horner and his doctor, or 'Quack', Horner schemes to feign impotence to cuckold the 'Shy Husbands and Keepers… [who] like old Rooks are not to be cheated, but by a new unpractis'd trick' (1.1.p.2) which marks a move towards a novel form of sexual gratification – by publicly emasculating himself, he maximises private pleasure.[51]

Horner's scheme could be read merely as supporting Hume's critique as being a humorous vehicle, but there is a deeper sense of an alignment and instruction in Horner's 'unpractised trick', which attempts to close the gap between sexual anxiety, desire, and fantasy.[52] His railing against the hypocrisy of the 'old Rooks' and constraints of marriage as a 'force of Nature' (1.1.p.8) shows overtly Horner's quest to highlight the pretence of a happy marriage: deriving pleasure from the inevitability of infidelity is placed squarely at the heart of the play. Horner, as the 'sign of a Man' (1.1.p.10), allows for the contrasting foregrounding of 'appearance and reality, or appearance and nature', but nevertheless, his own impotent trickery turns reality into a desired masochistic fantasy.[53]

Horner and Pinchwife have two different approaches to obtaining and contractually agreeing masochistic pleasure. Horner, representing the 'main social engine of aristocratic society' weaves a calculated ruse to obtain sexual gratification by pretending to emasculate himself voluntarily; his scheme is far more nuanced than

[50] Deleuze, p. 16.
[51] William Wycherley, *The Country Wife, A Comedy* (Thomas Dring, 1675); The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Quack' as a person who dishonestly claims to have medical or surgical skill, or who advertises false or fake remedies, a medical impostor. 'Quack' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online] https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].
[52] Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, p. 104.
[53] Gelineau, p. 279.

stereotypically clandestine and casual sex.[54] As Jeremy Webster suggests, Horner appears as a Jacobean style 'trickster' figure, whose aim is to challenge 'traditions and ideologies' to create a new 'meaning and order' out of the chaos he has created.[55] Horner's dissembling and destructive characterisation parallels William Johnson's suggestion that a trickster is able to travel 'between one region and another, one realm of experience and another, and mediates between things manifest and things hidden'.[56] Horner's 'dynamic energy' as a '*Machiavel* in love' (4.1.p.66), allows him both to highlight the contemporaneous hypocrisy of fidelity and to transform this pretence into an outwardly acceptable, if not celebrated, sexual behaviour.[57] By feigning impotence and placing himself in a feminised place, Horner gains sexual agency by removing the masculine sexual anxieties which plagued the patriarchal hierarchy: he '[*makes horns)*' and then claims to 'make no more Cuckolds' (1.1.p.3) he plays on his words to allay Pinchwife's fear; however, his actions belie his sexual freedom. Indeed, his pretence of emasculation to the other characters in the play allows him to compare marriage and love to the 'venereal disease' he professes to suffer from, as well as implicitly suggesting a carnal, single life.[58]

Horner's scheme is the epitome of libertinistic hedonism: for him, the sexual act has become almost 'fantastic and allegorical, it is so separated from any of its original emotional or biological purposes'.[59] Without the need to affirm his virility, Horner's impotence is the intersection of his own masochistic fantasy and reality. His disavowal of masculinity and feminisation fantasy marks the

[54] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 49.
[55] Webster, p. 31.
[56] William Johnson, 'Spenser's Hermetic Tricksters in *The Fairie Queene* III and IV', *English Studies*, 83 (2002), 338-355 (p. 339).
[57] Johnson, p. 339.
[58] Holland, p. 86.
[59] Holland, p. 77.

> point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which it is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it.[60]

His choice to go beyond the fear of emasculation in the form of castration takes him successfully beyond sexual and gender normalities.[61] If Freud's psychoanalytic concept of castration theory – whereby a boy fears losing his genitals as punishment for incestuous thoughts –is applied to Horner, his opting to appear emasculated effectively neutralizes the ideology that 'castration anxiety develops into moral anxiety – social anxiety', or the anxiety surrounding cuckolding.[62]

In doing so, Horner places himself in a unique position: in his humiliation, he both gains a new sexual agency by entering the feminine world, and at the same time gives women power over him to satisfy his sexual needs. As Horner explains to the Quack:

> Horner: Now may I have, by the reputation of an Eunuch, the Priviledges of One; and be seen in a Ladies Chamber, in a morning as early as her Husband; kiss Virgins before their Parents, or Lovers; and may be in short the *Pas par tout* of the Town. Now Doctor?

[60] Deleuze, p. 31.
[61] Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', in *The Unconscious*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Penguin Books, 2005), pp.95-100 (p. 99).
[62] Sigmund Freud, 'Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety', in *Standard Edition 22* (Hogarth Press, 2001), pp. 77-178 (p. 139).

Quack: Nay, now you shall be the Doctor; and your Process is so new, that we do not know but it may succeed.

(1.1.p.6)

Essentially, the apprentice has overtaken the master: the Quack-doctor has transferred his assumed, if dubious, authority to Horner, along with the socially sanctioned ability to examine women intimately without provoking male outrage. By likening Horner's 'process' to a scientific procedure, the Quack confirms to Horner 'now' he is at liberty to assert control over women, circumventing the traditional authority of husbands, fathers, and suitors. Horner's self-identification as the '*Pas par tout*', or 'master key' of the town—suggests a figurative transformation into a tool that grants him access to women and the liberation from restrictive socio-sexual norms. This metaphor positions Horner as an agent of libertine pleasure, unbound by conventional moral codes.[63] His belief in owning or being the key, and its pleasurable associations, becomes the object of his masochistic fetish, one where denial and affirmation of his castration are incorporated within its structure.[64] As a point of departure, Horner's key fetish becomes the substitute for his own and the female phallus, one that he uses both to enable cuckoldry and ward off its consequences. In suspending reality, Horner has created his pure ideal: by going beyond the castration complex, Horner has nothing to fear, and, by fetishizing the unlocking of women sexually with his key, he hands them the power to be his torturer: to deny and grant him pleasure as is their whim.

[63] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Passepartout' as both 'a key that opens any or many doors, a master key'. The dictionary also defines the word as 'a person who may go anywhere, a thing giving a person the right or opportunity to go anywhere', 'Passepartout' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online] https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].
[64] Freud, *Fetishism*, p. 99.

In Act 2, scene 1, Lady Fidget attempts to discover whether Horner is indeed impotent and questions whether he 'cou'd [...] be so generous? so truly a Man of honour, as for the sakes of us Women of honour, to cause your self to be reported no Man? No Man!' (2.1.p.30), suggesting that without a phallus, he is to be cast out of the patriarchal hierarchy and cuckoldry obsessed society.[65] The dissemblance of castration allows him, as Sir Jasper suggests, to be 'a privileg'd Man amongst the virtuous Ladies' (2.1.p.28) which allows Horner to create a complete upheaval of what it truly means to be a man; his feminisation, whilst comical and self-serving, entitles him to mock the hypocrisy of the phallus-driven patriarchal system.[66] Sir Jasper's belief that Horner is a eunuch allows him to place Horner in a subjugate female position and therefore, is able to be ordered to 'go with these Ladies to the Play' (2.1.p.27). However, this instruction unknowingly and farcically authorises Horner's continued deception, satisfaction and natural desires, which ultimately leads to Sir Jasper's cuckolding.

Horner's pretence of feminisation gives him 'a certain cynical wisdom' that can only be gained by removing himself from the male sphere and viewing its sexual hypocrisy. [67] He understands that the masculine world is collectively anxious about female agency (or, castration anxiety) and the destruction this can cause to control, pride, and sexual prowess, which runs concurrently with the desire to eradicate any trace of feminine agency. As Helen Burke suggests, Horner's aim is 'to expose the falsehoods that hold the social structure together, to confront the scandal at the interior of the system'.[68] Horner's castration fantasy deals 'with the gap between what one is and what one would like to be and expressed in envy towards privileges belonging to the opposite sex'; by becoming a figurative eunuch he demands the feared

[65] Burke, p. 235.
[66] Burke, p. 239.
[67] Holland, p. 81.
[68] Burke, p. 234.

female agency to satisfy his masochistic desire.[69] Horner's feminisation becomes a subversive power against the patriarchal code of domination and by being both male and female, at the same time, his masculinity allows for the self-determination and empowerment of feminine desire within the play.[70] Indeed, in becoming intentionally inconspicuous, Horner is allowed to expose the sexual mendacity of patriarchal society and to confront the hypocritical female subjugation.

Horner subverts the patriarchal fear of the rise of female agency by accurately interpreting and playing upon the husbands' and wives' concerns about respectability. However, this is only possible within Horner's fantasy: by exposing the duplicitous ideology of virtue he drives women, particularly Lady Fidget, into revealing their sexual desires to use them against him as a form of masochistic torture.[71] Aspasia Velissariou argues that Horner's reality allows for a 'reaccommodation of female desire, in particular into more flexible forms of sexual exchange', but by becoming feminised he contractually relinquishes his male sexual agency to Lady Fidget – specifically during the infamous 'china scene' in Act 4, scene 1.[72]

It is during this scene that Horner openly admits to the Quack that 'I deceive you it seems, and others too; for the grave Matrons, and old rigid Husbands think me unfit for love, as they are; but their Wives, Sisters and Daughters, know some of 'em better things already' (4.1.p.64). Whilst the admission of Horner's plan succeeding could be thought an obvious statement of conclusion to the Quack, I would argue that his admission that his dissemblance is working is a major step towards vocalising the changing sexual economy between 'Wives, Sisters and Daughters'. Horner's 'better

[69] Danielle Knafo, 'Desiring Castration: A reformulation of Castration Theory Illustrated with a Transgender Case', *Psychoanalytical Inquiry,* 38 (2018), 34-50 (p. 35).
[70] Aspasia Velissariou, 'Patriarchal Tactics of Control and Female Desire in Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* and *The Country Wife*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 37 (1995), 115-126 (p. 116).
[71] Burke, p. 234.
[72] Velissariou, p. 125.

things' suggests that he has changed women into what Freud describes as 'phallic women' who have the power to alleviate male castration anxiety by giving it a solution through the creation of a masculine disavowal of the threat of castration.[73] To place Lady Fidget in this position specifically allows for Horner's masochistic contract, one that places her in a masculine position, thereby humiliating him into a sense of pleasurable inferiority. Ultimately, when the Quack steps 'behind the screen' upon Lady Fidget's entrance, he confirms that the patriarchy has temporarily ceded sexual power to the matriarchy.

Horner's freedom to indulge in his masochistic desires is both inherent and unquestionable, setting him apart from Wycherley's portrayal of Pinchwife. Pinchwife is humorously depicted as a superannuated libertine who, driven by fragile masculinity and an obsessive fear of cuckoldry, chooses an innocent, virginal wife from the country. His character functions as a stark caricature of everything Horner is not: outwardly moralistic, domineering, and jealous. Unlike Horner, who strategically feigns impotence to facilitate his libertine pursuits, Pinchwife's relentless control over his wife, Margery, and his constant anxiety about appearing foolish, ironically expose his own impotence — not only sexually but also in terms of agency and power. Like Dryden, Wycherley uses his characters – specifically Pinchwife – to lambast the wearisome constraints of marriage, puritanical control and its conflict between the libertine's state of nature.[74] Pinchwife has made himself, in Freudian terms, 'dangerously dependent on part of the external world, the chosen love-object, that one

[73] Freud, *Fetishism*, p. 97.
[74] Peggy Knapp, 'The "Plyant" Discourse of Wycherley's "*The Country Wife*"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 40 (2000), 451-472 (p. 456).

[would be] exposed to extreme suffering if one was spurned by it or lost it through infidelity' in his choice of wife.[75]

Pinchwife's masochistic desire is born from the delicate balance between suffering the physical loss of Margery and the mental anguish of contemplating her loss. His search for an innocent, virtuous wife from the country, unaware of his past sexual exploits, reveals his desperation to publicly restore his moral reputation, preserve his masculine honour, and curb his sexual anxieties. In doing so, Pinchwife fixates on the fantasy of an ideal woman who he believes can soothe his fears. However, to pursue this fantasy, he must renounce his previous appetite for infidelity — symbolized by the sophisticated agency of a 'deceitful pamper'd Smithfield Jade' (1.1, p. 11) — and abandon his former belief that it is 'only a fool that marries' (1.1, p. 13), a sentiment that defined his earlier libertine lifestyle.

Pinchwife's overreaction to being called an 'old Whoremaster' (1.1.p.15) hyperbolically envisages and creates his fantasy woman. His desire to avoid being cuckolded meant his leaving the sophistication of London in the hope of finding an innocent, dull and malleable wife who will assuage his masculine ego, satisfy him sexually and, as Horner puts it to Pinchwife succinctly, 'keep a Whore to your self' (1.1.p.14). Pinchwife's flaw is the belief that his ideal wife can only be found in the country where he can be 'a little surer of the breed there, know what [a woman's] keeping has been, whether foyl'd or unsound' (1.1.p.11) in the hope that she does not understand the licentious nature of London. His desire perhaps stems from the comical but stereotypical point of view held by Londoners that rural communities upheld 'traditional ideas about honour and morality', yet in reality there had been a 'very striking increase' in 'extra marital sexual activity' during the late seventeenth

[75] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. by David McLintock (Penguin Books, 2002), p. 37.

century by what Lawrence Stone calls 'the plebs'.[76] Indeed, Pinchwife is blinkered to the thought that the attitude towards sex and infidelity in London is no different to that of the upper-class in the country.

Pinchwife's belief in the unschooled and unsullied nature of rural folk and their sexual morals is his sole reasoning behind being able to control his made-up reality with Margery, particularly as she is 'no *London* Wife' (1.1.p.11), too 'silly to bring to Town' (1.1.p.12) and will 'make [him] no Cuckold' (1.1.p.13). However, his control and exaltation of Margery as his saviour from cuckoldry and masculine anxiety rapidly unravels on his return to London. Pinchwife's diminished sexual fears return to the forefront of his characterisation. Horner promptly asks whether Pinchwife is 'a cuckold' (1.1.p.11) upon hearing of his marriage and suggests that by bringing Margery to town, Pinchwife is merely encouraging Margery into becoming sophisticated, powerful and sexually liberated whether he desires it or not.

When the audience first sees Margery in Act 2, scene 1, Pinchwife's sister, Alithea, states to Margery that Pinchwife is 'afraid you shou'd love another Man' (2.1.p.15), and indeed, he already suspects that Margery's innocence is compromised having been shown the path to sexual agency by the cosmopolitan Alithea's 'Town documents' (2.1.p.16). Pinchwife's desire to keep Margery innocent, and the lengths he will go to control her – both physically and mentally – openly depicts his castration anxiety and fear of the loss of his patriarchal agency during the short time they are in London.[77] Pinchwife repeatedly coerces Margery into declaiming her fidelity, specifically that she must 'love [him] only, and not be like the naughty Town Women, who only hate their Husbands, and love every Man else, love Plays, Visits, fine

[76] Stone, pp. 398, 382.
[77] The timeline of the play is unclear; however, it can be assumed that it takes place over a short period: Pinchwife has just returned from the country to finalise Alithea's wedding and suggests to Margery that she will go back to 'the Country on Friday' (3.1.p.34).

Coaches, fine Cloaths, Fidles, Balls, Treates, and so lead a wicked Town-life' (2.1.p.17). Margery's constant reassurances to assuage Pinchwife's paranoia have become comedic: she has gained the sexual agency of a town wife and admits to Pinchwife that 'when you forbid me, you make me as't were desire it' (2.1.p.18). However, it is in Pinchwife's acquiescence in taking Margery to the theatre in which the creation of his masochistic fantasy is first seen. He reaches a critical crossroads between keeping her innocence and allowing her sexual power over him. Pinchwife comically takes every effort to keep Margery hidden from Horner, dressing her 'in the Suit, we are to carry down to her brother' (3.1.p.35), but Pinchwife recognises that Margery has grown to have 'the obstinacy already of a Town-wife, and I must, whilst she's here, humour her like one' (3.1.p.34). In an echo of Dryden's Palamede who sees masquerading as a place to explore sexual desires by being concealed, Pinchwife foresees that Margery would allow Horner that privilege, rather than himself as 'Masks have made more Cuckolds, than the best faces that ever were known' (3.1.p.35).

Pinchwife consciously chooses to lose control and place Margery in the position of his masochistic torturer by taking her into a 'swarm of Cuckolds, and Cuckold-makers' (3.1.p.41) within the theatre. Pinchwife's 'phantasmic and obsessional harping' on the dangers of cuckoldry have ultimately allowed Margery to recognise 'the power of brave signs [such as] the Bull's-head, the Rams-head, and the Stags-head' (3.1.p.41) – all signs of masculine power and virility.[78] Rather than fixating on just the one 'sign' to signify the potency of her husband, Margery recognises that virility, or conversely the threat of masculine vulnerability, extends to all men and not just to Pinchwife. By dressing Margery in male clothing, Pinchwife positions her in a reversal of gender roles: and being seen as male places her in a position of parity with

[78] Kosofsky Sedgwick, p. 53.

Pinchwife. Although Margery is disguised, Pinchwife's fear of being cuckolded by Horner becomes extreme and hysterical, declaiming to Horner 'you'l debauch him, [Margery] he's yet young and innocent, and I wou'd not have him debauch'd for anything in the World' (3.1.p.47). This impassioned plea suggests the desperate retention of virtue and I would suggest that it has a dual meaning: Pinchwife's repetition of 'debauch' here can mean to 'lead astray' or 'mislead' and is an encouragement to Horner to corrupt Margery and cuckold him in an act of pleasure-pain for himself.[79] This act of encouragement marks Pinchwife's disavowal of reality and his loss of control: being cuckolded by Horner is the creation and control of a fantasy world where Pinchwife is allowed to experience pleasure from the pain of cuckoldry and the reversal in gender roles between him and Margery. It is from this chaos that Pinchwife submits to his sexual anxieties and emasculates himself, and similar to Horner and Lady Fidget, his feminisation allows him to create the new reality of an 'ungrateful tale' (4.1.p.58) where he derives sexual pleasure from the torture of Margery and Horner which must be told 'an hundred times over' (4.1.p.58).

Pinchwife is unable to control the double suspension of both his masochistic fantasy and the reality of the socio-expectations of marriage, honour, and the repercussions of being cuckolded. This manifests itself in his violence towards Margery in a visible display of the Freudian death drive to resolve his sexual frustration. Nevertheless, his frustration stems from his desire to have Margery as his torturer and to not have his pleasure disrupted by societal constraints, but Pinchwife's violent aggression is the cause of the destruction of his masochistic fantasy,

[79] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Debauched' in the seventeenth century as 'To turn or lead away, entice, seduce, *from* one to whom service or allegiance is due; e.g. soldiers or allies from a leader, a wife or children from husband or father, etc. (Usually with the connotation 'lead astray, mislead'. 'Debauched' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online]. <https://www.oed.com> [Accessed 15 January 2025].

overstepping by demanding that Margery 'Write as I bid you, or I will write Whore with this Penknife in your Face' (4.1.p.61). With his physical threat and mental branding of Margery as a 'Whore', he returns to reality and displays the shame of being a cuckolded husband. Even with the threat of violence and reduction to a common prostitute, Margery is unable to contractually become Pinchwife's torturer and enact his fantasy. Therefore, he returns her to the position of merely being an unfaithful wife, making him look 'ridiculous' (4.1.p.79) and ultimately, she has taken 'the Pen and [made] an end of the Letter' (5.1.p.79). Pinchwife's death drive, unlike Palamede's in *Marriage a-la-Mode*, is his belief that marriage is needed to bind him contractually to his torturer. However, he requires infidelity to complete his masochistic pleasure and pain; forcing Margery to write a 'Letter to your Lover [...] or you'll provoke me' (4.1.p.60) he displays his need for proof of her infidelity and the violent extremes he will take for its confirmation.

Pinchwife's dictation of Margery's letter to Horner in Act 4, scene 1 acts out his cuckoldry fantasy, demanding that Margery detail Horner's 'nauseous, loath'd kisses, and embraces' (4.1.p.61). The juxtaposing language reflects his inner struggle between fantasy and reality, 'nauseous' and 'loath'd' reflecting the insult of cuckoldry, yet Pinchwife wants the sexual 'kisses' and 'embraces' detailed in the letter. When Margery questions this fine detail, he demands that she 'Once more write as I'd have you, and question it not, or I will spoil it with this, [*Holds up penknife*] I will stab out those eyes that cause my mischief' (4.1.p.61). In threatening to violently blind Margery if she does not do as he desires, Pinchwife intends to forcefully manoeuvre her into enacting the cuckoldry at the centre of his masochistic fantasy. As Kathleen Oliver suggests, Margery has now become 'weapon, abuser, and victim [who are] presented in such close proximity to one another that violence becomes not only imaginable but

imaginatively fulfilled' in an act of control of Margery and an end to Pinchwife's sexual frustration.[80]

The play ends on a comedically satisfactory note for the audience: all the characters are left aware of their deceptions and sexual transgressions that have occurred throughout the narrative, but for the sake of social appearances and reputation they must all pretend otherwise.[81] The Dance of the Cuckolds, as a bastardisation of the wedding dance, ultimately comments on all the characters' actions. It particularly reflects the actualisation of Horner's and Pinchwife's cuckolding masochistic fantasies: they are both on stage as part of the chorus, dancing, and recognising that their private sexual otherness is now permitted publicly. Horner participates in the dance that he has created literally and figuratively: his last words that 'he who aimes by women to be priz'd, / First by the men, you see must be despis'd' (5.1.p.102) highlights his pleasure at remaining humiliated in his emasculation, rejection of morality, and propounding the status of the phallic female. Pinchwife seemingly ends the play by recognising that he is responsible for his own fate, self-defeated and left frustrated that 'Cuckolds like Lovers shou'd themselves deceive [...] *(Sighs)* –' (5.1.p.102). Horner and the women are left triumphant at the end of the play.

Wycherley's epilogue '*Spoken by Mrs Knepp*' (Elizabeth Knepp played the character of Lady Fidget on opening night) suggests an agency that women did not have at the beginning of the play. She unnervingly challenges the male audience to answer '*what you'd do to her if in Place where; / Nay have the confidence, to cry come out, / yet when she says lead on, you are not stout*' (Epilogue.p.103).[82] Whilst Mrs

[80] Kathleen Oliver, '"I will write Whore with this Penknife in your Face": Female Amatory Letters, the Body, and Violence in Wycherley's "*The Country Wife*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 1 (2014), 41-60 (p. 42).
[81] Webster, p. 68.
[82] The play was first staged on 12th January 1676 with Mrs Knepp in the role of Lady Fidget, *The London Stage*, p. 227.

Knepp is ventriloquising Wycherley's voice, dressed as Lady Fidget, she clearly understands that women control men's sexual desires, rather than men controlling women's and that '*The World, which to no man his due will give, / You by experience know you can deceive, […] / But then we women, – there's no cous'ning us'* (Epilogue. p.103). Female control of masculine sexual desire and masculine anxieties of libertinistic failure are key to the shaping of the masochistic fantasy, and as will be seen in *The London Cuckolds*, this psychological authority shapes men into victims and authors of their own desires, and eventual humiliation.

Farcical Failures in Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds*

Cuckoldry, hedonism and the hypocrisy of marriage were to remain topical tropes within Restoration comedy. However, stylistically, comedy began to evolve: rather than the witty, implicit, and intelligent humour of Dryden and Wycherley, there was a distinct move towards the portrayals of outrageous 'sex farces' where the central device of the play was 'simplicity itself'.[83] Edward Ravenscroft continued Wycherley's derision of marriage in *The London Cuckolds* (1681) – shattering any pretence to the gendered propriety, socio-morality, and belief in the sanctity of marriage which had tacitly been mocked during the previous decade.[84] My examination of the play will illuminate how Ravenscroft continued to critique the hypocrisy of marriage and reflects upon the failure of libertinistic exploits. This analysis will give a novel perspective on how the farcical genre of comedy attempted to provide an expository view of the hyperbolic, anti-authoritarian nature of libertinistic ideology whilst camouflaged under a celebration of laughable immorality. Following this, I will

[83] Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, p. 354.
[84] Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, p. 123.

highlight the depiction of cuckoldry within the theatre, and I will question how masculine anxieties and fear of sexual failure affected the act of infidelity. Throughout this study I will discuss how the cuckolding narrative of *The London Cuckolds* depicts the final step towards the creation of the masochistic fantasy.

The London Cuckolds was seen contemporaneously as a 'permissible saturnalia', a comedy of errors surrounding foolish London cuckolds which remained fashionable and popular – staged on Lord Mayor's Day until 1751, when David Garrick deemed it obscene and refused to stage it again.[85] As a result of its humour and 'bedroom-farce' construction, the play continues to be disparaged by modern critics; Robert D. Hume dismisses the play as 'sheer farce', and Derek Hughes suggests that it is 'very lightweight' and 'unreflective' on the importance of morality.[86] John Harwood contends that Ravenscroft completely ignored the period's anxieties and political discord to create a farcical play that discarded the traditional discourses of authority and morality.[87] Yet, implicitly Ravenscroft does respond to these worries by using bawdy humour to provide escapism from the bitter political arguments and social unrest surrounding the Popish Plot (August 1678– February 1679) and the Exclusion Crisis (February 1679 – March 1681).[88] London citizens were politically fatigued: after three general elections, and three unsuccessful attempts to pass parliamentary bills to exclude James, Duke of York, from the direct line of succession to Charles II. There was increased agitation against Catholicism and arbitrary government which, ultimately, led to public unrest and fear of another civil war.[89] The political upheaval

[85] Rothstein, p. 249.
[86] Rothstein, p. 242; Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, p. 354; Hughes, *English Drama,* p. 199; Hughes, *English Drama,* p. 230.
[87] John Harwood, *Critics, Values, and Restoration Comedy* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 87, 85.
[88] John Miller, *The Stuarts* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p.169; Susan Owen, 'Drama and political crisis', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 158-173 (p. 172).
[89] Miller, p. 170; Owen, p. 158.

during the Exclusion Crisis can be seen to have had an indirect effect upon playwrights and the theatres during the period; there was a radical transformation in dramatic form and control – particularly the move towards the production of farcical comedy on the London stage.[90]

Comedic theatre's success fluctuated during the 1678–1679 season, suffering a period of critical unpopularity – the previous decade's acceptance of the 'rampant free gallantry' that had been pervasive in sex comedies had become unfashionable and rejected by theatre goers.[91] As the political crisis intensified, witty sex boom comedy went out of fashion, with the public paying closer attention to the political arena or 'theatre of news' in the coffee houses, rather than in attending plays.[92] With the defeat of the Exclusion movement, the 1681–1682 season saw a resurgence of theatre-going and a rise in the staging of farcical comedies – indeed, Ravenscroft's prologue references that '*The Theatres are up, and, to their cost, / Must strive, by Victory, to please you most*' (sig. A2v) in reaction to the deep political divisions of the Crisis that had given rise to the party politics of the Tories and Whigs and their stances towards exclusion.[93]

Ravenscroft implicitly engages with the political discourse of his time, particularly during the 'Tory Reaction' period. His satire of London Whigs is subtly hidden through the farcical portrayal of older characters in *The London Cuckolds*.[94] The comedy of the 1680s has been described as a 'senility of empty giggles', but it is in

---

[90] Owen, p. 158.
[91] Owen, p. 160; Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, p. 377; John Harrington Smith, 'Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy', *Modern Philology*, 46 (1948) 22-33 (p. 27).
[92] Owen, pp. 160, 155.
[93] The first recorded performance of *The London Cuckolds* was on 22nd November 1681; however, as *The London Stage notes* 'the date of the first performance is not known', *The London Stage*, p. 303; Edward Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds. A Comedy* (Jos. Hindmarsh, 1682). It is important to note that the pagination in this quarto is inconsistent. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis of *The London Cuckolds*, act, scene and signature references will be provided instead; Owen, p. 158.
[94] Owen, p. 161.

this simplicity that Ravenscroft offers a derogatory commentary on some of the audience's stance towards the politics of the day.[95] In using the laughter of farcical comedy, he takes Restoration comedy's stereotypical straightforward characters who have no apparent thoughts of their own, and where 'impropriety was of the essence', to disguise his own stance towards the folly of politics and foibles of status in an attempt to concentrate solely on the fantasy of the 'ambiguities of desire [and] the social problems of relationships'.[96] Although the nature of farcical comedy can be thought of as offering little in the way of realism, perhaps it is in the extravagant unreality which drew the audience to be critical of politics, and to explore a new way of thinking about sexual power and female agency.[97]

The London Cuckolds is, at first glance, structurally complex; nevertheless, on closer reading, the play is based around a single action – an attempt at cuckoldry that is repeated three times with various degrees of success. Three aged husbands terrified of being cuckolded – Wiseacre, Doodle and Dashwell – are pitted against three young, witty gallants: Townly, Ramble and Loveday. Each of the husbands believes that they have come up with the best way to avoid being cuckolded – Wiseacre is about to marry an ignorant country girl, Peggy, Doodle has married the witty Arabella, and Dashwell has married the overly religious Eugenia, whilst the young wits are depicted as single and sexually frustrated. This leads to the bedroom farce at the heart of the play: each of the wives attempts to be unfaithful only to be thwarted by her husband's oblivious, but timely, return. The farcical bawdry of the play lies within these returning husbands, mistaken identities, and desires, particularly that of Ramble's relentless

[95] Rothstein, pp. 3, 248.
[96] Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (Applause Books, 1996), p.224; Peter Holland, 'Farce', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 107-126 (p. 108); Harwood, p. 89.
[97] J.L Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 213; Harwood, p. 88.

sexual mischief and lack of success in pursuance of the wives. Eugenia plans to bed Ramble, only to be faced with the return of her first love – Loveday; Arabella plans to sleep with Townly but encounters Ramble and she becomes confused as to who is who – eventually attempting to sleep with both; Ramble appears to fall in love with Peggy and uses her country girl ignorance to sleep with her. At every step the unobservant husbands come upon these situations with an unfailing belief in their wives' ridiculous excuses and are self-congratulatory about not having been cuckolded. The play ends with Townly, Ramble and Loveday remaining sexually unfulfilled, yet free to continue their libertinistic freedom; Wiseacre, Doodle and Dashwood are doomed to remain figures of fun, and cuckolded.

The threat of adultery and cuckoldry had not diminished since Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, indeed, the threat had become more prevalent by the 1680s.[98] Farcical humour became subsumed with the depiction of infidelity, derision of marriage and sexual immorality, where 'impropriety was of the essence'.[99] Nevertheless, there is a dichotomy within cuckoldry's representation on the stage: cuckoldry, and the act of being cuckolded was 'exaggerated beyond belief' and created a sense, like that of Doodle et al, of unbelievability that cuckoldry could happen to the male audience members.[100] Equally, Ravenscroft offers a sense of the societal shift towards acceptance that infidelity was the reality of marriage and sexual desire.

Depictions of cuckoldry in comedy had begun to be recognised by the 1680s as not solely limited to ridiculing the aristocracy and upper class for their hypocritical morality, political preferences, and pretensions.[101] Moreover, this ridicule was greatly

[98] Bentley, p. 229.
[99] Bentley, p. 224; Styan, p. 213.
[100] Styan, p. 213.
[101] Richard Bevis, *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1789* (Pearson Education, 1988), p. 93.

influenced by the rise of middle-class culture; 'social improvement' and equality between the classes had become a social movement in the latter half of the seventeenth century.[102] Peter Earle suggests that 'equality, or the dream of it, produced an insolence and conceit in the middle class' that was typically seen in the aristocracy.[103] Aldermen, such as Doodle et al can be seen as typical tradesmen attempting a narcissistic emulation of the higher classes' pretensions and manners in an act of a '"cit" [trying to become a] "wit"'.[104] Stringent class boundaries meant that tradesmen would never achieve social equality, and the humour created by their attempts gave rise to risible representations in plays.[105] Unlike Wycherley's humorous portrayal of cuckolding as the preserve of the rich – a 'rhetorical means to a moral end, an aesthetic expression of a moral calculus', the depiction of cuckoldry had evolved during the Exclusion Crisis as a means to humble 'vain, self-deceived men' of a lower class without a moralistic ending.[106] Ravenscroft's depiction of three young, aristocratic gallants and their attempts at cuckolding the naïve old men marks a desperate attempt to retain the act of cuckoldry as an upper-class predilection.[107]

In Act 1, Ravenscroft reveals the pretensions and naivety of Doodle, Dashwell and Wiseacre to an extreme extent: all of them giving their contrasting and ridiculous reasoning behind marrying their wives. Wiseacre claims that in marrying the ignorant Peggy she will be 'the mother of devotion' and that he can 'make her doe what I will' (1.1.sig.B2r); Doodle counters him by suggesting he would rather have his intelligent wife, Arabella, and that by marrying a fool he 'should always suspect her a whore, for 'tis want of wit that makes 'em believe the flatteries of men' (1.1.sig.B2r); Finally,

[102] Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (University of California Press, 1989), p. 9.
[103] Earle, pp. 3, 11.
[104] Earle, p. 11.
[105] Earle, p. 11.
[106] Rothstein, p.248; Harwood, p. 91.
[107] Rothstein, p. 248.

Dashwell suggests that 'security lies not in the foolish wife, or in the wife, but in the godly wife, one that prays and goes often to Church' (1.1.sig.B2v). Their moral reasoning, although true in their eyes, reflects the rationale behind the hypocrisy of marriage, failure of patriarchal control and masculine anxiety. Their gullibility highlights the reality that whomever one marries, infidelity is a certainty and that 'cuckoldry serves largely as a rough comeuppance for foolish men who plume themselves on their shrewdness in avoiding it': particularly when the husbands are depicted as undesirous of a good relationship with their wives and are ultimately unsuccessful in retaining their wife's fidelity.[108]

What should be seen as the old men's dominant position of age and apparent wisdom is merely seen by the audience as credulous; Ravenscroft's characterisations are depicted as figures of ridicule, their 'vanity, pride and blindness' and 'moral flaws' create a visible pathway to being cuckolded.[109] Throughout the play, sexual freedom is seen as the ultimate desire to affirm masculine prowess and deflect masculine anxiety. Sex was seen by the trio of gallants 'like gold [...] something both concrete and symbolic in its galvanising effect on and hypnotic allure to those who covet it' and Ramble, Loveday and Townly can be considered as the new generation of sexual radicals who make every effort to seek happiness through liberation from the restrictions of marriage and the masculine anxiety that had developed.[110] This cyclically continues the masculine anxieties surrounding marriage and fidelity of the previous generations.

As previously discussed within this chapter, masculine sexual anxieties are one of the driving forces for the creation of the masochistic fantasy. The masochist's

[108] Rothstein, p. 248.
[109] Harwood, p. 94.
[110] Harwood, p. 86, Hume, p. 95.

worries are an expression of an internal conflict which forces them to control how they can attain a specific pleasure to quieten their angst. This control shapes the masochist's identity: from their publicly respectable appearance to their private sexual desires. The thought of losing sexual pleasure or appearing emasculated through being cuckolded urges the masochist into desiring pleasure and pain. Unlike Dryden and Wycherley, Ravenscroft provides an indulgent view of the acceptance of cuckoldry, but he tempers this by tightly interweaving it with masculine anxiety and identity. The trio of aged husbands depicts the failure of the traditional societal perception of what it means to be a man – virility.[111] The old men blame their cuckolding worries on their age, particularly the slow decline in their sexual prowess: Wiseacre himself sums up his anxiety, declaring that 'a young woman is the only provocation for old age' (1.1.sig.B1r) and that to be seen as a virile male relies solely on being satisfied by women.[112]

Like Pinchwife's unresolved worries about his ability to satisfy Margery as a man and husband, Ravenscroft depicts Doodle, Dashwood and Wiseacre's preoccupation with their masculinity and their inability to satisfy their wives. He effectively turns his characters' anxiety into a figure of fun, and it is through this humour that he allows the male audience a moment of self-analysis on the futility of their own sexual anxieties. Nevertheless, Ravenscroft does not reserve his judgement solely for male identity and impotence. Jarred Wiehe argues that Ravenscroft confronts 'the late seventeenth-century ideological drive to make "masculinity" a "natural" product that stems from male bodies' of the new generation of libertines and Ravenscroft challenges what could be perceived as the failure and futility of sexual

[111] Jarred Wiehe, 'Propping up and Stripping Down: Stage Properties as Technologies of Gender in Edward Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* and *The London Cuckolds*', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 40 (2016) 5-22 (p. 14).
[112] Wiehe, p. 14.

freedom and its link with masculine identity irrespective of age.[113] Ravenscroft's characterisation of the young trio of gallants is similarly portrayed as being restricted by masculine ideology and the belief in patriarchal superiority.[114] Ramble's conversation with Townly that he has 'been unfortunate hitherto, I always meet with occasions, but never bring 'em to perfection; yet it is not my fault neither, for either my mistress jilts me, fortune jilts me, or the Devil prevents me' (1.1.sig.B4r) emphasises that being a man does not mean that agency, sexual freedom, and libertinism presents itself effortlessly.

Ravenscroft questions youthful masculine identity and anxiety particularly in the characterisation of Ramble. He farcically attempts to obtain pleasure-pain gratification with any of the wives as he fears that 'something extraordinary has hapen'd –– to knock is not convenient, to expect is painfull, but a Lover must have patience, a little sufferance sweetens the delight and renders the pleasure of enjoyment more valuable' (2.2.sig.E1r). In Act 3, Ramble's endeavour to sleep with Arabella sensationally and ridiculously falls apart when he becomes trapped within a window frame attempting to enter her house. At this point, he is then wholly denigrated by being covered in stale urine from Doodle's chamber pot, burnt, covered in faeces, and finally stripped of his masculine attire by thieves. It is in this scene that we see masculinity at its most vulnerable and with its anxieties laid bare for all to see, and as Ramble states 'the reward of Lovers had need be sweet for which they endure so much' (3.1.p.sig.F3r).[115] In becoming 'stuck fast' (3.1.sig.F3v) within the window, Ramble is stripped of his agency and is reduced to hanging 'like a Monkey by the Loins' (3.1.sig.F3v).

[113] Wiehe, p. 6.
[114] Wiehe, p. 6.
[115] Wiehe, p. 15.

Ramble's entrapment creates a fantasy structure where he submits to emasculation. Ramble's entrapment in the window, caught by 'his Loins', serves as a visual metaphor for the instability of his masculinity.[116] His clothing, which outwardly signifies patriarchal power and social dominance, paradoxically becomes the very mechanism of his humiliation and symbolic submission. His inability to escape the window symbolises Ramble's realisation of his fear of castration and reveals an underlying desire for the fulfilment of his sexual needs. As Deleuze suggests, the 'masochistic rites of torture and suffering imply actual physical suspension', and Ramble, in being trapped in the act of creating his fantasy, reduced to a 'Monkey', allows himself a space in which he is forced into making the imaginary a reality.[117] Ravenscroft's use of farce and 'its physicality [which] mocks the intellectualism and verbal wit of higher forms of comedy' allows Ramble to be similarly objectified like a woman once he is stripped of his '*hat and Periwig'* (3.1.sig.F4r)*:* clothing that marks him out as a man. Rather than being defeated, the shame empowers him to create his own reality where he can establish and strengthen his desire from his 'pickle' (3.1.sig.F3v) for a masochistic contract through the 'disavowal [and] suspense' of entering Arabella's house.[118]

Ramble's masochistic desire is shown through his being 'insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; [and] he is a humourist, a logician of consequences'; by enduring being trapped, both literally and metaphorically, he understands the reality of his actions – being 'lodg'd in the Counter, and carried before

[116] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Loins' as 'the part of the body that should be covered by clothing and about which the clothes are bound' and 'the seat of physical strength and of generative power', 'Loins' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 May 2025].
[117] Deleuze, p. 33.
[118] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Pickle' as 'a (usually disagreeable) condition or situation; a plight, a predicament'. 'Pickle' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025]; Holland, *Farce*, p. 109; Deleuze, p. 89.

a Magistrate to morrow, and all the City will ring of me by noon' (3.1.p.sig.F4r) will, ostensibly, reveal his sexual fantasy to the public.[119] Yet his growing pleasurable desire to endure masochism does not prevent him from continuing his search to contract with a torturer, even if he, as Townly advises him, is an 'unreasonable Blockhead [...] to go a Masquerading thus' (3.1.sig.f2r).[120]

Ramble's danger of arrest is a humorous denouement to his predicament. The threat of being carried off to the Magistrate acts a form of masochistic torture by Arabella: where she could save him from this humiliation, she does not.[121] Deleuze suggests that

> A close examination of masochistic fantasies or rites [...] bring into play the very strictest application of the law, the result in every case is the opposite of what might be expected (thus whipping, far from punishing or preventing an erection, provokes and ensures it) [...] the masochist regards the law as a punitive process and therefore begins by having the punishment inflicted upon himself; once he is allowed or indeed commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid.[122]

Ramble's entrapment, his degradation, threat of prison and public embarrassment all spur him on to complete his desire to create a fantasy world where he can contract for his masochistic torture. His eventual emasculation, whilst stuck in the window, follows on from his earlier attempt at sleeping with Arabella and his cuckoldry of Doodle at

[119] Deleuze, p. 89.
[120] As previously noted in n.93, the pagination is inconsistent in the quarto. The printer has inserted an octavo gathering with the signature mark 'f'.
[121] Ramble is eventually rescued from being taken to prison after being recognised and vouched for by Townly.
[122] Deleuze, p. 88.

the beginning of Act 3. The pleasure from the punishment for this is what drives Ramble's Masochean masochistic desire: turning from a 'young active fellow fit for Imployment' (3.1.sig.E2v), he relinquishes his sexual agency to Arabella, giving her power as he 'can hardly forbear [...] a minute longer' (3.1.sig.E2v). His impatience at the wait for Arabella to agree to sexual intercourse merely increases his anxiety that his desire for, as Deleuze describes it, 'pain, punishment or humiliation [as] necessary prerequisites to obtaining gratification' will not be achieved.[123] Arabella's new-found sexual agency and her denial of sexual pleasure permits her to torture Ramble into a state of arousal, telling him to

> Take notice [...] thou desperate resolute man, that I now go to my chamber, where I'll undress me, go into my bed, and if you dare to follow me, kiss or come to bed to me; if all the strength and passion a provoked woman has, can do't, I'll lay thee breathless and panting, and so maul thee, thou shalt ever after be affraid to look a woman in the face.
>
> (3.1.sig.E3r)

Arabella's detailed description of her undressing is anticipatory, solely used to goad and inflame Ramble. Her threat that Ramble will be forever 'affraid' tacitly exhibits her explicit agreement towards becoming his Masochean masochistic torturer, and that she will be able to provide his mental pain, or 'thy worst' (3.1.sig.E3r) in the future.[124] This is not the only method by which Ramble derives his pleasure from pain; his 'desperate' anxiety that stems from the continuance of waiting for his sexual gratification – something that is 'essentially tardy, always late and always postponed'

[123] Deleuze, p. 71.
[124] Deleuze, p. 71.

grants him further pleasure without making a binding masochistic contract with Arabella, instead choosing to keep his options open towards any of the wives within the play.[125]

The use of farcical situations to demonstrate Ramble's sexual pursuits can be thought of as Ravenscroft's attempt to use humour, subtextually, to display Ramble's desire for a masochistic relationship without openly admitting his sexual deviance. As Freud proposes,

> The field of sexuality and obscenity also offers a wealth of opportunities for obtaining comic pleasure as well as sexual arousal, in so far as human beings are shown in their dependence on bodily needs (degradation) or the physical imperative behind romantic [...] love [which is] uncovered.[126]

Freud's hypothesis illuminates how Ramble's sexual appetite forces him into comedic situations to satiate his desire. His attempts at cuckoldry, his bawdy language and the fantasy that is created within the window frame confirms his sexual arousal, and indicates to Arabella that he wishes to form a masochistic contract with her in the hope that she will become sexually aroused herself.[127] Ramble considers himself no 'ordinary Lover' (3.1.p.sig.F3r) and 'so elivated with the thoughts of her' (3.1.sig.F3r) that he subconsciously understands that Arabella will keep him in his predicament and, therefore, she has him in her thrall. Effectively, she has become his desired torturer, and she offers Ramble what Freud suggests as 'the prospect that further efforts might not be in vain'.[128]

---

[125] Deleuze, p. 71.
[126] Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (Penguin Books, 2002), p. 216.
[127] Freud, *The Joke*, p. 94.
[128] Freud, *The Joke*, p. 96.

This masochistic desire is not limited to Ramble and can be seen in the interaction between Arabella and Townly. In Act 4, scene 2, Arabella is told by her husband Doodle that she must only answer all 'impertinent men, that ask you any questions [...] with No –– Let 'em say what they please, let your answer still be, No, no' (4.2.sig.g5v).[129] However, in Act 5 Arabella, in a 'fantastic concoction of farcical incident', cleverly uses the ambiguity of the word 'no' when speaking to Townly to encourage his sexual desire, the prospect of sex with her and an indication of the form that her torture of him will take.[130] Townly's persistent pleading to Arabella that

Townly: I am your most humble Servant.

Arabella: No.

Townly: Y'Gad but I am, and will if you please.

Arabella: No.

Townly: Will you not give me leave to wait on you?

Arabella: No.

Townly: Nor stand and talk with you a little, dear Rogue?

Arabella: No.

Townly: I am in love with you; will you be heard-hearted to a man that Loves you?

Arabella: No.

(5.1.sig.g6v)

[129] As previously noted in n.93 and n.95, the pagination is inconsistent in the quarto. The printer has inserted a duodecimo gathering with the signature mark 'g'.
[130] Styan, p. 212.

displays the length he will go to place her in the position of torturer or his 'Rogue'. Indeed, it is from his waiting for pleasure through her opposition, and his declarations of love, in which their masochistic contract is created.

Ravenscroft presents an ambiguous view of masochistic relationships, refusing to allow either Townly or Ramble to establish a true masochistic contract. Moreover, the apparent failure of their masochistic efforts mirrors the dynamics of the aging husbands and their wives. The attempts by Doodle, Dashwell, and Wiseacre to secure their wives' fidelity highlights their inability to experience either pleasure or pain, revealing that men without masochistic tendencies are sexually inadequate, a situation that directly feeds into masculine anxiety. Similar to Horner's key fetish, Wiseacre, after marrying Peggy and leaving on their marriage night, figuratively transforms himself into a nightcap to remind her in great detail that 'you are to love me, and the love of a wife to her husband, is to doe all things that he desires and commands. […] you must show all duty and reverence to that Night cap, as if it were my self' (4.2.sig.g4v). The nightcap, as a masculine item of clothing, is metamorphosised into his figurative phallus purely to keep alive his desire for sexual gratification during his absence on a night when the need for a literal phallus is customarily needed for consummation of the marriage.[131]

Wiseacre's nightcap represents symbolically his blind belief that the phallus and marriage contract simply equates to the certainty of his fantasy world and masochistic contract with his wife, leaving Peggy to 'Watch whilst her Husband Sleeps, and to walk […] by him all Night' (5.1.sig.G1v). Wiseacre goes further than simply setting the nightcap down by the bed as a form of patriarchal and sexual control. He

[131] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Nightcap' as 'a cap worn in bed or with nightclothes. Also: a skullcap worn as an informal alternative to a wig'. 'Nightcap' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].

then proceeds to place, in a fantastical desire, Peggy into armour to guard his nightcap as both a protection from his being cuckolded but also as a visual representation of the type of masochism that he desires: the strong woman who possesses a sexual agency over him and who wears the traditional clothing of a man. Nevertheless, in leaving Peggy behind for the night, Wiseacre unwittingly destroys his own fantasy: without consummation of the marriage his pleasure-pain and his complete disavowal of reality have not been converted into his new masochistic reality.

It is up to Ramble, in his role as cuckolder, to educate Peggy into the position of the Masochean masochistic torturer of both him and Wiseacre. In Act 5, Ramble finally seduces Peggy, playing on her lauded country innocence and Wiseacre's absence. Ramble confirms that 'she's merely impos'd upon' (5.1.sig.I1r) by Wiseacre and that he 'will stay with [her] tonight and take pains to instruct in the whole Duty of a Wife' (5.1.sig.I1v) in expectation that she will bring him pleasure, but the return of Wiseacre will bring him ultimately pain. Eventually, Ramble's cuckoldry will transport Wiseacre into a form of masochistic contract: whilst unsure that he has been cuckolded by Ramble, the possibility that it has occurred drives him into a state of pleasure and pain, particularly when Peggy admits to Wiseacre that

> Peggy: [...] when I told him you bid me, he said that was but the first Duty, but he'd shew me all the rest, and teach me every nights Duty, and that you had sent him so to do.
>
> Wiseacre: To do how?
>
> Peggy: Nay but *I* can't tell you how, *I* have learn'd a great deal of him, and if I were in Bed I could shew you.
>
> Wiseacre: You are a Baggage.
>
> (5.1.sig.H1r)

Wiseacre calls Peggy 'Baggage' contemptuously: she is dirt or rubbish in her treatment of him.[132] However, there remains within Wiseacre an element of preserving honour and saving face from the ignominy of a very public sexual insult by Ramble. Rather than admit that he has been clandestinely cuckolded, Wiseacre suggests that it was he who ordered Peggy's 'education' to become a torturer, confirming that his masochistic fantasy

> 'twas all but a dream. I spoke to a Conjurer before I went, to Conjure up something before your eyes on purpose to make you think so, and to Conjure you asleep, and make you dream so, I tell you it was all but a dream, and the Conjurers doing.
>
> (5.1.sigs.H1r-H1v)

His use of the term 'Conjurer' suggests an otherworldliness, something fantastical that can only be brought about through the unseen or supernatural, perhaps as a way of both disguising and explaining his subversive sexual desire as well as accepting that it can only happen through cuckoldry. Once Wiseacre understands that Peggy has been told how to behave, he replaces Ramble as her tutor to 'Conjure my self' (5.1.sig.H1v). The repeated use of the term 'dream' in conjunction with 'Conjurer' connects these to a masochistic fantasy which acts as both a form of concealment and validation for the pleasure-pain gathered from cuckoldry for all the couples within the play. Loveday begs Eugenia to 'play Conjurer for me' (5.1.sig.G2r)

[132] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Baggage' in the seventeenth century as 'Rubbish, refuse, dirt'. 'Baggage' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online]. https://oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].

and Townly has a 'great Faith in Dreams' (5.1.sig.H4r) when explaining his attempted cuckoldry with Arabella to Doodle, which he could have 'Dream't a thousand times or'e' (5.1.p.sig.H4v). This sense of magical dissemblance allows for seemingly acceptable way to continue their subversive desires, a disavowal and fantasy that is permissibly made real.

The denouement of the play does not leave the audience under the illusion that a masochistic contract and cuckoldry are unconditional. Masochism and the creation of masochistic fantasies continue to exist, but the appearance of sexual normalcy and the socio-moral status quo must be maintained. Patriarchal control must be upheld irrespective of the 'wicked Machinations' (5.1.sig.I1r) of masochism; cuckoldry must be seen to be feared and punished; husbands will remain allegedly ignorant to their wives' libidinous actions whilst wives become their puppet masters. As Arabella sums up: 'let us meet to morrow; Each confess the whole truth, and laugh heartily at the folly of our Husbands' (5.1.sig.I3r) in an act of triumph.

During the Restoration period, the depiction of marriage in comedic plays reflected a significant attitudinal change to marriage, morality, and sex. As exemplar playwrights of this period, John Dryden, William Wycherley, and Edward Ravenscroft were swift to portray the fluctuating ideological move away from the sanctity of monogamous marriage to show the emerging belief in the futility of marriage with a concomitant desire for infidelity, and sexual freedom. This movement towards a new sexual ideology marked a breakaway from the traditional religious control of marriage and sex, and indeed was a reactionary and schismatic move away from the puritanical control which had defined the Interregnum. In the playhouses, the authority of the church was displaced in favour of libertine ideology: marriage and fidelity were an

unnatural state of being, sustaining its tenets was an impossibility, and sex was the true authority within society.

Dryden, Wycherley and Ravenscroft highlight and critique masculine anxieties: particularly those towards the appearance of fidelity, honour, control, and sexual prowess. Dryden's focus on the frustration of fidelity, and lack of eroticism in marriage drives the anxiety of his characters Rhodophil and Palamede, whilst Wycherley and Ravenscroft interweave these anxieties into the success of being a cuckolder and the threat to being of cuckolded. The plays depict cuckoldry as an all-consuming fear for the married protagonists, particularly Pinchwife in *The Country Wife* and Wiseacre, Dashwell and Doodle in *The London Cuckolds*. Over the course of these three plays, the notion of male honour is invariable: men's humorous, yet desperate attempts to remain being seen as honourable, moralistic, and capable of exerting control over their wives are unsuccessful. The playwrights deride this attempt at retention as a hypocrisy and suggest that men implicitly desire mental pain from sexual humiliation and acceding female agency for their sexual pleasure in a form of Deleuzian Masochean masochism. Nevertheless, humiliation is not limited to the husbands of the plays: the unattached gallants Ramble, Townly and Loveday's libertinistic failure in *The London Cuckolds* fuels their tortuous desire for sexual gratification; equally, Horner voluntarily chooses the shame of feigned emasculation to achieve his masochistic pleasure.

These sexual anxieties: fidelity, cuckoldry, and sexual failure enable men to create an ideal masochistic fantasy, fuelled by a desire to suspend their painful reality of failure and socio-expectations, allowing them a new reality where they can explore a sexual freedom by disavowing their masculine dominance and submitting to a female torturer – through choosing either to remain married, or by becoming cuckolded. It is in this new form of expression, or otherworldliness, that the masochist can validate his

demands and in doing so, the pain and humiliation of their anxieties becomes something private to be enjoyed in a pleasurable act of sexual gratification. However, this fantastical dream can only exist concurrently with reality and, therefore, the masochistic fantasy must rely on the hypocritical need for a monogamous marriage, socio-moralistic honour, and integrity.

The plays question what it means to be a man of a certain social class, and moreover, what a man is without a Masochean masochistic desire. Only Wycherley's Horner successfully continues his masochism by the end of the play; Pinchwife and Dryden's and Ravenscroft's male characters only momentarily experience the pleasure from mental pain and are not able to maintain a masochistic contract. This loss merely serves to augment male anxieties, leaving men more fearful, sexually frustrated, and emasculated figures of fun. Indeed, we see the extreme measures that the male characters take to avoid such failure: Pinchwife's violence in his attempt to retain his masochistic torture by Margery; the farcical reasoning behind the right choice of wife by Doodle et al, and the many failed attempts at libertinistic freedom by Ramble, Townly and Loveday. The men are left humiliated, burdened by their moral flaws, faced with the futility of their sexual desires, and fundamentally emasculated in society.

Ultimately, this sexual ideology was tempered by Dryden, Wycherley and Ravenscroft, with none of them offering an outright approval of the libertinistic lifestyle. The playwrights offer no firm resolution to their plays; whilst sexual boundaries are expanded, they each end in a return to socio-normality and the status quo: the cuckolded remain humiliated, marriages irrespectively continue unhappily and gallants remain ever hopefully libertinistic. As will be discussed further in chapter three, the increase in female agency gained by the masochist's desire is not diminished to any extent; female playwrights assume control of the depiction of female

empowerment, showing how women are triumphant over men's desires and display a comparably masculine control over their husbands.

Chapter Three

The Masochist's Ideal: Independence, Disguise and Desire

Throughout chapter two I showed how Dryden, Wycherley and Ravenscroft illuminated how Masochean masochistic desire is formed from the need for humiliation, to enliven marriages, or as an alternate form of libertinistic desire. Thematically, comedic plays written by male playwrights throughout the 1670s and early 1680s charted the oscillation between the depictions of freedom, sexual excess, and the consequences of cuckoldry for men. However, an underlying didacticism towards women prevailed: specifically, the demand for feminine honour, virtue, and fidelity. My study of the plays in the preceding chapter demonstrated the need for these demands which implicitly invited women's sexual freedom. Yet masculine playwrights had no experience of the restrictive sexual rules with which women were supposed to abide.

In this chapter, a study of Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), *The Feign'd Curtizans* (1679) and Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* (1695) will outline how these playwrights responded to the demand for female submission by depicting their female characters as independent, manipulative and in control of masculine sexual desire. Whilst these plays span a long period of time, my choice of primary texts reflects the negligible number of female professional playwrights on the London stage post 1660. With the exception of Behn, Frances Boothby's *Marcelia*, or, *The Treacherous Friend* (1669) and E. Polewhele's *The Faithful Virgins* (1670) were brief instances of female voices writing for predominantly male tastes. This study will explore how Behn and Ariadne used gender ambiguity, pseudonymity and anonymity to obtain impartial, if not favourable, critiques by men.

It is only with the start of Behn's career that a woman seized the freedom to express her frustrations within the playhouse, and this discussion will evaluate Behn's, and latterly Ariadne's, ambitious critique of masculine tendentiousness and depiction of female empowerment within their plays. When viewed from a Deleuzian angle, this subversive treatment of gender roles by both Behn and Ariadne parallels Deleuze's conceptualisation of the female natures of the 'Three Women of Masoch' and their journeys to becoming masochistic torturers.[1] To recapitulate Deleuze's theory, he suggests that women have two inherent natures – the hetaeric generator of disorder and the sadistic woman who is fixated on causing pain, although the masochistic nature is evolutionary and occurs in synthesis between the two natures. Throughout the analysis of the plays, I will critically evaluate Deleuze's view to examine its limitations and strengths in relation to the female characterisations to re-evaluate Behn and Ariadne's plays.

When analysed from a Deleuzian perspective, *The Feign'd Curtizans* illuminates how deception, pretence and disguise are the first stage in the evolutionary process of the hetaeric woman. This investigation will focus on how Behn's female characters' play-acting as prostitutes empowers them to gain independence and exercise control over their sexual desires. This discussion will lead to an examination of how the freedom of appearing as a courtesan allows Behn's psychologically nuanced women to use their force of personality, beauty and intellect to dominate and control men. Behn's female characterisation would become paradigmatic for her later plays and for later female playwrights, including Ariadne. Her play, *She Ventures, and He Wins* remains focused on the gender imbalances that Behn critiqued, but Ariadne, writing in the 1690s, reflected the limited proto-feminist movement within her

[1] Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), pp. 47-55.

characters' assertive interactions with men. A Deleuzian reading of the play will show how Ariadne's female characters have evolved from the hetaeric into the sadistic women – using their allure with cruelty – and the impact this has on women's control of men. Ultimately, this discussion seeks to understand how this behaviour places men into a gender-reversed position of submission and pain.

This chapter will conclude with an examination of Behn's *The Rover* to reveal how her female characters' creative and comical determination enables them to manipulate and control the men of the play. This study does not follow the three plays chronologically; however, this regression allows for a clear examination and understanding of Deleuze's conceptualisation of the evolutionary nature of the Masochean women: from the hetaeric, to the sadistic and finally, the masochistic ideal. ~~P~~positioning *The Rover* after *The Feign'd Curtizans* in my analysis illuminates how Behn uses her representations of the unemotional idealised woman to explicitly challenge the societal status quo of gender inequality and female submission. Furthermore, Behn's revolutionary depiction of female ruthlessness and control – coming before *The Feign'd Curtizans* – will show how Behn perhaps exceeded the limits of what was reasonable for women, and why her female characters going forward became less extreme, or obvious, in their critique of gender lines. Along with these studies, I will explore how the evolutionary nature of the three women of Masoch correlates with the level of freedom experienced by Behn and Ariadne, and how this has the potential to reassess women's roles: either as a character or playwright within the theatre.

A Venus in Disguise: Disorder in Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans*

As discussed in the section on *The London Cuckolds* in the previous chapter, audience tastes would become increasingly difficult to anticipate during the politically turbulent period 1679–1681. In this section, I will examine how Behn used social turbulence to her advantage by advocating for gender parity and an end to patriarchal sexual hypocrisy. As we shall see, Behn disguises her female characters as courtesans, and in so doing removes them from respectable society in an act of disorder within the play. As I will explain, when viewed from a Deleuzian standpoint, Behn is calculating: her female characters are both sexually available and chaste, they are physically in control of themselves and the men around them. This characterisation provides an examination of how Behn's women reflect the first iteration of Deleuze's three women of Masoch – the hetaeric – and how they sow disorder to create anxiety, humiliate and eventually emasculate.

The Feign'd Curtizans (1679) was Behn's first play to be produced during fluctuations in theatrical popularity and the societal unrest of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis between 1679 and 1681.[2] It is during this period that Behn took advantage of the apparent variability of 'party politics and sexual politics' outside the theatre in order to 'forge new sexual and political viewpoints' within the playhouse: particularly her gender critiques in *The Feign'd Curtizans*.[3] On first sight, Behn's play is a 'rollicking "Spanish" romance', a genre that transported her audience back to an

[2] *The London Stage* notes that 'the date of the first production of [*The Feign'd Curtizans*] is not known, but as the play was licensed for printing on 27 March 1679, the premiere must have been no later than March 1679', *The London Stage 1660–1700,* ed. by William Van Lennep (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 276.
[3] Susan Owen, '"Suspect my loyalty when I lose my virtue": Sexual Politics and Party in Aphra Behn's Plays of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678–83', in *Aphra Behn, Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Janet Todd (Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 57-72 (p. 57).

earlier pre-Civil War period – where women were characterised as being moralistic and chaste, and to be otherwise meant damnation and social exclusion.[4] Nevertheless, Behn radically subverts this genre by depicting her female protagonists on the verge of indecency in order for them to gain independence and control of their own physical and sexual desires.

Behn's play presents us with several convoluted plot lines – where the three heroines assume various disguises and deceptions to control their fates. The first plot follows two sisters, Marcella and Cornelia, and their escape from the control of their guardian, Count Morosini. He is forcing Marcella to marry Octavio, and have Cornelia sent to a nunnery. The sisters flee to Rome where they feign being the courtesans Euphemia and La Silvianetta. The English cavaliers, Sir Harry Fillamour and Galliard, see the courtesans and become entranced by their beauty. Marcella and Cornelia fall in love with the cavaliers but do not reveal their true identities: Marcella tests Fillamour's constancy, and Cornelia encourages Galliard's advances.

The second plot follows Laura Lucretia's attempt at freeing herself from an arranged marriage to Julio. She is in love with Galliard, and dresses as a man to meet him, but she realises that Galliard is in love with the courtesan, La Silvianetta/Cornelia. Annoyed, Laura Lucretia pretends to be a courtesan – confusingly taking the name La Silvianetta to deceive Galliard into falling in love with her. The plot becomes confused when the three women are brought together at the denouement of the play. Octavio discovers Marcella/Euphemia's love for Fillamour and swears to challenge him to a fight. Marcella/Euphemia disguises herself as a pageboy to stop Fillamour from going, but she is unsuccessful, and farcically Fillamour

[4] Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 329; Spanish romance was a popular dramatic genre during the 1670s. This genre was characterised by the action being set in Spain, offering a complex intrigue plot where the retention of virtue and chastity was of the upmost importance for female characters, Hume, pp. 240-241.

and Galliard end up fighting with Octavio. Finally, their deception is uncovered and they dispense with their courtesan disguises; Morosini and Octavio realise that the sisters are beyond their control and allow them to marry Fillamour and Galliard. Laura Laura Lucretia's deception is punished by being tricked into honouring her arranged marriage to Julio.

Janet Todd argues that Behn's choice to set the play in Rome, during a volatile period in England, is perhaps mistimed due to the religious crisis surrounding James, Duke of York and the line of succession.[5] As a dramatist, Behn figuratively used the crisis to 'create plays for an audience with preconceptions [which the playwrights] could fulfil or frustrate'.[6] Although not an uncommon structural device in Restoration theatre, Behn's choice of setting the play in continental Europe suggests a conscious, if not complex, choice to highlight the religious crisis and the dangers of Catholicism for her audience. However, Behn's figurative placing of the audience in Rome allows them to enjoy a forbidden city with an absence of restrictions.[7] As will be seen, Behn exploits this freedom by allowing her female characters to become independent and, therefore, alter the sexual power dynamics within the play. During Act 1, scene 1, Galliard tells Fillamour that the courtesans, La Silvianetta and Euphemia are 'the greatest blessing this wicked World can afford us' (1.1.p.2) – playing on the ideology that Rome was seen by the English as a 'wicked' place, but the sexual freedom is a 'blessing' to do as they wish.[8] Behn satirises this hypocritical 'blessing' in Act 1, scene 2: the religiously hyperbolic Mr Tickletext questions whether in Rome it is 'any great

[5] Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn, A Secret Life* (Fentum Press, 2017), p. 247
[6] Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 7.
[7] Behn was not unique during this period; other comedies, such as John Leanerd's *The Counterfeits* (1679) and Lewis Maidwell's *The Loving Enemies* (1680) are set in Catholic Europe.
[8] Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans, or, A Nights Intrigue. A Comedy* (Jacob Tonson, 1679).

matter of Sin only in visiting a Lady that loves a man' (1.2.p.6), only to be told by the pimp Petro that

> Petro: Sin Sir, 'tis a frequent thing now adays in Persons of your Complexion.
>
> Tickletext: Especially here at *Rome* too, where 'tis no Scandal.
>
> Petro: Ay Signior, where the Ladys are *Privileg'd*, *and Fornication licenc't.*
>
> Tickletext: Right*! and when 'tis Licens'd 'tis Lawful, and when 'tis Lawful it can be no Sin.*
>
> (1.2.p.6)

The idea of having the 'Complexion' of a protestant and that sex is licensed with Roman women appeases Tickletext, and in a fantastical desire he convinces himself that he is free to enjoy his libidinous fantasies without guilt.

The play's depiction of the licensed sexual freedom of the '*Privileg'd*' ladies, as Jane Spencer suggests, 'throws into question the woman's proper role of obedience and submission, celebrating women's deceitful, dissembling actions in pursuit of their desires', and it is in these depictions that Behn shows her frustrations at the predominantly male control of the theatre.[9] When Behn's vexations at gender inequality, and the atypical independence of her female characters are seen in the context of the Deleuzian theory of the three women of Masoch, they become

[9] Jane Spencer, '"Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comic Plot and Female Action in *The Feign'd Curtizans*', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 86-101 (p. 100).

> the Grecian woman, the pagan, hetaerae or Aphrodite, the generator of disorder. Her life, in her own words, is dedicated to love and beauty; she lives for the moment. She is sensual; she loves whoever attracts her and gives herself accordingly.[10]

Behn as a 'generator of disorder' – a troublemaker, the inciter of psychological manipulation, the instigator of female emancipation – assails the male critical condemnation of a woman writer that produces female characterisations who create masochistic pleasure from being defiant, emotionally distant and unattainable.[11] Cornelia exclaims that she would rather 'turn errant keeping Curtizan, and buy my better fortune' (2.1.p.14) to illustrate her growing desire for erotic freedom – as a form of torture – and a means to an independent life.

As will be seen, the demands for gender and sexual equality forms part of women's manipulation of the masochistic desire and places men in a position of submission. Cornelia calls attention to the disparity in women's rights, claiming that her 'sex [is] an Oath I shall not violate this dozen year: my sex shou'd excuse me, if to preserve [men's] fame, they expected I shou'd ruin my own quiet' (2.1.p.14) – they must operate hypocritically within the bounds of socio-respectability, but men are free to do as they wish. Behn's female characters implicitly remove themselves from patriarchal domination, and as Laurie Finke highlights: Behn's heroines, and their sexual freedom present the 'fullest possible scope to female action [and] allow her

[10] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Hetaera' as a 'female companion or paramour, a mistress, a concubine; a courtesan, harlot', 'Hetaera' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025]; Deleuze, p. 47.
[11] Laurie Finke, 'Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 17-43 (p. 25).

[Behn's] audience glimpses of female power' which confronts the hypocrisy of male superiority.[12]

In Act 2, scene 1, we are introduced to Marcella, reading Ovid, and Cornelia, dressed as courtesans, who are discussing being seen only as vapid and submissive sexual objects. Cornelia mocks this insipidity by suggesting to Marcella they should appear to 'Sigh till our wandering Breath / Has rais'd a gentle gale amongst boughs, / To whose dull melancholly Musick, we / Laid on a Bed of Moss, and new fall'n leaves, / Will reade the dismall tale of Eccho's Love!' (2.1.p.14). Her use of blank verse creates a sense of gentleness; however, Cornelia does not voice overtly her dissatisfaction. Instead, her language takes on a frustrated tone which adulterates the banal femininity expected of them. Her 'wandering breath' that becomes a 'gentle gale' suggests a tonal shift towards becoming bold enough to articulate her dissatisfaction and demand 'prethee what a pox have we to do with Trees, Flowers, Fountains, or naked statues?' (2.1.p.14). Cornelia's reference to the mythological nymph Echo, and her 'dismall' fate indicates her belief in the patriarchal control that keeps her in submission.

Cornelia exclaims she 'can make better use of Famous Ovid' (2.1.p.14), transforming her into a generator of disorder: her startling interruptive '– No' voices her decision to no longer submit to men. She will make 'better use of famous Ovid' and chooses to avoid the same fate as Echo's – only being able to parrot 'the last few words of the many spoken by others'.[13] Cornelia's 'better use' illustrates her desire to break with the prescribed socio-morality based on the subjective readings of Ovid to create

[12] Spencer, p. 100.
[13] Ovid is seen predominantly as an erotic poet but during the seventeenth century he came under serious criticism. Dryden castigated Ovid for being 'frequently witty out of season', whilst Richard Hardin posits that during the Restoration period Ovid's tales were read by Englishmen as overly moralised and allegorical narratives, Richard Hardin, 'Ovid in Seventeenth-Century England', *Comparative Literature*, 24 (1972) 44-62 (pp. 49-50); the story of Echo is contained within Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Epistles*, Ovid, 'Book III', in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by David Raeburn (Penguin Classics, 2004), pp. 91-128; *Ovid's Epistles, Translated by Several Hands* (Jacob Tonson, 1680), sig. A5r.

a new sexual hierarchy. Furthermore, Behn's stage direction for Cornelia to snatch the book emphasises the visible affirmation of this desire – Cornelia takes her freedom and demolishes the 'pox' of masculine comparison of women to 'trees, flowers, fountains, or naked statues'.

Behn's independence as a professional playwright is reflected by Cornelia's desire for freedom – particularly as she was writing during a period where, as Elin Diamond proposes, 'female authorship was a monstrous violation of the woman's sphere'.[14] Behn is the 'writer' and her 'strumpet muse' is Cornelia; they symbolically become the Deleuzian hetaerae: both Behn and Cornelia are willingly in violation of female respectability.[15] Behn foregrounds what Annette Kreis-Schnick argues is 'the particular concern with [...] women's participation in the arts. Their products immediately receive a sexual label and are thus denigrated' in celebration of the power this creates.[16] Cornelia and Marcella's pretence as the courtesans La Silvianetta and Euphemia opposes the demand for feminine virtue and Cornelia elevates the prostitute to having a 'Noble title [that] has more *Votaries than Religion*' (2.1.p.14). Cornelia, and therefore Behn, suggests that in being proud of the title, a woman cannot be 'frightened with the vizor, which [they] put on' (2.1.p.24); instead it is an act of empowerment.

Behn's depiction of women who willingly disguise themselves as prostitutes, to take control of their agency, are the optimal masochistic torturers and their disguise as courtesans removes them from respectable society and permits them freedom. Elin Diamond considers that Behn 'seems to have created a spectator [...] who takes

[14] Elin Diamond, '*Gestus* and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*', in *Aphra Behn, Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Janet Todd (Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 32-56 (p. 33).
[15] Catherine Gallagher, 'Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 65-85 (p. 73).
[16] Annette Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theater in the Early Modern Period* (Associated University Press, 2001), p. 23.

pleasure in ornaments that deceive the sight, whose disavowal of material reality produces a desire for [...] exotic and enticing representations'.[17] As will be discussed later in the chapter, Behn's disguised 'ornaments' simultaneously remain virtuous and appear lascivious to accentuate their hetaeric nature; indeed, Octavio observes that they 'differ from the rest [...]. they generously own their trade of sin, which others deal by stealth in' (2.1.p.13). Deleuze illuminates how Cornelia's and Marcella's willingness to disguise themselves as 'sensual' and 'ready to give [themselves] accordingly' to satisfy the masochists' desire highlights their hetaeric natures. Cornelia postulates that women 'have no more to do then to advance in this same glorious Profession, of which now we only seem to be: – in which to give it its due, there are a thousand satisfactions to be found, more then in a dull virtuous life!' (2.1.p.15).[18]

Deleuze expands upon his theory through his use of Johann Bachofen's proposal that there were three phases of cultural evolution in the creation of modern society.[19] Deleuze's equation of the Grecian woman with

[17] Diamond, p. 35.
[18] Behn's dedication of the play to Nell Gwynn suggests a reliance on the reputation and sexual, tortuous dominance of actresses on men. It is Behn's first play to be dedicated to a patron, and whilst Derek Hughes argues that 'it would be risky to read too much' into Behn's choice of dedicatee, Behn's female characters suggests another close link with the Deleuzian 'hetaeric mother' figure of Gwynn 'who made much of being a whore', Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 35; Janet Todd proposes that a woman like Behn, who 'associated with theatre bawdiness, [and] whose private life had not been impeccable, [was viewed] like an established royal mistress' and, indeed, Behn exploits this reputation by addressing Gwynn with 'less faith and zeal then you alone can inspire, had wanted power to have reduc't me to the true worship' (dedication. sig. A2r), Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn, A Secret Life* (Fentum Press, 2017), p. 253; Whilst Behn's dedication could be considered hyperbolic: Behn makes sacrifice to Gwynn with 'infinite fear and trembling' (dedication. sig. A2r) and her language suggests a level of understanding of how women are treated in a male dominated world and also the masculine desire to be treated with pain. Both, in their respective professions, have the power to appear as Aphroditic, inspiring desire, disorder and when Gwynn speaks, 'men crowd to listen' (dedication. sig. A2v).
[19] Jakob Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (Benno Schwabe, 1897).

> The first [of Bachofen's eras] is the hetaeric or Aphroditic era, born in the lustful chaos of primeval swamps: woman's relations with man were many and fickle, the feminine principle was dominant and the father was nobody.[20]

The suggestion that early civilization was aetiologically ruled by the Hetaerae, or prostitute, links back to Behn and her characters' transient sexual liberty. Behn and her characters can be considered as part of Deleuze's theory that women are generators of disorder – who show a new way of thinking – and originate from the 'lustful chaos of the primeval swamps'. However, this temporality of female liberty is only contained within the fantastical, and safe, space of the theatre and the closed individuality of the plays. This individuality acts as a prototype and, like the masochist's fantasy allows for a repetition and distinctiveness of each depiction of masochism from play to play. As such, within *The Feign'd Curtizans*, Behn chooses to depict confident women who are willing to become hetaeric female torturers.

During Act 2, scene 1 Marcella, disguised as Euphemia, discovers that Fillamour does not recognise her, and she threatens to 'punish him [and] ruin him with perjury' (2.1.p.19). Whilst her perjury is her disguise, I would suggest that her torture of Fillamour is the teasing of sexual pleasure at the same time as having no intention of losing her chastity. She views her torture as presenting emotional unavailability, physical control and a psychological manipulation of Fillamour into humiliation and submission. Yet Fillamour does recognise her, and Marcella's punishment is part of his fantasy: his decision to 'try her farther' (2.1.p.19), and willingness to 'pay a heart [with] flames –' (2.1.p.19) displays his anxiety that the punishment will not continue, and the extent that he will go to experience degradation from her erotic power.

[20] Deleuze, p. 52.

The question of whether a woman loses 'her value and become undesirable if she is unchaste' is part of the chaos that surrounds the male and female relationships within the play.[21] Cornelia's independence allows her to challenge the hypocritical view of the libidinous, unchaste woman and the sexual freedom of the courtesan correlates with Deleuze and Bachofen's ideology that the 'father is nobody'. This allows their control of men that enhances men's desire, Marcella and Cornelia's disguise as 'fair young' (2.1.p.15) courtesans and their belief that it should oblige men 'to some curiosity at least' (2.1.p.15) allows them to become, as Deleuze suggests, the archetypal female torturer who 'wears furs [...] wields a whip, [...and] treats men as slaves'.[22]

Cornelia suggests that the freedom of prostitution as a masochistic torture is a form of religion – one that worships the paganistic Aphrodite, rather than catholic God. In act 2, scene 1, in a sparring conversation, Galliard suggests to Cornelia that

Galliard: – If creatures so fair and charming, as your self had any need of prayer, I shou'd believe by your profound attention you were at your Evenings Devotion.

Cornelia: That you may finde your mistake, in the opinion of my charms, Pray believe I am so, and ought not be interrupted.

Galliard: I hope a Man may have leave to make his Devotions by you, at least without danger or offence.

Cornelia: I know not that, I have reason to fear your devotion may be ominous, like a Blazing Star, it comes but seldom, – but ever threatens mischief, – Pray Heaven I share not in the calamity.

[21] Staves, p. 26.
[22] Deleuze, p. 47.

(2.1.pp.17-18)

In a play on Christian ideology, Galliard sets the courtesans apart from respectable women as lesser 'creatures' but Cornelia retorts that her 'charms', or sexual power, are reliant on some form of religion to support this. When Galliard asks to join her in her 'devotions' without 'danger or offence', Cornelia refuses him in an act of rebellion – his devotions to God are 'ominous' and threaten to take away her erotic power. Her retort that she shares 'not in the calamity' indicates her power of wielding the whip against Galliard and that her defiance is his pleasurable torture.

Cornelia acts like the Deleuzian Grecian woman who 'denounces marriage, morality, the Church, and the state as the inventions of man, which must be destroyed'.[23] Behn has created Cornelia's agency by putting her in disguise to destroy masculine social expectations of women and wives and indeed, similarly to Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds*, the play denounces the idealisation of marriage. Cornelia's refusal of Galliard's devotions grants him 'less control over the action' and displays her authority, and the masculine language, to change the course of action between them.[24] Behn's depiction of Cornelia's enjoyment of the pretence of being a courtesan calls into question 'the assumptions that happiness resides in marriage and that marriage should be denied to sexually experienced women' during the Restoration period.[25] Whilst Cordelia and Marcella are seen as courtesans and are therefore seen as sexually available, they remain chaste throughout the play, but this pretence is a means of showing that the

[23] Deleuze, p. 48.
[24] Spencer, pp. 89-90.
[25] Peggy Thompson, 'Closure and Subversion in Behn's Comedies', in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (University of Kentucky, 1996), pp.71-88 (p. 75).

masculine honour-virtue ideology is a patriarchal pretence of retaining female submission and respectability within marriage. Although Susan Staves argues that 'female desire [...] entails an experience of powerlessness, [...] it is coloured by fear of disgrace, and dread of abandonment', the women of the play are not powerless, they utilise the only item that is truly their own – their body – to create a power over men.[26]

Cornelia and Marcella's defiance highlights what Staves suggests is the 'problem of what the "value" of woman was in society' without masculine domination, and whether they 'lose [their] value and become undesirable if [they become] unchaste'.[27] Cornelia and Marcella recognise that the freedom gained from their deception originates from the value of being seen as unchaste, and their decision to remain chaste allows them to retain their marriageable value. Indeed, Cornelia, in disguise, uses the ambiguity between chaste and unchaste to challenge the male view of a woman's worth – explicitly suggesting to Marcella in Act 2, scene 1 that

> we have no more to do then to advance in this same glorious Profession, of which now we only seem to be: – in which to give it its due, there are a thousand satisfactions to be found, more then in a dull virtuous life!
>
> (2.1.p.15)

In Act 4 scene 1, Fillamour enters La Silvianetta's apartment and remarks 'How splendidly these Common women live, / How rich is all we meet in this Palace, / And rather seem th'Apartment of some Prince, / Then a receptickle for lust and shame' (4.1.p.39). Fillamour's surprise that 'common women' can live like 'some prince'

[26] Susan Staves, 'Behn, Women, and Society', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.12-28 (p. 22).
[27] Staves, pp. 23-26.

dichotomously suggests a change in attitude towards the view of an unchaste, lower-class prostitute and demonstrates the idea that the courtesans can be possessed by 'wise people' (4.1.p.39). Fillamour's view of La Silvianetta as concubine sends him into a fervent display of passion towards Euphemia/Marcella, telling her

> Fillamour: – Yes! thou has't wondrous power,
> And I have felt it long.
> Marcella: How!
> Fillamour: – I've often seen that face – but 'twas in dreams:
> And sleeping lov'd Extreamly!
> And waking – sigh't to find it but a dream,
> The lovely Phantom vanish't with my slumbers,
> But left a strong *Idea* on my heart;
> Of what I finde in perfect Beauty here,
> – But with this difference, she was Virtuous too!
>
> (4.1.p.40)

Fillamour's use of blank verse reflects his frustration at not being able to possess Marcella/La Silvianetta for himself. The use of irregular metre suggests the exuberance of his emotions, which he is unable to voice – merely able to exalt her 'wondrous power' of love that will torture him in reality, rather than in his 'dreams'. Fillamour's hyperbolic language contrasts with Marcella's short replies: inflaming his passion. Marcella's brusque retorts could be considered as unimpeachable due to their brevity, but her disguise as a courtesan adds a duality to her speech, re-joining Fillamour as 'silly' for dreaming of a virtuous woman.

Marcella's responses typify the Deleuzian generator of disorder, her wordplay with Fillamour continuing to confuse him and disrupt his reality. Marcella, using her courtesan disguise suggests to Fillamour that he should

Marcella: [...] leave this Mask of foolish modesty,
And let us hast where Love and Musick calls;
Musick! that heightens Love! and makes the soul
Ready for soft impressions! [...]

Fillamour: Plague of this tempting woman she will ruin me!
I finde weak Virtue melt from round my heart,
To give her Tyrant Image a Possession:
So the warm Sun, thaws Rivers Icy tops,
Till in the stream he sees his own bright face!

(4.1.pp.40-41)

Marcella's exclamation that 'modesty' in both women and men is 'foolish' is an implicit challenge towards the view that women must be virtuous. Her idea of going to her bedchamber where love and music can make 'Ready for soft impressions', suggests that Marcella attempts to use this façade of hypocrisy, and her sudden sexual voracity, to confuse and trick Fillamour into revealing his true desires. This confusion is reflected in Fillamour's speech: he veers between thinking that she will 'ruin' him but recognises that her chastity will become his masochistic torture, giving her a 'Tyrant Image' and that the 'warm Sun' of her sexual freedom will thaw his 'Rivers Icy tops'. Derek Hughes suggests that Behn reduces the 'spirit to matter' and is a 'commentary on [...] sexual rhetoric [...] with [its] fusion of the erotic and the religious'; the 'warm sun' of Marcella to Fillamour's icy river tops suggests that the idea of Masochean

masochism is a natural, or normal, desire. [28] Furthermore, Galliard joins Silvianetta in the freedom to worship at the altar of Aphrodite in an inversion of morality, telling her that if he married her, he would have 'no Conscience, no Honour in me!' (4.1.p.50). Galliard's exultation of Cornelia as an 'almighty Curtizan' (4.1.p.50) and use of religious imagery of a 'sacred Temple of the God of Love' (4.1.p.50) returns to Bachofen's theory of the Aphrodite woman and is reminiscent of the institution of sacred or temple prostitution.[29]

Galliard's desire to bed Cornelia/La Silvianetta to 'consecrate [her] power' within a temple is a requisite sexual ritual that grants him masochistic pleasure and pain. When Cornelia admits that she is not a courtesan in Act 4, scene 1, Galliard decries

> The Impudence of Honesty and quallity in woman!
> A plague upon 'em both, they have undone me,
> Bear witness Oh thou gentle Queen of night,
> Goddess of shades, ador'd by Lovers most;
> How oft under thy covert she has damn'd her self,
> With feigned love to me!
>
> (4.1.p.51)

His blasphemous prayer to a pagan goddess decries the 'Honesty and quallity in woman' but rather than choosing to pray to the Christian God for absolution, he

[28] Hughes, p. 114.
[29] Stephanie Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 2-3; Deleuze, p. 52.

chooses to pray to the 'gentle Queen of night' – Aphrodite – for some form of punishment of the 'damn'd' Cornelia.

Only when Cornelia reveals that she is not a courtesan does she gain equality and control over Galliard, or as Deleuze suggests 'conceives equality merely at the critical moment at which she gains dominance over man'.[30] Cornelia places Galliard in a submissive, feminine position through the retention of her virtue and honour, yet Galliard has lost his, and is therefore seen, like an immoral woman, as 'unable to preserve her physical integrity at all costs'.[31] In Act 4, scene 1, Galliard questions whether Cornelia is

> Galliard: [...] no Curtizan?
>
> Cornelia: No by my life! [...]
>
> Galliard: So, – and you are reall honest, and of quallity?
>
> Cornelia: Or may *I* still be wretched!
>
> Galliard: So, then farewell honesty and quallity! – S'death, what a night, what hopes, and what a Mistress; have I all lost for honesty and quallity! [*offers to go*]
>
> Cornelia: Stay. –
>
> Galliard: I will be wreck't first, – [*in fury*] – let go thy hold! – [*in a soft tone*] – Unless thou wouldst repent. –
>
> (4.1.p.51)

Cornelia's calm tone contrasts with Galliard's hyperbole. She commands him to 'stay' whilst retaining the flirtatious linguistic interplay that she might 'still be wretched'.

[30] Deleuze, pp. 47-48.
[31] Kreis-Schnick, p. 68.

Hughes argues that Behn does not see women's 'ability to gain equality of status through equality of linguistic power' because men 'exercise the power of the word because it is always underwritten by the sword', but I would suggest that Cornelia matches, if not exceeds masculine linguistic power to gain not only equality, but dominance over Galliard.[32] His 'sword' can be construed as his actions in this discourse; however, the oscillation between fury and speaking softly suggests a submission to Cornelia and a display of his masochistic desire. The underwriting of his sword, or manliness, does not appear to create fear in Cornelia – it only induces her to continue her domination of him.

In the final act, Behn moderates her resistance to the demands for female submission, honour and virtue – acknowledging that women have an unsustainable sexual independence. Throughout Act 5 Behn brings all her characters together to undo the women's disguises and a return to the patriarchal demands on women. In Act 5, scene 1, Laura Lucretia raves to her confidante, Sabina, that Galliard has gone from her, suggesting that

> [...] my Fortune is too blame, My cursed Fortune
> Who like Misers, deals her scanty bountys with so slow a hand,
> That or we dy before the blessing falls,
> Or have it snatcht ere we can call it ours!
> [...] – Oh Gods! and then! even then to be defeated.
>
> (5.1.p.56)

[32] Hughes, p. 10.

Laura Lucretia's 'Fortune' positively and negatively affects her desire for independence: freedom as a courtesan can be immediate, the freedom of a virtuous woman is an impossibility unless they 'dy' or have 'it snatcht' from them before they can experience it. Julio does offer Laura Lucretia an opportunity to retain her sexual freedom: if she chooses to be his wife and become his masochistic torturer – arguing that he 'prest for something more than dear expressions' (5.1.p.58) without success. Laura Lucretia continues to attempt to advance her masochistic power over Galliard when he comes to her rooms. She declares that she has

> a power that never yet was known
> To charm this stranger quickly into love,
> Assist my eyes thou God of kinde desires;
> Inspire my language with a moving force
> That may at once gain and secure the Victory.
>
> (5.1.pp.59-60)

and indeed, her 'power' does have some victory over Galliard, leaving her 'Mistress of my wish' (5.1.p.62). Although Laura Lucretia believes that appearing as a courtesan and inveigling Galliard gives her the power she craves, Behn tempers her rhetoric of female sexual independence and punishes Laura Lucretia for going against the socio-moralistic, patriarchal view of women. Finally, Laura Lucretia is tricked by Julio into marrying him, allowing him to control her both sexually and mentally – for her to 'yield at last' (5.1.p.68).

In contrast, Behn chooses not to punish Cornelia or Marcella at the denouement of the play. Whilst Kreis-Schnick suggests that they are returned to an 'idealized [and] sentimental vein' of feminine virtue and obedience, they remain implicitly desirous for

some form of freedom.[33] They both shy away from remaining as a Deleuzian 'generator of disorder' and return to what Thompson suggests is a 'shape of a marriage in which he [the husband] can control'; I would suggest that neither remain as being seen, wholeheartedly, as submissive wives under a husband's control.[34] Ultimately, both women are left as having achieved their free desires – Marcella has taken on the masculine role and is victorious in challenging Fillamour's virtue and fidelity, whilst Cornelia chooses to become Galliard's 'most Mistress like wife'(5.1.p.70) in act of rebellion against matrimonial passivity.

The Pain of Virtuousness in Ariadne's *She Ventures, And He Wins*

The above study has highlighted how Behn's comedy attempted to critique and destabilise societal conventions which confined women in a subjugated role. In an act of mimesis of her gender ambiguity throughout her early career as a professional playwright, Behn has her female characters don false male identities and disguises them as courtesans to remove them from respectable society in an act of control over their own desires. As courtesans, they dispense with feminine, respectable virtues – becoming at once attainable and unattainable – to manipulate and control men's sexual desires. When their actions are seen through Deleuze's conceptualisation of the Three Women of Masoch, Behn's female characters in *The Feign'd Curtezans* are the original hetaeric generators of disorder, and at the beginning of their journey towards becoming the masochist's torturer.

[33] Kreis-Schnick, p. 68.
[34] Thompson, p. 75.

Deleuze theorises that the masochist's idealised woman has a three faceted nature, each representing different aspects of the torturer's psychology which defines their roles in the masochistic fantasy. The second woman in the triumvirate is the opposite to the hetaeric – the sadistic woman is cruel, physically punishes the masochist and is responsible for the fulfilling of the pain of the masochistic desire. This section will examine how the playwright Ariadne depicts and evolves this sadistic role in *She Ventures, and He Wins* (1695). I will discuss how Ariadne depicts her female characters' evolution from the hetaeric into an overly sadistic woman, and how their punishment establishes a deep connection between masochist and torturer. In addition, this study seeks to address concurrently how Ariadne continues Behn's critique of gender dynamics through a use of role reversal and character disguises in order to mock the fragility of masculine identity and challenge Restoration theatre's stock image of female subservience and virtuousness.

The hypocritical masculine desire for submissive, virtuous, and honest wives was to remain a popular trope within the theatre for playwrights such as Thomas D'Urfey, William Congreve and John Vanbrugh during the period up to 1700. After the death of Aphra Behn in 1689 there was an absence of new female playwrights writing for the London stage, and therefore, critically, there was no female voice to continue Behn's implicit critique of patriarchal control. It was not until 1695 that a putative female playwright had her work produced under the pseudonym 'Ariadne'. Her play, *She Ventures, and He Wins* marked the beginning of a 'period of extraordinary activity' in the theatre by new female voices, such as Catherine Trotter, Delarivier Manley, and Mary Pix.[35] Ariadne re-establishes assertive female characters who push the

[35] *The London Stage* suggests that the premier of *She Ventures, and He Wins* 'is not known, but the play was probably not acted later than September 1695, as it was advertised in the *London Gazette*, No. 3122, 10-14 Oct. 1695', *The London* Stage, p. 452; Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds:*

boundaries of sexual equality and exemplify the Deleuzian double nature of women.[36] As discussed, Behn's heroines in *The Feign'd Curtizans* illustrate the Deleuzian hetaerae – sensual, disorderly, and independent – but Behn ultimately constrains her heroines and returns them to the status quo of feminine acquiescence. However, Deleuze suggests that women have two innate natures: the hetaeric and the sadistic, both of which are in a state of evolutionary instability. Ariadne's female characters in *She Ventures, and He Wins* can be seen at the beginning of their evolution: with hetaeric independence and disorder already in place, they evolve into the nature of the 'sadistic woman [who] enjoys hunting and torturing others'.[37]

Ariadne's 'comedy of example' depicts her heroines as creating a masochistic torture through their retention of chastity, and virtuousness – using these qualities to challenge masculine honesty and frustrate their libertinistic advances.[38] To appreciate the role of Ariadne's heroines, it is worth visiting how she subversively portrays this torture as an indirect criticism, a reflection, and an intentional consequence of the societal shift after the Revolution of 1688. The royal court's relationship with the theatre had waned since the revolution and Ros Ballaster indicates that both Mary II and later, Anne, 'were far less enthusiastic theatre-goers [and their] courts were also, at least publicly, far more decorous, reserved and familial than those of their father and uncle'.[39] As will be discussed fully in chapter five, the theatre had become a 'far

---

Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage (University of Manchester, 2006), pp. 114-115; *The London Stage* suggests that Catherine Trotter's play *Agnes de Castro* possibly premiered in 'December, certainly no later than early January 1696', *The London Stage*, p. 455; Delarivier Manley's play *The Lost Lover, or The Jealous Husband* premiered 'not later than March 1696', *The London Stage*, p. 460; and Mary Pix's play *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* was 'first acted not later than early June 1696 and probably no later than May 1696', *The London Stage*, p. 462.

[36] Some male playwrights had attempted to adopt a feminist perspective during the period, these included Thomas Southerne and Thomas D'Urfey.

[37] Deleuze, p. 48.

[38] Hume, p. 420.

[39] Ros Ballaster, 'The first female dramatists', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500*-1700, ed by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 280; John Evelyn writing about a representation of an earthquake in Jamaica: 'being prophanely & Ludicrously represented in a puppet play or some

more sentimental and a less rumbustious environment' during the 1690s.[40] The breakup of the United Company in 1695 and the creation of Betterton's Company marked a rise in didactically moralistic comedy being produced in the theatre which explored the 'shaping of personal identity and [...] the exploration of problems and modeling solutions'.[41] Comedies produced by Betterton's company, such as William Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) and John Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* (1697) actively reflected and challenged societal change surrounding the roles of women and men, marriage, personal wealth, and divorce.[42]

Robert D. Hume highlights how a loss of royal patronage and distancing from immorality caused the London stage in the 1690s to suffer a reduction of the production of the overly libidinous comedies which had dominated the playhouses in the 1670s.[43] Nevertheless, Ariadne humorously portrays an unconventional didacticism: showing women how to behave without offending male sensibilities. She herself claims in the preface that the play is an 'Error of a weak Woman's Pen, one altogether unlearn'd, ignorant of any, but her Mother-Tongue, and very far from being a perfect Mistress of that too' (preface.sig.A2r) in order to call attention to and downplay her gender.[44] Ariadne is 'sensible of the many nice Judgements I expose my self to, [and the men] who may justly find an infinite Number of Faults in it' (preface.sig.A2r) to explain to women that they can subject men to the same high

such lewd pass-time in the Faire at Southwarke, caused the Queene to put-downe & abolish that idle & vicious mock-shew', 'The Diary of John Evelyn' (1690–1706) [diary] 1692 Sept, pp. 115-116 in *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online* https://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/display/10.1093/actrade/9780198187523.book.1/actrade-9780198187523-div2-3?r-1=1.000&wm-1=1&t-1=contents-tab&p1-1=1&w1-1=1.000&p2-1=1&w2-1=0.400 [Accessed 15 January 2025].

[40] Ballaster, p. 279.

[41] Hume, p. 407–408; Paula Backsheider, '"Endless Aversion Rooted in the Soul": Divorce in the 1690-1730 Theater', *The Eighteenth Century*, 37 (1996) 99-135 (p. 99).

[42] Backsheider, p. 100.

[43] Hume, pp. 423-420.

[44] *She Ventures and He Wins. A Comedy. Writen by a Young Lady* (Hen. Rhodes, J. Harris, and Sam. Briscoe, 1696)

standards as an act of both power and torture – in an evolution from the Deleuzian hetaerae to the sadistic woman who denies men pleasure.

Ariadne's cruel female characters and the change in society exemplify Deleuze's engagement with Jakob Bachofen's philosophical treatise *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* (1926) on the theory of the two natures of women. Bachofen advances that 'all institutions presuppose earlier stages of formation: nowhere in history do we find a beginning, but always a continuation, never a cause which is not at the same time an effect'.[45] This suggests that sadistic women, such as Ariadne's characters and their denial of pleasure through chastity, can come only into being through an evolution which involves both fantasy and reality. Deleuze's reliance on an evolutionary pathway presupposes that one nature cannot exist without the other: the sadistic nature of women is 'preceded by unregulated hetaerism' and is solely the product of a 'matriarchal age' where women are in an unsustainable position of power over men that will, ultimately, be followed by a cyclical return to a patriarchal age and a demand for feminine submission.[46]

Ariadne builds upon Restoration comedies' central themes of 'appearance and reality, honesty and duplicity' to create a subversive incitement for feminine authority.[47] As Jenn Fishman proposes, Ariadne 'stood to gain both Behn's continued popularity six years after her death and the notoriety that came to be associated with all women involved in the theatre'.[48] Ariadne's return to the 'Incomparable' (preface.sig.A2v) Behn's themes in *She Ventures, and He Wins* allows her to reaffirm Behn's feminist progressiveness. Gilli Bush-Bailey proposes Ariadne gives 'a wholly

[45] Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* (Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 75.
[46] Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, pp. 69-93.
[47] Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage* (University of Manchester, 2006), p.115.
[48] Jenn Fishman, 'Performing Identities: Female Cross-Dressing in "She Ventures, and He Wins"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 20 (1996) 36-51 (p. 37).

female perspective' throughout the play's proceedings and it is notable that Ariadne populates *She Ventures, and He Wins* with seven women who speak more lines than the six male characters.[49]

In a play which deals intrinsically with the depiction of the rise in power of the matriarchy, it is important to consider the playwright's choice of the assumed name of Ariadne, or 'Young Lady' (title page). Ariadne's use of a 'fanciful' pseudonym could be suggestive of what Margaret Ezell considers as a 'protective device' that hides 'the author's sex and enable[s] her to simultaneously preserve her "modesty" while receiving a fair hearing'.[50] However, Ariadne chooses a name that does not hide her sex, indeed, it would have 'been futile as it was unnecessary', perhaps in an appeal and demand for a new female playwright to give women a voice on the stage and to criticise the double standards of a fair hearing by male critics.[51] Ariadne's mythological name illuminates Bachofen's theory that 'since the beginning of all development lies in myth, myth must be the starting point', therefore, it is important to explore the choice of Ariadne's mythical nature.[52]

In myth, Ariadne falls in love with Theseus and helps him to escape the labyrinth after he killed the minotaur, only to be spurned by him. The poet Catullus questions whether Ariadne is 'cruel hearted' and nurses 'at heart unmastered passions', and he further suggests she had 'smouldering / Eyebeams until throughout her frame she had caught / fire / [and] her inmost marrow was all ablaze' (LXIV.54-95).[53] Indeed, on discovering Theseus' dereliction, Ariadne swears that 'no woman now should put her faith in a man's oath / and none expect a man's word to be

[49] Bush-Bailey, p. 115.
[50] Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), p.197, Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 35–36
[51] Ezell, p. 36.
[52] Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, p.75.
[53] Catullus, *The Complete Poems*, ed. and trans. by Guy Lee (Oxford World's Classics, 1990), pp.83-87.

trustworthy' (LXIV.143-144).[54] By comparing the description of the mythical Ariadne's nature to Deleuze's of the sadistic woman, there is a significant correlation in her choice to 'humbly beg the Favour to borrow the Name of ARIADNE' (preface.sig.A2v). By borrowing the name Ariadne, the playwright imitates the myth – equating herself with a mythically strong, knowledgeable, and powerful woman who, despite a loss of virtue, remains resolute in the face of damnation.

One must question the extent of Ariadne's claimed uneducated ignorance, in the preface, based on the playwright's supposed gender. Helen Barry's work on gender and print culture in the seventeenth century suggests that a writer's 'anonymity tempered customary constraint along gender lines, and the dictate of public decency'; However, Barry describes how 'patriarchal social structures of the day [...] excluded most women from education, public office, and the professions'.[55] Indeed, the proto-feminist Mary Astell had recently published anonymously under 'A Lover of her SEX', *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694) which 'brought the issue of whether women should be educated to the fore' and help them to 'surpass the Men as much in Vertue and Ingenuity, as you do in Beauty'.[56]

There has been recent theorisation that Ariadne could have been a male writer. The 'small novel' (preface.sig.A2v) she borrows from has been identified as *The Fair Extravagant* (1682) by Alexander Oldys.[57] Barry argues that there was precedent that men were writing as women during the 1690s; for example, writing to the periodical *The Athenian Mercury* (1690–1697) on such subjects as love and marriage – usually

[54] Catullus, p. 89.
[55] Helen Barry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late Stuart England* (Routledge, 2003), p. 61.
[56] Barry, pp. 54-59; *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest. By a Lover of Her SEX* (R. Wilkin, 1694), pp. 4-5.
[57] Jorge Figueroa Dorrego, 'Ariadne's adaptation of Alexander Oldys's *The Fair Extravagant* in *She Ventures, and He Wins*', *SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*, 19 (2009) 177-188 (pp. 178-180).

seen as feminine considerations.[58] Barry continues by suggesting that these writers and indeed, the editors of *The Athenian Mercury* implicitly looked to undermine the 'separate spheres' of male and female readers, and this would suggest that men were equally concerned about the contemporaneous treatment of women, as women were about themselves.[59] Indeed, Ariadne – either a woman, or writing as a woman – links closely with Deleuze's suggestion that 'it is significant that her [a sadistic woman's] actions are prompted by a man or otherwise performed in conceit with a man, whose victim she is always liable to become'.[60] Accordingly Ariadne is allowed, as playwright, a tortuous power to depict feminine power; her female characters have a sadistic hold over men, but both are ultimately vulnerable to the male members of the audience.

She Ventures, and He Wins follows two humorous plot lines which are motivated by the need for virtue, honour, respectability, and the punishment of immorality. The first plot follows two women: Juliana and Charlotte, who, in an act of frustration decide to dress as men so Charlotte can find a husband who she knows is virtuous, although she does not believe a virtuous man can exist. Charlotte meets Lovewell as a man and quizzes him on his morals; she tells him they must meet again where she will be joined by two women, and he must marry the first one that touches him. In the morning, she enters the park with Juliana, dressed as women in masks – Charlotte takes Lovewell's hand, and he agrees to marry her immediately.

The second, more comedic plot follows Urania's punishment of Squire Wouldbe for his untoward advances. Although both are married, Wouldbe continues to chase Urania. In league with her husband, Urania sends Wouldbe a letter inviting him to a sexual assignation with her – but he must be dressed as a woman to evade her

[58] Barry, pp. 54-61.
[59] Barry, p. 59
[60] Deleuze, p. 48.

husband, Freeman. Wouldbe arrives and as he undresses Freeman arrives and Urania makes Wouldbe hide in a cistern and then a tub of feathers. Once he has done so and Freeman has left, Wouldbe calms himself; however, Freeman bursts back into the room dressed as the Devil, terrifying Wouldbe.

Both plots are brought together in the final Act: Urania is told by Dowdy, Wouldbe's wife, that Urania must come to witness Wouldbe attempting to be unfaithful to Dowdy again with a beautiful girl. Juliana and Charlotte enter the park to witness Wouldbe's punishment by Urania and Dowdy. In the final scene, all the characters end up arguing with each other over love and honour. Ultimately, Charlotte and Juliana are rewarded with virtuous husbands; Urania with the satisfaction of knowing that her honour remains intact, and that Wouldbe is punished for his dishonesty and sinfulness.

As previously discussed, the play opens in Act 1, scene 1 with Charlotte and Juliana in mid-conversation; we are immediately transported into their sexual reversal appearing as men with Juliana's exclamation to Charlotte that 'the breeches become you so well 'tis almost pity you should ever part with 'em' (1.1.p.1). As Jacqueline C. Pearson suggests, the gender reversal is 'exploited to give women power over their own lives, to reveal by opposites the real nature of woman's lot in society, and to suggest new possibilities'.[61] Charlotte, dressed as a man, discusses the problems of finding a suitable husband, denying that she will remove the breeches

> Charlotte: till I can find one can make better use of them to bestow 'em on, and then I'll resign my Title to 'em for ever

[61] Pearson, p. 140.

Juliana: 'Tis well if you find it so easie, for a Woman once vested in Authority, tho' 'tis by no other than her own making, does not willingly part with it.

(1.1.p.1)

This draws our attention to the restrictions and contradictions of female behaviour: Charlotte has a confidence and power to 'bestow' the breeches to a man solely because she is dressed as a man. Juliana acts prudently – cautioning Charlotte that 'once vested in authority' a dominant woman can be seen as enjoyably domineering by a man, but equally, will find it hard to relinquish that power to a husband.

Charlotte's decision to dress as a man can be seen as the beginnings of her sadistic nature, seeing it as the only means to escape the patriarchal expectation for submission: reflecting Auxiliadora Pérez Vides' suggestion that 'the standard codes of female behaviour began to be strongly rejected [during the 1690s] and there was a tendency to deconstruct the stereotypes that enclosed women'.[62] Charlotte uses her identity as a man to take on the freedoms of masculinity and to challenge the masculine demand for female submission – telling Juliana that she will

[…] ramble the Town till I can meet with the Man I can find in my heart to take for better for worse. These Cloaths will give us greater Liberty than the scandalous World will allow to our Petticoats, which we could not attempt this Undertaking in without hazard to our Modesty.

(1.1.p.1)

[62] Auxiliadora Pérez Vides, 'Gender, Disguise and the Politics of Marriage in Ariadne's She Ventures, and He Wins', *SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*, 11 (2000) 271-276 (p. 272).

Charlotte's provocative desire to 'ramble' dressed as a man places her in the position of becoming the more confident of the two women and perhaps illustrates Deleuze's theory that the sadistic woman 'though the primitive Grecian [hetaeric] woman [finds] her Grecian man or Apollonian element, her virile sadistic impulse' through the 'liberty' of wearing men's clothes.[63] Her transvestism, as Fishman asserts, 'permits [the transformation of] conjugal hermaphrodism (in which two become one and female identity typically becomes absorbed into the subordinate role of wife) into a relationship in which women maintained the autonomy they [had] procured' whilst dressed as men.[64] Charlotte here both wants independence to find a virtuous man 'for better for worse', but rails against the 'scandalous World' that thwarts her ability to do so. Her decision to wear men's clothes, or not to be obliged 'to follow the World's dull Maxims' (1.1.p.2) is a powerful symbol of being a 'masterless woman' and a show of her 'uncontrolled sexuality' – a key trait of the sadistic woman.[65] Juliana remains as the feminine voice of the hetaeric nature, asking Charlotte whether 'every one [will] think you stark mad for a Husband, to take this extravagant course for one?' (1.1.p.2), realising that Charlotte has perhaps gone too far and lost 'the *raison d' être*'.[66]

Pearson suggests that 'the transvestite [...] does not offer disturbingly radical criticism of social mores'; however, I would posit that Charlotte does overtly criticise the masculine attitude and libertinistic desires.[67] Charlotte directs her cruelty towards men who

[63] Deleuze, p. 48.
[64] Fishman, p. 41.
[65] Jean Howard, 'Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1988) 418-440 (p. 424).
[66] Deleuze, p. 50.
[67] Pearson, p. 102.

> are so used to flatter and deceive our Sex, that there's nothing but the Angel appears, tho' the Devil lies lurking within, and never so much as shews his Paw till he has got his Prey fast in his Clutches.
>
> (1.1.p.1)

Charlotte's speech is summarily accurate in describing the male view of women as 'Prey' and that any potential husband must be both angelic and devilish to fulfil his sexual needs – perhaps a well-constructed reasoning behind her desire for sadistic domination. It is notable that 'women's subordination to man was a chief instance, trumpeted from pulpit, instantiated by law, and acted upon by monarch and commoner alike'.[68]

Charlotte's feelings and actions take on a close interpretation of Thomas Hobbes' suggestion that

> some have attributed the Dominion to the Man onely, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it. For there is not alwayes that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War.[69]

Hobbes theorises that the difference between gender hierarchy and subordination is marginal – and can only be resolved with a deciding 'War'; indeed, an interpretation of Hobbes would suggest that men who believe solely in in hierarchical power 'misreckon in it', and that they, like women, can be placed equally in a submissive

[68] Howard, p. 418.
[69] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Clarendon Press, 2012), II, p. 308.

position. ‘Strength’ spurs Charlotte on to dominate Lovewell, particularly in Act 1, scene 3, when she views him as a potential husband and she suggests that ‘this is my Man’ (1.3.p.5) and that, like prey, she will ‘accost him, and try what Mettle he’s made of’ (1.3.p.5) in a gender role reversal.

The trope of madness is repeatedly used to accuse and describe Charlotte and her actions. As discussed, Juliana accuses her of madness in Act 1, scene 1, and again in Act 1, scene 3 she asks if Charlotte is ‘sure [that Charlotte is] not stark mad’ (1.3.p.5) and calls her ‘a Mad-Wench’ (1.3.p.5). The word madness suggests both the foolishness of attempting to challenge the patriarchy, and the tyranny of domination which is disquieting for Juliana yet exciting for Charlotte. Charlotte’s perceived madness is reiterated by her brother Sir Charles in his discussion with Sir Roger in Act 2, scene 2, where he tells Sir Roger that he will

> see that Mad Sister of mine dispos’d of first: I’d give Five Hundred Guineas to see her in love; for I dare not own my being so, till she’s a little tamed. She’ll only make me her sport, as she does all Mankind besides.
>
> (2.2.p.12)

Sir Charles parallels Juliana in calling Charlotte mad. From a male perspective Charlotte is irrational for challenging patriarchal control but he echoes Hobbes’ hierarchical theory. He is resigned to her as a masochistic torturer: ultimately, he will become her ‘sport’ along with the remainder of ‘mankind’. These sentiments are further reflected in the musicians’ song in Act 2, scene 2 to entertain Sir Charles and Sir Roger, the musicians singing

> Young Celinda’s youthful Charms,

Fills the admiring Town with wonder;

The stubbornst Heart, her Eyes alarms

And makes them to her Power surrender

[…]

Her Eyes, in all, do Love inspire.

(2.2. pp.13-14)

The musicians' song, which punctures Sir Roger and Sir Charles' conversation, about the powerfully erotic Celinda recalls the legend of Ariadne and her fiery eyebeams or 'her Eyes alarms', and her power to make men 'to her Power surrender'. Indeed, it is interesting that Sir Charles asks specifically for 'the song' (2.1.p13), suggesting an indirect acceptance of Charlotte's behaviour that will fill the 'Town with wonder'.

Charlotte's transvestism and the domination contrasts with Pearson's argument that 'the adoption of disguise can mark a masochistic and stereotypical self-abnegation', which underscores female vulnerability.[70] Rather than a vulnerability, Charlotte's transvestism allows a resilience whereby the lack of submission augments and frees matriarchal power through the guise of masculinity. Indeed, Charlotte is not self-abnegatory, instead she uses transvestism as a form of masochistic torture directed at Lovewell and Sir Charles. The demand for female virtue and chastity is now used by a transvestite heroine to challenge the hero's values, reversing 'the traditional pattern' of gender hierarchy.[71]

Importantly, a heroine who purposely remains chaste at the same time as questioning a man's virtue is perhaps at the crux of the depiction of Charlotte's Deleuzian sadistic nature. Plays such as *The Country Wife* and *The London Cuckolds*

[70] Pearson, p. 103.
[71] Margarete Rubik, *Early Women Dramatists 1550-1800* (MacMillan Press, 1998), p. 59.

depict female chastity as a frustration of libertinistic desires, and as a woman's way to protect her reputation. However, Ariadne does not see chastity negatively as an inconvenience, rather Ariadne depicts it as a conscious choice, a tool of the sadistic woman, to torture men into holding them to the same standards of constancy, and to create a pleasure-pain domination to punish their inconstancy. In Act 3, scene 3, Juliana and Charlotte, dressed as women but in masquerade, meet Lovewell: in a fickle, rapturous desire he pleads with Charlotte to remove her mask 'for there are dangerous eyes' (3.3.p.21) which already hold a power over him. Her refusal to unmask suggests the retention of her chastity and both allows her to 'reign' (3.3.p.22) over him and creates a masochistic pain in his 'imagination' (3.3.p.22). Juliana suggests that she will 'soon reduce the Rebel to his Obedience, convince him of the Truth, by showing him a Prospect of that Heaven which is allotted for him' (3.3.p.22). It is only when Lovewell proves to her that he is virtuous that Charlotte removes her mask, claiming him 'as my own' (3.3.p.22) in an act of domination and ownership as the Deleuzian sadistic woman.

Whilst we see Charlotte grow into her sadistic nature, Urania and her punishment of Squire Wouldbe positions her as a mature Deleuzian sadistic woman. Her torture of Wouldbe is 'performed in conceit' with her husband, Freeman, in a sadistic quest to punish Wouldbe for his overtly libidinous advances towards her.[72] It is interesting to note Ariadne's use of the Greek legend of Urania. Contemporary readership perhaps would have recognised the name from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) – the poet's Muse, who Stevie Davis suggests is the 'explicitly feminine personification' of the pagan Urania – who descended from 'Heav'n' and had 'meaning'

[72] Deleuze, p. 48.

more than a 'name'.[73] Mythologically, Urania has a duality: often associated with benign universal love, yet conversely her full title is given as Aphrodite Urania, born from the positive pleasure of Gia's castration of the Titan, Uranus – God of the sky.[74] Ariadne's choice of the name Urania, and its divine meanings of love, castration and the pagan Aphrodite, conveys that Urania is at the peak of her sadistic nature: she has emasculated her husband into the virtuous 'freeman' and become the 'Oedipal mother, the image of the beloved, who becomes linked with the sadistic father as victim or as accomplice'.[75]

In Act 1, scene 2, we are introduced to Urania's plan for torturing Wouldbe – telling Freeman that he should

> leave him [Wouldbe] to my management, and for once trust a Woman's Revenge; I'll warrant you I'll handle him so as shall give you more pleasant Satisfaction than any you can propose; nothing so sharpens our Sexe's Invention, as Revenge, the Darling delight of our Nature.
>
> (1.2.p.3)

Urania's clarity of speech leaves us with no misapprehension of her sadistic desires and domination which allows her to enact a 'Woman's Revenge' which is more tortuous than any man 'can propose'. Her utterance that she sees the pain of revenge as 'the Darling delight of our Nature' both singles out the masochistic torturer as a

---

[73] Stevie Davis and William Hunter, 'Milton's Urania: "The meaning, not the name I call"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 28 (1988), 95-111 (p. 95); John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Peter Parker, 1667), sig. Z1r.

[74] Urania is described as '"the heavenly," or spiritual, to distinguish her consorts from Aphrodite Pandemos. Plato represents her as a daughter of Uranus, begotten without a mother', *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, ed. by William Smith, 3 vols (John Murray, 1872) III, p. 1284.

[75] Deleuze, p. 55.

natural occurrence and gives her husband a vicarious sexual thrill of the 'more pleasant Satisfaction' from the chilling foreshadowing of the pleasure and pain to come to Wouldbe.

Whilst Charlotte is seeking a virtuous husband, Urania as a married woman is far more direct in her attitude towards the punishment of iniquity. Nevertheless, she still requires the help of Freeman, who is submissive to her wishes and complicit in her farcical punishment: it can only be successful if Wouldbe's fear of discovery by Urania's husband exists. This is the catalyst that spurs Urania to farcically make Wouldbe dress as a woman, force him into a cistern, and drive him into a devilish torture. In Act 3, scene 1, Wouldbe is undressing after being soaked and feathered, Freeman enters with four other men and pretending to be the devil he nightmarishly chants

> [...] what must be done,
> With this wicked Mortal; whose glass is now run,
> Wee'll dip him in Styx to abate his hot Lust,
> Then headlong to Hell we the Letcher will thrust;
> Wee'll laugh at his Torments and jest at his Groans.
>
> (3.1.p.20)

Wouldbe is then carried off to his wife, in what appears as a descent into hell as punishment, leaving Freeman to ask Urania 'what hast ordered them [the other devils] to do with him now?' (3.1.p.20) Ultimately, Urania is in sole control of Wouldbe's fate, Freeman is merely her attendant, her Deleuzian Grecian man.

Urania and Charlotte's lack of submission and their hunt for virtuousness illustrates Deleuze's suggestion that the 'matriarchy [survives] in degenerate

Amazonian or Dionysian forms'.[76] The women's actions might be seen as degenerate: both taking on a patriarchal role, rather than remaining in normal or desirable obsequiousness; and although they have different goals, they both reflect Hobbes' view that

> the *Amazons* Contracted with the Men of the neighbouring Countries, to whom they had recourse for issue, that the issue Male should be sent back, but the Female remain with themselves: so that the dominion of the Females was in the Mother.[77]

Hobbes' use of the Amazons in his theory allowed 'a discussion of women's role and rights' that could be seen as subversive.[78] Pearson highlights how Amazons were seen negatively 'like learned women' in the seventeenth century, who displayed an 'evasion of natural womanly roles and their attempts to usurp male power' which reflects the Deleuzian sadistic nature.[79] Both Charlotte and Urania appear to have acquired the masculine libertinistic desire, the need for submission, and they sexually hunt and dismiss men in an act of female rule. Fishman proposes that 'female authority seems to be illegitimate and corrupting'; however, I would suggest that neither woman is corrupted, they merely wish to illustrate their sexual equality through means that are open to them – either through transvestism or domination.[80]

Both plot lines come together in Act 5, in a conglomeration of domination, masochistic torture and resolution. Sir Roger meets with Charlotte to tell her to go and

[76] Deleuze, p. 53.
[77] Hobbes, p. 308.
[78] Pearson, p. 87.
[79] Pearson, p. 87.
[80] Fishman, p. 42.

be happy with Lovewell, and although she agrees with him that her tyranny was 'a foolish Curiosity' (5.1.p.34), her actions are, ultimately, seen as too extreme by her brother. Sir Charles apprises her that she has 'gone too far, in thus imprisoning a Man who shortly must command you' (5.1.p.37), and whilst Charlotte is willing to relinquish her 'Throne to dwell with [Lovewell] in Chains' (5.1.p.39) as a submissive wife, Ariadne depicts Lovewell as eager to keep Charlotte's dominance. Perhaps in an echo of Urania's dominance over Freeman, Lovewell states that he will 'no longer cavil with my Fate, but by a tame submission to it battle its upmost Malice' (5.1.p.38). Equally, Urania's humiliation of Wouldbe is resolved: her tortuous punishment of him publicly concluded in front of all the characters. She has 'used all my Methods to restrain his [Wouldbe's] Folly, by shewing all the Scorn a virtuous Woman could to a dishonest Love: that but increased his Persecutions till I was weary of being Angry' (5.1.p.41). Urania is tired of her domination, but she remains defiant towards patriarchal control until the end of the play – Wouldbe asks her whether she fears his 'revenge' (5.1.p.42), only for her to retort aloud 'Not at all' (5.1.p.42) in a public declaration and validation of her domination.

Ultimately, Ariadne leaves the audience with her plot lines resolved and an ostensible return to the patriarchal status quo: happy marriages, virtuous men rewarded, and the immoral punished. Nevertheless, Ariadne does not wholly return her female characters to being submissive wives. Instead, she leaves us with a subtle sense that female domination or the sadistic nature is in part a male desire and, although tyrannical, moulds men into a new position of acquiescence and submission.

Indifference and Humiliation in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*

Throughout this chapter I have focused on how Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans* and Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* challenged and subverted traditional gender roles that were regulated by contemporaneous societal expectations. Both playwrights were publicly self-aware of their gender but took advantage of their sex to implicitly attempt liberationist advances on the stage. Their groundbreaking originality created a sophisticated portrayal of women: demonstrating their intellect, empowerment and personal desires during a period when Restoration comedy was reliant on the depictions of female acquiescence and the restrictions of marriage. When Behn and Ariadne's comedies are viewed from a Deleuzian stance, their psychologically nuanced female characters challenge patriarchal authority through a domination of male desire. They embody the innate natures of Three Women of Masoch – independent, sensual and unruly – who are essential to the multifaceted aspect of authority in the masochistic fantasy.

The Masochean natures are not static and eventually evolve into the masochist's ideal torturer – emotionless, severe, and a generator of disorder, and this psychological state is both considerably progressive and extraordinary. The depiction of the three female natures can be exemplified by Aphra Behn's comedy *The Rover* (1677). This chapter's chronological step back from *The Feign'd Curtizans* and *She Ventures, and He Wins* shows Behn's revolutionary, tentative steps towards a depiction of a masochistic torturer and significantly illuminates how the natures of Masochean women evolve into being the ideal torturers. I will establish how the ideal tortuous woman is created and discuss the sustainability of this masochistic nature with a focus on the play's setting, emotional reactions, and the use of disguise. Furthermore, I will analyse how *The Rover* established an originating point for the

depictions of the Three Women of Masoch in Restoration theatre and how this suggests a reassessment of female characterisations.

Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans* and Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* have subtly reflected Deleuze's theory that women have an innate dual nature – the hetaeric and sadistic – which is in a constant state of flux; however, he suggests that these natures 'do not represent the masochistic ideal but rather the end points between which this ideal swings, [but are] like the span of the pendulum'.[81] Deleuze's metaphorical 'pendulum' suggests a frozen moment between the changing psychological natures where there is a narrowly constrained amount of both hetaeric freedom and sadistic torture which allows for the formation of the masochistic torturer. Unlike his specific, if not simplistic, delineation of the two natures of women, Deleuze does not define comprehensively what this female sub-nature encompasses. He suggests that the ideal masochistic 'element' is separate from both the hetaeric and sadistic, and we can only see that a woman has become an idealised torturer by 'piecing together the various descriptions of her [and only then] can we hope to arrive at this fantastic character, this fantasy' in a patchwork of actions.[82]

Behn and Ariadne established the depictions of the Deleuzian dual natures of women, and the common theme of masochism shown throughout the previously discussed plays. Moreover, both playwrights show the extremes of the pendulum swing in their female characters. To understand their descriptive importance in the Deleuzian patchwork of the ideal, I would suggest that the women within *The Feign'd Curtizans* and *She Ventures, and He Wins* are comments on the unsustainability of the duality of feminine nature, or refinements of an originating, fixed point in the depiction of female masochistic characterisation. Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677)

[81] Deleuze, p. 50.
[82] Deleuze, p. 50.

establishes a psychological depth to the nature of women through Behn's creation of three assertive female characters, 'whether virgin or courtesan': Angellica Bianca, Florinda and Hellena, who command the action of the play.[83] Unlike the constrained, less complex characterisations of Cornelia or Urania, the triumvirate of women within *The Rover* exemplifies the oscillation between the Deleuzian natures and highlights the precision of the masochistic ideal. It is in the contrast between Behn's more nuanced female characters that we see the creation of the fantastical female torturer, and the limitations of Deleuze's inscribing of feminine natures.

The Rover marked an increase in Behn's theatrical popularity and her arrival into what Derek Hughes considers as 'the mainstream of comedy'; Behn, despite criticism of her gender, had an ability to respond in an 'original and outstanding way to the innovations of her peers' within the male-dominated theatrical space of the mid-1670s.[84] During this time there had been a move in comedy towards a focus on the depiction of the boisterous and sexual excesses of rake heroes, such as Horner in *The Country Wife* (1675) and Dorimant in George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676).[85] In the prologue of *The Rover*, the 'Person of Quality' (prologue, sig. A2v) comments on the popularity and prolific rise of sex comedies in the playhouses which '*are stuff'd with Witts, and with Deboches, / That Crowd and sweat like* Citts, *in* May-Day *Coaches*' (prologue, sig. A2v).[86] Behn deftly responded to the sex-boom zeitgeist and created the dissolute rake Willmore, with his 'erotic magnetism' who would appeal to

[83] Helen Burke, 'The Cavalier Myth in *The Rover*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 118-134 (p. 123).
[84] *The Rover* was performed on 24th March 1677 by The Duke's Company at the Dorset Garden Theatre. However, *The London Stage* suggests that 'there is no indication as to whether this is the premiere. The play was advertised in the *London* 6-9 Aug. 1677', *The London Stage*, p. 256; The play was staged again at both Court and in theatres: 1680, 1681 (twice), 1685 (twice), 1687 and 1690, *The London Stage*, pp. 260-391; Hughes, p. 81.
85 Ballaster, p. 270.
[86] Aphra Behn, *The Rover: or, The Banished Cavaliers* (John Amery, 1677).

the audience's desires and proved to Behn's advantage in the male-dominated theatre – *The Rover* would showcase her 'mastery of rollicking razzle-dazzle' comedy.[87]

Behn's gender ambiguity allows her to create hetaeric disorder and disseminate her frank portrayals of female desire to 'all who are not of their [the writer's] cabal' (prologue, sig. A3v). Despite her rise in popularity as a playwright, Behn both reflected on her status as a woman playwright and distanced herself from being a woman in a male-dominated space to avoid criticism: blending her personal identity and literary voice to challenge female depictions on the stage. She continued her gender dissociation by retaining the pretence of writing as a man in *The Rover*. In the prologue, she remains an obscure, shadowy figure who has the actor ask what 'the author of the coming play [...] thought I should say / In thanks for your good company today' (prologue, sig. A2v). This disassociation reflects what Margaret Rubik suggests is Behn's need for a 'fair hearing' from male critics to find professional success.[88] Equally, Behn appears to be in conflict with her deliberate gender ambiguity in the construction of the play. As will be seen in chapter four, adaptations and borrowing from plays was commonplace during the 1670s, and Behn is no different during the period. The plot of *The Rover* was taken from Thomas Killigrew's unperformed comedic play *Thomaso* (1654).[89] Derek Hughes summarises that this gave Behn the opportunity to ensure a 'radical tightening and varying of Killigrew's cumbersome play' to establish a feminine 'viewpoint [which] becomes not eccentric or marginal but central' to Behn's darkly comical play ruled by women.[90]

[87] Rubik, p. 43; Hume, p. 305.
[88] Rubik, p. 42.
[89] Rubik, p. 43.
[90] George Woodcock, *Aphra Behn: The English Sappho* (Black Rose Books, 1989), p. 123; Pearson, p. 254.

The Rover is an extremely complex play which features several deftly interwoven plot lines which are motivated by debauchery, masculine validation, and female independence. The first plot follows Hellena and Florinda, who face very different prearranged fates – Hellena is to become a nun, and Florinda faces an arranged marriage. In an act of rebelliousness, they disguise themselves and go to Carnival: Florinda in the hope of meeting her paramour Belvile, and Hellena to experience independence. At Carnival, Hellena meets Willmore: toying with each other they agree to rendezvous later, and Florinda meets Belvile.

The second plot follows the fortunes of the courtesan Angellica Bianca. Having recently arrived in Naples, Angellica advertises herself by hanging portraits outside her apartment. Willmore and his English compatriots lust after Angellica and a fight breaks out between the English and Spanish men – Angellica sees this and assumes it was started by Willmore, demanding that he come and beg for her forgiveness. Willmore in an act of hubristic bravado manages to sleep with Angellica for free by making her fall in love with him.

In Act 3 Willmore professes his love to both Angelica and Hellena, not realising that both have seen him dallying with the other – Angellica seethes with jealousy, and Hellena celebrates his inconstancy. Florinda goes to meet Belvile but is accosted by Willmore who, thinking she is a whore, attempts to rape her: thankfully the entrance of Belvile saves her from this horror. In Act 4, Angellica's jealously is provoked by Hellena who, in disguise, asks Angellica to leave Willmore. However, he recognises Hellena and teases her by professing his love to Angellica, but he says he will never get married – insulting Angellica in the process. Angellica is devastated and vows revenge. Later, in Act 5, after much subterfuge and attempts on her honour, Florinda marries Belvile in a hurried ceremony offstage. Angellica enters raving at Willmore,

threatening to kill him – but she is subdued and led off to be cared for. Eventually, the play ends with Hellena and Willmore agreeing to get married.

As discussed in chapter one, the masculine masochistic fantasy requires a fantastical space where torture can occur; therefore, one must question whether for a Deleuzian feminine masochistic element to actualise – this too must occur within a conceptual space. Behn's choice of play setting during the Neapolitan carnival allows the actions of the characters to occur during what Hughes describes as a 'period of permitted suspension and inversion of official order', and therefore, the potential for an erotically fluent freedom during a specific period and location.[91] Taylor Corse explains that during the seventeenth century, Naples was seen as a 'volatile and unpredictable city', whilst the diarist James Howell remarked that Naples was '*Natures* Darling' where the inhabitants of the city 'may be say'd to have *much of Vertue and no less Vice'*.[92] These reports of a boisterous, chaotic and amoralistic city with unfettered physical and sexual freedom suggests that Behn could have chosen Naples as both a literal setting and a framework to disguise and legitimise the depiction of her characters' masochistic relationships.

Plays such as Dryden's *An Evening's Love* (1668) had used carnival settings to, as Derek Hughes proposes, 'portray the conflict between healthy, exuberant desire and the oppressive laws' and Behn utilises the carnival to move beyond the trope of patriarchal conflict and 'the darker side of male licence'.[93] Nevertheless, Behn does not leave the theme of gender repression behind: marriage and its associated oppressive patriarchal customs remain portrayed in the characterisation of Don Pedro and his

[91] Hughes, p. 85.
[92] Taylor Corse, 'Seventeenth-Century Naples and Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 29 (2005), 41-51 (p.43); James Howell, *Parthenopoeia*, (Humphrey Mosely, 1654), sigs. A1r, A1v; Howell, sig. B1r.
[93] Hughes, p.85; Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 208.

frustrated control over his sisters. Behn goes further with her critique and uses this conflict, along with the disorder and liberation of the carnival, as a catalyst and subterfuge for both Hellena and Florinda's hetaeric desire for the freedom. The fantasy space of the carnival allows Hellena and Florinda to don fantastical new identities which allow them to escape the repressive patriarchal rules of obedience.

In Act 1, scene 1, Hellena and Florinda openly lament their imposed fates – Hellena must go to a convent and Florinda rails against her arranged marriage 'With Indignation' (1.1.p.2) that 'how near soever my Father thinks I am to Marrying that hated Object [Don Vincentio] I shall let him see, I understand better, what's due to my Beauty, Birth and Fortune, and more to my Soul' (1.1.p.2). Florinda's desire for a personal choice of husband is matched by Hellena's desire to escape a life of religiosity and sexual frustration. Florinda's complaints about her arranged marriage make Hellena 'begin to have a shrew'd guess [about sex and marriage] and fancy it very pretty to sigh, and sing, and blush, and wish, and dream and wish, and long and wish to see the Man' (1.1.p.1). Hellena's 'dream', and the repetition of 'wish', displays a determination to escape her fate and forge a new identity which allows for sensuality and liberty. Hellena recognises that the disorder of carnival is a means to experience independence through its 'masks and anonymity [...] to escape control of [...] men' whilst she is 'resolv'd to provide my self this Carnival' (1.1.p.2): if only to experience one night of pleasure.[94] Importantly, we see both women in their hetaeric natures evolving away from being beholden to their patriarchal submission.

Despite this, Behn returns to the continuing obstacle of Hellena's patriarchally imposed confinement like a 'Wild Cat' (1.1.p.5) by her brother Don Pedro. Hughes considers that by venturing 'outside the prison of the home [women] enter a different

[94] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 86.

system of control, for the open spaces of the city are a jungle infested with predatory males', therefore, Hellena's escape instils fear in Pedro for the ruination of her honour, chastity and the impossibility of entering the convent.[95] Behn takes his patriarchal fear and comedically contrasts this with Hellena's emphatic desire to remain chaste before marriage. She demands in Act 5, scene 1, that she will only relinquish her virginity through 'getting my consent, [and] old Gaffer *Himen* and his Priest, say amen to to't (5.1.p.80), which conceivably reflects the fantastical disorder that the carnival is creating. Notably, Pedro places Callis, Hellena's governess, in the position of her gaoler. Callis is a figure of authority and has been placed in a position to curb Hellena's desires as a child. Pedro's placement of a woman in control of Hellena's imprisonment, during carnival, implicitly suggests an acceptance that she is ungovernable in a 'jungle infested with predatory males'.[96]

Callis embodies the themes of 'appearance and reality, honesty and duplicity' which Bush-Bailey argues have come to define Behn's work.[97] Callis uses her duplicity to incite Hellena's desire to

> Callis: go in Masquerade? 'twill be a fine farewel to the World I take it – pray what wou'd you do there?
>
> Hellena: That which all the World does, as I am told, be as mad as the rest, and take all Innocent freedomes – Sister, you'll go too, will you not? come prithee be not sad. – We'll out-wit Twenty Brothers, if you'll be rul'd by me.
>
> (1.1.p.6)

[95] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 86.
[96] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 86.
[97] Bush-Bailey, p. 115.

Callis' rhetorical statement that going to the carnival will be Hellena's 'farewel to the World' reflects the threatening reality of Hellena's seclusion from public life, and an acquiescence that her independence will be fundamentally 'fine'. Callis, as a woman has the Deleuzian dual nature and knowingly asks Hellena what 'wou'd [she] do there' whilst having 'a Youthful itch of going my self' (1.1.p.6).

It is at this point in the play that we see in focus the oscillation in natures between the two sisters. Hellena recognises that the carnival will make her 'as mad as the rest', and in enjoying its madness of disorder, she will enjoy the 'Innocent freedomes' of her chastity and sexual denial, which will eventually turn her into Willmore's masochistic torturer. Nevertheless, Hellena's desire, and the ideology of the carnival conflicts with Florinda's. Although the sisters are hetaeric in nature, Hellena must still cajole Florinda to 'go too' and to 'be not sad', suggesting a divergence in each sister's natures, and a limit to the desire to be a masochistic torturer. Although Florinda displays a sad reticence, there is a foreshadowing of Hellena's masochistic element in her desire to 'outwit twenty brothers'.

Hughes highlights that carnival is not about suspending societal order, rather it acts to place women into a 'different system of control'; however, I would argue 'control' for the female characters of *The Rover*, is the compulsion or attempt to reach their masochistic role.[98] Behn presents the open space with a confidence rather than a fear; indeed, outwardly Hellena confirms a 'love [of] mischief' (1.1.p.2) and desire for 'some mad Companion [...] that will spoil my devotion' (1.1.p.2), providing a fantasy space for their natures to develop. What is more, Florinda and Hellena display what Jacqueline C. Pearson describes as an 'unusual power and independence', which feeds

[98] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 86.

into their natures: both women are unafraid to reach for the freedom and the men they desire.[99]

When viewed from a Deleuzian perspective, Hellena and Florinda's fixation on independence depicts their advancement towards gaining the power of the sadistic impulse, yet this contradicts Deleuze's theory that a sadistic woman can only exist with the conceit of the previously discussed 'Grecian man'.[100] Moreover, this counteracts Deleuze's account for the separation of female natures and his theorisation that

> The character of the woman torturer regards the outer limits with a mixture of fear, revulsion and attraction, since she never quite knows whether she will be able to maintain her prescribed role, and fears that she might at any moment fall back into primitive hetaerism or forward into the other extreme of sadism.[101]

Resulting from this, I would hypothesise that Deleuze's interpretation of the feminine natures are far more nuanced than being simplistic fixed points with separate characteristics and circumstances; female natures are an imperceptible amalgamation of the differing aspects of hetaerism and sadism. Furthermore, the masochistic element is not a conscious mental state which occurs at an evolutionary stage of nature or delineation of role, rather it is reactionary to outside forces; for example, sexual desire, fantasy or patriarchal control which place women into acting out the Deleuzian 'trinity of the masochistic dream [which] is summed up in the words: cold – maternal – severe, icy – sentimental – cruel'.[102]

---

[99] Pearson, p. 153.
[100] Deleuze, p. 48.
[101] Deleuze, p. 50.
[102] Deleuze, p. 51.

This reaction to external forces is complementary to Deleuze's theory that the hetaeric and sadistic natures' 'sensuality is replaced by [the masochistic torturer's] supersensuousness sentimentality' the hetaeric and sadistic 'warmth and [...] fire by her icy coldness' and 'confusion by her rigorous order'.[103] In particular, one could suggest that the Deleuzian masochistic nature is initially portrayed by the characterisation of the courtesan Angellica Bianca. In Act 1, scene 2 the audience are introduced to the ethereal beauty and nature of Angellica through a discussion between the English cavaliers, Willmore, Belvile and Frederick. Both Belvile and Frederick are almost hyperbolically captivated by her – without having seen her. Frederick expresses that 'we [the cavaliers] have been all fir'd with a Beauty newly come to Town, the famous *Paduana Angellica Bianca*' (1.2.p.15), and Belvile reflects that Angellica is 'now the only ador'd Beauty of all the Youth in *Naples*' (1.2.p.15). Certainly, in both Frederick and Belvile's opinions, Angellica

> Belvile: has the pleasure to behold all languish for her that see her.
>
> Frederick: 'Tis pretty to see how much Love the Men regard her, and how much Envy the Women
>
> (1.2.p.15)

Without having observed Angellica, the audience are made aware of her other-worldly power which she holds over both men and women which places her beyond what is experienceable or perceptible – her supersensuousness. This leaves us in expectation of perceiving the sensuality of this Aphrodite-like woman, with

[103] Deleuze, p. 51; The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Supersensual' as 'Transcending the senses; that is above or beyond what is perceptible by the senses; supersensible; transcendent; spiritual', 'Supersensual' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].

'astonishing beauty' who Willmore imagines as a 'soft, white, kind –– Woman!' (2.1.p.16).[104] Notably, Behn chooses to keep Angellica hidden until Act 2, scene 1; conceivably to increase sexual expectation, and as a reflection of Angellica's Masochean masochistic hold over the men. The cavaliers have come to Angellica's house to catch sight of her and attempt to buy her services, but in an act of mercenary coldness, Angellica 'has rais'd the Price too high' (2.1.p.19) at '*A Thousand Crowns a Month*' (2.1.p.19). Anita Pacheco argues that Angellica's high fee 'confirms her ascendency over the worshipping suitors brought to their knees by the desire she excites and thwarts in all but the fortunate few who can afford to pay for her favours'; however, this could suggest that this represents her masochistic 'icy coldness', severity, and her 'disavowal of sensuality' to torture her potential clients.[105]

The cavaliers' suspense to see Angellica and their pain at her unaffordability suggests the creation of fantastical space based on the pleasure of waiting and the pain of unattainability. This fantasy is augmented in Act 2, scene 1 by the appearance of Angellica's portraits, rather than herself. When servants '*hang up a great Picture of* Angellica's *against the Balcone, and Two little ones at each side of the Door*' (2.1.p.18), the cavalier – Blunt, hides his pain at not being able to afford Angellica by being 'no Chapmen for this Commodity' (2.1.p.18), Willmore becomes entranced in his sensual fantasy with the portrait, claiming 'how wondrous fair she [Angellica] is' (2.1.p.19).[106] Elin Diamond theorises that the 'iconicity' of the paintings 'function as fetishes, as substitute objects for the female body', they are indicative of the fixed point of the masochistic nature.[107] Whilst Angellica's portraits are drawn from life, and provide a

[104] Anita Pacheco, 'Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *ELH*, 65 (1998), 323-345 (pp. 335-336).
[105] Pacheco, p. 336; Deleuze, p. 52.
[106] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Chapmen' as 'A man whose business is buying and selling; a merchant, trader, dealer', 'Chapmen' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].
[107] Diamond, p. 45.

masochistic torture, they form part of what Deleuze advances is the point 'of dialectical transmutation' – the sexually heated hetaeric nature – coldly, severely, and cruelly becoming the masochistic ideal. Furthermore, the iconicity of Angellica reflects Deleuze's suggestion that the characterisation of masochism and 'its theatricality is a peculiar form of cruelty in the woman torturer: the cruelty of the ideal'.[108] Angellica's portrait cruelly entrances and inflames Willmore with a 'posture that is loose and negligent, / The sight on't would beget a warm desire / In Souls whom Impotence and Age had chill'd' (2.1.p.22) driving him to the 'responsive behaviour' of theft and violence over her portraiture, as well as the pleasure-pain fantasy it has created within him.[109]

The coldness and cruelty of the portrait takes physical form in Act 2, scene 2. When Angellica demands to meet Willmore after she has seen the cavaliers' fight over the pictures, she coolly berates Willmore as 'Insolent' (2.2.p.24) and demands 'how durst you pull down my Picture?' (2.2.p.24). Perhaps in summation of the potentiality for a masochistic contract between them, Willmore retorts with 'how durst you set it up, to tempt poor Am'rous Mortals with so much excellence' (2.2.p.24). The public pictures, and the communal male masochistic fantasy has become a personal and private reality for Willmore within Angellica's chamber. She lambasts him with 'I sent for you to ask my Pardon Sir, not to Aggravate your Crime –– I thought I shou'd have seen you at my Feet imploring it' (2.2.p.25), in a cruel, but admissible, form of punishment, yet she arouses his desire with her cold indifference that his 'edifying Doctrine will do no good upon me' (2.2.p.25).

The implicit masochistic meaning behind the use of pictures is not limited to Angellica. In Act 3, scene 1, Florinda uses her portrait, in a jewelled locket, to elicit a

[108] Deleuze, p. 55.
[109] Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 24.

delayed desire from Belvile. Ashley Brookner Bender proposes that Florinda's 'identifiability leads to vulnerability', but this identifiability, like Angellica's, becomes Florinda's visible sign of empowerment: by giving Belvile the locket she openly signals her desire for him and her hetaeric need for independence from Don Pedro.[110] Whilst Pearson contends that Florinda 'comes closest to a stereotype of female passivity (she is threatened with rape three times and needs to be rescued by a man!)', she contradictorily argues that Florinda is 'prepared to fight actively to gain the man she loves and escape the [...] forced marriage'.[111] Pearson's characterisation of Florinda as passive suggests an ambiguity: she appears as both submissive in comparison with Hellena and in awe of her learning to 'Love so easily' (3.1.p.3), but Florinda displays a firmness to go with Hellena and meet Belvile. Florinda's masochistic power lies between the point her passivity meets her desire for independence: her passivity is her supersensuousness, and her self-determination – the sentimentality of the masochistic torturer. Florinda leaves Belvile the jewel so that when 'I'm gone, you may repent the opportunity you have lost, by your Modesty' (3.1.p.37) in an act which Deleuze would observe as 'a sentimentality assumed [by] the superior role of the impersonal element'.[112]

Florinda is unable to maintain either a hetaeric or a sadistic nature and therefore, diverges from Deleuze's 'pendulum' of the dual natures. Her attempt at a masochistic ideal fails by being ruled by her 'human value [and] by patriarchal standards'.[113] As previously discussed in chapter two, female submission drives the male masochistic desire which encourages a 'gap between the female self and its public

[110] Ashley Brookner Bender, 'Moving Miniatures and Circulating Bodies in Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 31 (2007), 27-46 (p. 33).
[111] Pearson, p. 153.
[112] Deleuze, p. 52.
[113] Pacheco, p. 325.

representations [which suggests] that misapprehension and misrepresentation [are] part of the male control'.[114] As can be seen in Act 3, scene 5, Florinda – in her nightclothes and waiting for Belvile in her garden – can be considered as displaying a hetaeric independence, and an acceptance of becoming his masochistic torturer in their personal fantasy. Her déshabillement is meant solely for Belvile and Florinda views the assignation as 'my way to happiness' (3.5.p.41), yet viewed by any other male, Florinda becomes, as Andrew Sofer proposes, an emblem 'of sexual availability'.[115] Her undress and the masculine view of feminine availability, acting as an outside force, negates Deleuze's theorisation that the masochistic coldness produces a 'protective milieu and medium, cocoon and vehicle'.[116] Florinda's hetaerism and masochism appear too subversive for men when displayed by a woman who is outwardly dependent on her honour and virtue, apart from Belvile. Willmore's attempted rape of Florinda in Act 3, scene 5 displays a cruel, 'brutal assertion of masculine power', which strips away Florinda's independence and selfhood, particularly as she is close to gaining her own version of independence that she craves.[117] Even though Florinda can 'cry murder! Rape! or any thing' (3.5.p.42), Willmore merely sees her as 'Baggage' (3.5.p.42) and viciously attempts to rape her.

That is not to say that Willmore remains unpunished for his behaviour: the fear for his masculinity, as will be explored later within this thesis, will become his masochistic pleasure-pain punishment inflicted by Hellena. Perhaps in an amalgamation of Angellica and Florinda's natures, Hellena is in a position of 'domination and control' throughout the play. Jacqueline Pearson suggests that

[114] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 88.
[115] Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter, Invisibility in Drama, Theater and Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 72.
[116] Deleuze, p. 52.
[117] Pacheco, p. 329.

'women can insist on sexual freedom equal to men's, but they have more to lose', but Behn portrays Hellena as assiduous in her desire for sexual awareness and hetaeric independence.[118] Hellena's assertiveness is conceivably a reaction to her probable fate of being confined to a convent: she has little to lose by taking risks with her reputation or removing herself from the constraints of marriageable women as she 'is to be a Nun, and so shall not be suspected to have any such Earthly thoughts' (3.1.p.31). Interestingly, Behn's characterisation of Hellena is taken from Killigrew's *Thomaso*, and Heidi Hutner argues that by '"rescuing" Killigrew's Hellena [and] transforming her [...] Behn undermines the ideological constructions of the virgin as the ideal embodiment of virtue and the whore as base and corrupt'.[119] Behn subverts this belief by characterising Hellena throughout the play as a maiden who wishes to experience immorality – escaping to the carnival and flirtation with Willmore – but will not give up her virginity to Willmore and therefore, her moral standing. Behn places Hellena in this position and transforms her into a Deleuzian fantasy woman: an embodiment of the masochistic element that is neither hetaeric nor sadistic and creates 'a theoretical and ideological structure which transforms it [the fantasy] into a general conception of human nature'.[120]

I would suggest that Hellena's actions are a display of the unique balance between hetaeric, masochistic and sadistic natures. Behn's refashioning of Hellena as sexually self-assertive and proactive in her desire to command Willmore significantly, as James Fitzmaurice theorises, 'allows the throwing off of unwanted restrictions on her behaviour and helps her to challenge male prerogatives'.[121] In contrast, Sofer

[118] Pearson, p. 162.
[119] Heidi Hutner, 'Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 102-120 (p. 105).
[120] Deleuze, p. 53.
[121] James Fitzmaurice, 'The Language of Gender and a Textual Problem in Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 3 (1995) 283-293 (p. 283).

argues that Hellena's desire 'embodies the yearning for heterosexual mutuality in a world that reduces women to wives, daughters, prostitutes, nuns, rape victims, and icons', but Hellena goes further than the desire for a gender mutuality.[122] She repeatedly taunts Willmore by calling him 'Captain' (3.1.p.33) and appends her demands for him to act or behave according to her wishes; for example, in Act 1, scene 2 when she meets with Willmore for the first time, they verbally spar:

> Hellena: See, Captain, how willing I am to be Friends with you, till time and ill luck make us Lovers [...] I know you Captains are such strict Men, and such severe observers of your Vows to Chastity, that 'twill be hard to prevail with your tender Conscience [...]
>
> Willmore: Do not abuse me, for fear I shou'd take thee at thy word
>
> (3.1.p.34)

Hellena mocks the prescribed feminine 'role in courtship' and begins to comparatively take on the masculine role of libertinism whilst seeking Willmore's feminisation and submission.[123] Unlike the pain-pleasure he could gain from Angellica, Hellena represents a challenge or 'a contest of resolve' and he is entranced by her supersensuous sentimentality – illuminated by her firm, if not exaggerated, denial to acquiesce to his sexual pleasure and that she is 'not in love' (3.1.p.30) with him.[124] Deleuze theorises that supersensuousness becomes 'the object of man's thought, and cruelty the punishment [for the masochist's] coarseness', which drives Willmore to continue wooing Hellena. Yet her punishment of Willmore is to keep him

[122] Sofer, p. 79.
[123] Brookner Bender, p. 41.
[124] Fitzmaurice, p. 283.

entranced and to deny him for his 'coarseness' and his libertinistic inconstancy with Angellica.[125] Consequently, Hellena's cruelty is indicative of the Deleuzian sentimentality that compels 'man to thought and properly constitute[s] the masochistic ideal'.[126] Willmore verbally plays with Hellena to retain his masculine dominance only to be continually outwitted by her.

During the denouement of the play in Act 5, scene 1, Behn clearly depicts the Deleuzian natures of women: both in celebration and critique of her female characters' volatility. The contrast between Angellica and Hellena as two women who have reached the masochistic ideal is evident: attaining and retaining the masochistic element is audacious, fearless, and supersensuous. To fail means neither a return to the hetaeric or sadistic nature – merely becoming a mindlessly submissive and dependent woman. This state becomes nuanced by the depiction of the external force of love, and its effect on the masochistic element – something that Deleuze does not consider. Although Angellica had a masochistic hold over Willmore as courtesan and patron, there are no emotional ties between them. Once Angellica develops feelings for Willmore, she begins to lose her masochistic hold over him and shifts away from the Deleuzian masochistic nature.

Angellica's overabundance of love and jealousy climaxes in the final scene where she threatens to kill Willmore with a pistol. Derek Hughes asserts that 'the most serious (virtually tragic) element of the play is Angellica's discovery that the power of the courtesan is an illusion', but she herself sums up her loss of her masochistic power, mourning that 'had I remain'd in innocent security, / I shou'd have thought all men were born my slaves, / And worn my pow'r like lightening in my Eyes, / To have

[125] Deleuze, p. 54.
[126] Deleuze, p. 54.

destroy'd at pleasure when offended' (5.1.pp.75-76).[127] Pearson proposes that a 'sexual reversal [allows] a woman to draw a [...] pistol' in a show of 'masculine courage and determination', but Angellica's actions suggest determination that 'Wou'd turn my rage to scorn' (5.1.p.76); her threat of violence represents a rapid oscillation between her hetaeric and sadistic nature in a desperate attempt to control Willmore as her masochistic lover.[128]

In contrast, Hellena remains as the masochistic ideal, commanding Willmore completely. This is not necessarily a positive step towards gaining her independence in the future, but Hellena closely reflects Deleuze's supposition that whilst the masochistic torturer has an 'intermediate' nature, she 'may also come last of all, for she is both oral and silent and therefore has the last word'.[129] Hellena's hetaeric unconformity and independence have given her 'the last word' and she conquers Don Pedro and, more importantly – she taunts Willmore into becoming her husband 'because no body else will love [him]' (5.1.p.79).[130] It is interesting that unlike Angellica or Florinda, Hellena does not have a portrait within the play – by remaining hidden from Willmore through her various disguises, such as gypsy and page boy, she 'understands the consequences of seeing and being seen, and [...] uses this to her advantage'.[131] Hellena, by seeing both Angellica's fate and Florinda's attempt at masochism, uses their failures to strengthen and understand how to remain as the masochistic ideal, to turn this into her autonomy and rule Willmore. At the end of the play, Hellena's hold over him places him in a position of submission: she acts as the 'Oral mother [...] who nurtures and brings death' to his masculinity.[132] Hellena's

[127] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, p. 90.
[128] Pearson, p. 158.
[129] Deleuze, p. 55.
[130] Brookner Bender, p. 27.
[131] Brookner Bender, p. 38.
[132] Deleuze, p. 55.

raillery with Willmore consciously manoeuvres him into the position of subservient and faithful husband, galling him when he suggests that

> Willmore: one kiss and I am thine –
>
> Hellena: One kiss! […] he that will be satisfied with one kiss, will never dye of that longing; good Friend, single kiss, is all your talking come to this? – A kiss, a caudle! farewel Captain, single kiss.
>
> Willmore: Nay if we part so, let me dye like a bird upon a bough
>
> (5.1.p.80)

Ultimately, Hellena becomes the '*Inconstant*' (5.1.p.81) libertine to the '*Constant*' (5.1.p.81) Robert Willmore. Behn leaves the audience with a view of a female rake in the act of masochistically torturing her husband 'in the Storms o'th' Marriage Bed' (5.1.p.83). It is interesting that Behn's fate for Hellena in *The Second Part of The Rover* (1680) illustrates the volatility of the Deleuzian masochistic nature: in a cruel twist of fate, Hellena dies in a storm at sea, off stage, merely a month after her marriage to Willmore. The death of the masochistic ideal fundamentally reaffirms that the masochistic nature is an unsustainable nature for women. In *The Rover*, Behn highlights that the torturer's nature will inherently evolve and materialise; however, it is a fleeting experience, and its depiction is of such brief duration it can go unnoticed in female characterisations. Nevertheless, when masochism does manifest itself, the female character – in similarity to the fate of Angellica, must return to the position of submission, silence, and invisibility. Ultimately, for the masochist's pleasure-pain fantasy to become real must necessarily oscillate and evolve along with a women's nature for them to come together.

Aphra Behn's and Ariadne's plays are uniquely placed to chart and illuminate how the earliest female professional playwrights responded to masculine dominance in the theatre post-1660. Whilst these plays are from two different periods – politically and socially – they continued, in a Sisyphean attempt, to challenge the view that women should be submissive, virtuous and acquiescent. Behn consistently took risks: as both one of the first female playwrights, and in her depictions of female empowerment which transgressed patriarchal bias. The measure of her defiance could only be oscillatory, and any feminine transgression could only take place on the stage. Both playwrights would rely on androgyny and pseudonymity to gain a coequality within the theatre, and Behn's dogmatic critique of gender rules fluctuates from trepidation to ebullience within, and between *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Curtizans*. Ariadne would take up Behn's proto-feminist cause in the 1690s yet would downplay her sexuality and her education.

Unlike their male contemporaries, there is a nuance to Behn and Ariadne's demands for sexual equality, independence and desire for a fair critique of their work. Behn and Ariadne's desire for independence mirrors those of their characters, and rather than the ostensible physicality and sexual obsessions of men, Behn and Ariadne portray their female characters as psychologically nuanced, intelligent and willing to consider how they will take control of their desires. It is this empowerment that leads me to a Deleuzian reading of the plays. The empowerment, subversive psychology and vacillatory freedom of Behn's and Ariadne's characters mirrors Deleuze's theorisation of the evolution of the masochistic idealised woman, or one of the natures of the three women of Masoch. This chapter's study of the plays has highlighted the transformatory growth in nature from the hetaeric, the sadistic and the cold masochistic torturer; they each contribute to the multifaceted masochistic fantasy. Although this chapter has suggested that Deleuze's theory of the three natures is in part inexact, his

conceptualisation has shed new light on the reasons for the changeability of Behn's and Ariadne's characters: from their desire for independence to a return to the gender role status quo.

At the same time, Behn and Ariadne use the rigidity of femininity as a form of masochistic control and as a critique of gender inequality. Behn's use of character disguises, pretence and intelligence empowers women to take control of their own desires, as well as commanding men's. Female subversiveness, when camouflaged by the implicit upholding of virtuousness becomes a form of torture: unavailability, emotional indifference and physical restraint drive the masochist into a state of frustration, humiliation and emasculation. Female independence, or what they view as independence, directs a man's pleasure and pain – whether through self-doubt, anxiety or being ignored by their object of desire. This study has examined how women become the masochistic torturer and identified their character traits; however, this has been seen as evolving, in isolation away from the masochist. In the next chapter, we will view how the masochist and torturer come together to formalise their relationship and make their pleasure-pain fantasy real.

Chapter Four

Law, Disorder, and the French Connection 1676–1681

The plays considered in the preceding chapters have revealed an androcentric, alternate erotic fantasy of masochism based on the need for cruelty, submission and mental torture. This desire, when viewed from a Deleuzian perspective, offers a new interpretation of how lasciviousness, cuckoldry and sexual failure drive male characters to experience sexual gratification from humiliation. In front of a backdrop of humorous errors and sexual conquests, the masochist's focal point is finding a receptive woman who will orchestrate his specific sexual needs. The previous chapter highlighted how Aphra Behn and Ariadne responded to these sexual desires by crafting and evolving empowered female characters under the guise of the Deleuzian torturer. Deleuze's principle of the 'Three Women in Masoch' illuminates the psychological states that a woman must go through – the overly libidinous hetaeric, cruelly sadistic and the coldly indifferent masochistic woman – to become the ideal torturer. When Behn's and Ariadne's female characters are viewed through this lens, it sheds new light on how the development of women's assertiveness is amplified and attenuated in Restoration theatre. For Behn and Ariadne, women were confident, psychologically nuanced and intellectually superior to their male counterparts, but their journeys towards becoming the masochistic ideal have neither a fixed trajectory, nor a guarantee for a long-lasting outcome of sexual freedom.

Yet the masochist and his ideal are not formed together, and the masochist must find his torturer for his fantasy to be made real. On the stage, their search is humorously unpredictable and obscured by the need to reflect an ordered society, regulated by moralism, which grapples with an underbelly of hypocrisy and

salaciousness. The plays within this chapter, William Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* (1676), Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678) and Nathaniel Lee's *The Princess of Cleve* (1681) are representative in their depiction of the masochistic hunt within the constraints of socio-moralistic expectations and conservatism.[1] Wycherley, Behn and Lee's plays are rebellious, innovative and experimental – implicitly sowing disorder within ordered societal and theatrical cultures. As well as viewing these plays from a Deleuzian frame of reference, I explore them through the perspective of adaptation and genre traits to discover how Wycherley, Behn and Lee's modifications boldly alter their source material to purposefully reflect the challenges of navigating the affected piety of English society.

This chapter explores how Wycherley and Behn connect with and respect Molière's source material but disrupt his authorial intent with their own. This intentional discord creates a humorously chaotic disjunction between different theatrical forms that provides a thought-provoking analysis of the state of society. Both Wycherley and Behn use diverse methods to accomplish this intentional discord: extravagant but contradictory characterisations and disruptive misunderstandings critique the hypocrisy of the rules that govern societal institutions and gender roles. As will be examined, Wycherley uses moral didacticism, honesty and a desire to remain within societal constraints to sow disorder and mock the superficiality and moral pretentions of the upper class. Wycherley's critique of flawed institutions, materialism and hypocrisy opens a debate on how patriarchal structures, both within and outside the playhouse, have overstepped their authority in prescribing the separate desires between men and women. Behn continues to develop her influential

[1] There is a critical inconsistency towards the inclusion of the hyphen in the play's title. The original edition of the play includes the hyphen, and for the purposes of this thesis I will use the given title, unless quoted.

and intellectually superior female characters to generate disorder within the male sphere. I will examine how Behn uses her characters, within a farce, to highlight the development of the masochistic relationship and the desperate psychological need for a masochistic pleasure-pain contract.

I will conclude the chapter with an analysis of how Nathaniel Lee adulterates his source material to deftly create confusion, extreme characterisations, and destruction of relationships. This study aims to evaluate how Lee's presentation of an unnerving disorder challenges the viewer's understanding of the significance and intent of adaptation. This discussion of Lee's work will ascertain how this skilfully reflects the Deleuzian masochistic process – from fantasy to contract – within a theatrical critique on libertinistic excess. This chapter concomitantly explores how a Deleuzian reading of *The Plain-Dealer*, *Sir Patient Fancy* and *The Princess of Cleve* provides a deeper understanding of how contractual formality brings order to the disorder of the masochistic union, and whether this binding element of the unity transforms a tumultuous relationship into one of harmonious pleasure-pain order. This provides a clearer stance on how the character relationships within the play reflect, challenge and evolve the Deleuzian patricentred desire for a masochistic relationship and the nature of women. Each study illuminates how a masochist's need to find a torturer, their interactions and journey towards a pleasure-pain contract is born out of the French source material and interwoven within these English comedies. A Deleuzian perspective has the potential to answer whether masochistic desire remains an exclusively masculine impulse which, left unchecked, becomes a psychologically and physically destructive desire.

Sin, Sincerity and Moralistic Law in Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer*

During the twenty-first century, there has been little critical analysis of William Wycherley's last play, *The Plain-Dealer* (1676). This study's aim is to focus on how Deleuze's contractual element is illuminated through Wycherley's depiction of his characters' desires, emotional losses and punishments. Produced a year after *The Country Wife*, *The Plain-Dealer* is ostensibly a comic study under the guise of a misanthropic critique of hypocrisy in a literary reworking of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (1666).[2] Molière had become an important cultural figure on the English stage during the late 1660s and throughout the 1670s, playwrights attempted to 'absorb and Anglicize Molière'.[3] John Dryden was inspired by Molière's *L'Étourdi ou les contretemps* (1655) in *Sir Martin Mar-al* (1667), Edward Ravenscroft's reworking of *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) in *The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman* (1672), whilst Thomas Shadwell founded *The Miser* (1672) on Molière's *L'Avare* (1668). Indeed, Wycherley borrowed the plot of Pinchwife and Margery from two of Molière's plays *L'Ecole des maris (1661)* and *L'Ecole des femmes* (1662).

Wycherley's return to Molière's work is unsurprising given the success of *The Country Wife* and the popularity of Molière's comedy during the 1670s. As I described in this thesis' introduction, Wycherley deftly gauged the growing public desire for more moralistic comedy as the 1670s progressed. Wycherley retains the central plotline of *Le Misanthrope* and its protagonists: Alceste, who despises societal

[2] *The London Stage* notes that *The Plain-Dealer* was performed on 11th December 1676, however, it notes that 'There is no certainty that this performance is the premiere, but as the play was licensed for printing on 9 Jan. 1676/7, this performance may well be the first one', *The London Stage 1660–1700,* ed. by William Van Lennep (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 253; Whilst written in 1666, *The London Stage* does not record a performance of *Le Misanthrope* in London until December 1721, '*Le Misanthrope',* in *The London Stage Database, 1660-1800* [online], https://www.eighteenthcenturydrama.amdigital.co.uk/LondonStage/Database [Accessed 15 January 2025].

[3] Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 117.

hypocrisy and Célimène, his fiancée who is morally wayward. Wycherley transforms Alceste's naivety, and widens Molière's satirical humour, cynicism and social critique. There is no acknowledged record of an English adaptation of *Le Misanthrope* before *The Plain-Dealer* and Joseph Harris suggests that Wycherley's adaptation was uniquely the 'first [...] literary reworking of Molière's play [...] outside of France and before it had become widely known abroad through translations'.[4] However, Harris criticises Wycherley for complicating 'Molière's tightly sparse plot with various racy subplots', but as will become clear, it is in these subplots that Wycherley augments Molière's comedy.[5] Approbation of the adaptation would come from Voltaire, who commended Wycherley who 'a corrigé le seul défaut qui soit dans la pièce de Molière: ce défaut est le manque d'intrigue et d'intérêt. La pièce anglaise est intéressante, et l'intrigue en est ingénieuse, mais trop hardie pour nos mœurs'.[6]

Wycherley dispenses with Alceste's emotional vulnerability and moral flaws in his characterisation of Manly. Instead, he characterises him as aggressive, disillusioned and cynical.[7] This psychological alteration, together with the addition of subplots within *The Plain-Dealer* both entertain and reflect upon an English society in moralistic flux. As will be seen in this chapter, the application of Deleuze's theory of masochistic pleasure-pain illuminates how the adaptation of the play, transformation of Alceste's vulnerability into Manly's hostility, and their abidance by a moralistic law, or code of conduct, cements the masochist and torturer's relationship.

Although the play is a reworked piece, the nature of Wycherley's play is capricious: *The Plain-Dealer* is framed around a 'Billiet doux Dedicatory' (sig. A2r) to

---

[4] Joseph Harris, *Misanthropy in the Age of Reason: Hating Humanity from Shakespeare to Schiller* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 146.
[5] Harris, p.146.
[6] has corrected the only flaw in Molière's play: this flaw is the lack of intrigue and interest. The English play is interesting, and the plot is ingenious, but too daring for our morals [my translation], Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, ed. by Frédéric Deloffre (Gallimard, 1986).
[7] Andrew Calder, *Molière, The Theory and Practice of Comedy* (The Atholone Press,1993), p. 6.

a bawd, but the play is a marked deviation from the sexual comedy of *The Country Wife*. It is tonally uncertain, if not mercurially comical, and it leaves critics questioning the play's form, and meaning of the plain dealing of the title. Robert D. Hume describes the play as 'problematical', without an 'aim or focus', which causes an instability of meaning and comedic genre – something that the play has struggled with since its first performances.[8] John Dennis reported that Wycherley himself worried that 'the Town [...] appeared Doubtfull what Judgement to Form of it'.[9] The play's 'comic truth' remains divisive; critics such as Ian Donaldson and Virginia Ogden Birdsall have attempted to arrive at a consensus on the play's genre with little success.[10] Donaldson questions whether the play's difficulty arises from 'one of *kind*: is *The Plain Dealer* to be regarded as satire, a romantic comedy, tragi-comedy, a re-write of Molière [...] or what?', yet he does not provide an answer to his own question.[11] Ogden Birdsall similarly acknowledges the division of opinion over the play's genre and suggests that *The Plain-Dealer* is about 'both comedy and satire, as well as about realism and idealism'.[12] I would posit that *The Plain-Dealer* is a comedy precisely due to Wycherley's inconsistent use of genres. This fluctuation reflects the unpredictability of reality, and Wycherley deftly uses darkly humour to shed light on the illusory nature of outward appearances: who one appears to be and who one truly is.

Deleuze attempted to answer the problematics of genre by placing his masochistic theory in a wider literary context, suggesting that there were 'many authors [who] are distorted by placing a childishly tragic construction on what is more

---

[8] Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 304.
[9]John Dennis, 'Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatic Poetry and of the Degeneracy of the Public Taste, 1725', in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), II, p. 277.
[10] Hume, p.145.
[11] Ian Donaldson, '"Tables Turned": *The Plain Dealer*', *Essays in Criticism*, 17 (1967) 304-321 (p. 304).
[12] Virginia Ogden Birdsall, *Wild Civility* (Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 158.

often the expression of an aggressively comic force'.[13] I suggest that Deleuze and Ogden Birdsall's conjectures establish the play as both comedy and satire, which brings a new understanding of Wycherley's depiction of the fallibility of human nature – hidden under the guise of a stinging critique of contemporaneous society's hypocrisy – which is truly comedic. This argument is tightly bound with the question about the play's form. As Hume suggests, *The Plain-Dealer* does not 'follow a common plot formula' which leads to further divisive criticism.[14] The play can be viewed as an interconnection of sketches which make up the whole: each bringing a separate meaning that leads to a unified message. Whilst this creates a 'puzzling feeling of instability', it is at the heart of the attack on the meaning and futility of plain dealing, and I posit that dissembling, deception and illusion are a fundamental component of both Restoration comedy and human nature, where 'sense can only be made by turning things back to front' to deftly portray a sense of realism.[15]

As mentioned above, the plot of *Le Misanthrope* is analogous with the plot of *The Plain-Dealer*. Wycherley's play follows Captain Manly's determination to escape the all-encompassing hypocrisy of London Society. In the first scene, Lord Plausible visits Manly and suggests that he fawn over the men at court to obtain a ship, but Manly rails at him for suggesting this and throws him out of his lodgings. He then argues with his acquaintance Freeman over dishonesty and hypocrisy in modern society – Manly despairs at the ubiquity of hypocrisy and cannot bring himself to join in, irrespective of Freeman's logic. Olivia, Manly's sweetheart before he left, hears of his return but has no desire to see him. Manly overhears her telling Eliza and Plausible that she does not love him and that she has married an unnamed man. She has become

[13] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty,* trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), p. 86.
[14] Hume, p.129.
[15] Donaldson, p. 320; Donaldson, p. 308.

as inherently hypocritical as the rest of society. Olivia sees Manly's page Fidelia, who has disguised as a page to follow Manly, whom she secretly loves. Manly hears Olivia mocking him and decides he must hypocritically hide his true feelings of contempt at her deceit to exact his revenge on her. He makes the disguised Fidelia agree to sleep with Olivia, only for Manly to take Fidelia's place, tricking Olivia into sleeping with him under the cover of darkness.

Wycherley deftly creates a subplot which closely follows the overly litigious Widow Blackacre's attempt to avoid Major Oldfox's attempt to woo her and Freeman's intent to marry her for her money. Just as honest and direct as Manly, she is consumed by her many lawsuits to the point of self-destruction. She is ridiculed by Freeman and her son, Jerry for daring to attempt to manage her own affairs. At Westminster Hall, Freeman persuades Jerry to let him be Jerry's guardian. By doing so, he gains control of the Widow's finances and lawsuits. Rather than suffer the ignominy of marrying Freeman, in a fit of rage the Widow Blackacre orders some knights to help her prove her fraudulent claim that Jerry is illegitimate, which Freeman overhears. In the confusion that this causes, Oldfox attempts to rape the Widow; however, Freeman rescues her. At the end of the play, Freeman persuades Widow Blackacre to give him a stipend in return for him not having her imprisoned for fraud, or indeed, needing them to get married.

From the outset of the play, Manly is presented as comedically aggressive and hyperbolically misanthropic in contrast to the foppish Lord Plausible. Act 1 begins *in medias res* with a heated conversation between the two men, but Wycherley visually sets Manly apart as looking '*surlily*', and as linguistically belligerent – Manly demands that Lord Plausible

> Tell not me [...] of your *Decorums*, supercilious Forms, and slavish Ceremonies; your little Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World, do daily over and over, for, and to one another; not out of love and duty, but your servile fear.[16]
>
> (1.1.p.1)

Manly's accusatory, menacing language and the repetition of 'your' suggests a contemptuous attitude towards Plausible. Manly merely views him as a slave in an act of deindividuation, merging him into a collective of 'Spaniels' who are incapable of acting autonomously within society. Manly suggests to Plausible that he is unable to act out of either 'love' or 'duty', which could be thought of as being predestined to conform within society's 'slavish Ceremonies' and Plausible acts out of 'servile fear' of becoming excluded. Manly's words echo Alceste's vulnerable claim that 'Partout que lâche flatterie, Qu'injustice, intérêt, trahison, fourberie; Je n'y puis plus tenir' (1.1.93-95), highlighting his own difficult, but subtle removal from society.[17] Manly's threat of exclusion here is aggressive but ironic – his suggestion reflects how he has no compunction in ostracising himself from society through his misanthropy and 'servile fear' of becoming a spaniel 'of the world'.

Manly's rejection of society places him as a bluntly honest individualist, who upholds in his view, the moralistic law that should govern behaviour. However, unlike Alceste's understanding that he is a mere member of society who wants 'qu'on soit sincère, et qu'en homme d'honneur, on ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du cœur' (1.1.35-36), Manly's words echo Hobbes' view of absolute sovereign power which was

[16] William Wycherley, *The Plain-Dealer. A Comedy* (R. Bently and M. Magnes, 1677); Manly's words echoes the Hobbesian ideology of fear and the state of nature. As previously discussed in chapter two, Hobbes suggests that fear is necessary for social order.
[17] Everywhere there is cowardly flattery, there is injustice, interest, treason, trickery; I cannot bear it any longer [my translation]; Molière, *Le Misanthrope,* ed. by Jaques Chupeau (Gallimard, 2013).

discussed in chapter two.[18] Manly believes that he retains his right to nature: his outspoken views attempt to dictate how Plausible, and the rest of society should act unemotionally moralistic, or as plain-dealers. I would suggest that his verbal reprimand becomes comedic as he is neither sovereign, nor that Charles II or his court was seen as particularly moralistic during the 1670s.[19] The humour of Manly's perseverance with maintaining the moralistic law is furthered by the dramatic irony that Olivia has not remained the moralistic woman he left and was far from unwavering in her monogamous affection for him during his absence.

His belief in the moralistic law and Olivia's loyalty exemplifies the Deleuzian theory that abidance by the law – either emotional, moralistic or juridical – creates a humour that is essential to the creation of a masochistic contract. Manly's fantasy is based on his belief in Olivia's righteousness and as will be examined later in this section, when Manly discovers Olivia's infidelity, he steadfastly remains laughably disillusioned with society, at the same time as attempting to form a masochistic contract. Deleuze suggests that

---

[18] People to be sincere and, as men of honour, to say nothing that does not come from the heart [my translation]. Le *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* defines 'Lâcher' in the seventeenth century as 'signifie d'abord « laisser aller »' [to let go], 'Lâcher', in *Le Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, ed. by Alain Rey, 3 vols (Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1992), II, p. 1957. When Alceste declares that one should 'ne lâche aucun mot' [say nothing], he suggests that speech is not merely a form of communication but a moral act. The verb *lâcher*, evoking the idea of releasing something, underscores Alceste's rejection of social artifice in favour of heartfelt expression. In doing so, Molière dramatizes the tension between private sincerity and public respectability, positioning Alceste's linguistic absolutism as both a critique of societal hypocrisy and the source of his comic isolation. Molière repeatedly plays on the related meanings of the verb *lâcher* and the adjective *lâche*, the latter defined as '« poltron, sans courage »' [cowardly, without courage], 'Lâche', in *Le Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, ed. by Alain Rey, 3 vols (Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1992), II, p. 1957. When Alceste denounces 'lâche flatterie' [cowardly flattery], he expresses his contempt for dishonesty and for the cowardice that enables it. Molière carefully manipulates these meanings to construct Alceste's perspective: words must arise from inner conviction, and any failure to speak sincerely is both a linguistic and moral shortcoming. Molière exploits this rhetoric for comic effect. Alceste's inability to tolerate flattery, compromise, or ambiguity renders him socially absurd. As Michael Hawcroft argues, Alceste's moral absolutism becomes a form of comic rigidity, while Larry F. Norman suggests that Molière uses Alceste's language to reveal the impossibility of living sincerely in a world governed by social performance, Michael Hawcroft, *Molière: Reasoning with Fools* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 93–95, Larry F. Norman, *The Public Mirror: Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 45–47.

[19] The public's view of Charles II's immorality has been discussed earlier in the introduction and chapter two of this thesis.

> The essence of masochistic humor lies in this, that the very law which forbids the satisfaction of a desire under threat of subsequent punishment is converted into one which demands the punishment first and then orders that the satisfaction of the desire should necessarily follow upon the punishment.[20]

If one applies the Deleuzian theory of 'the law' as a societal need for sincerity, rather than hypocrisy, then Manly is the 'righteous man [who] obeys the laws of the country [and] retains the freedom of thought, freedom to think of the Good and [acts for the sake of the Good'.[21] To illustrate, Manly continues to rail at Lord Plausible that

> speaking well of all Mankind, is the worst kind of Detraction, for it takes away the Reputation of the few good men in the World, by making all alike: now I speak ill of most men, because they deserve it; I that can do a rude thing, rather than an unjust thing.
>
> (1.1.pp.1-2)

Manly's refusal to speak 'well of all Mankind' out of artifice, and his desire to 'speak ill' reduces him to a figure of fun. As stated earlier, from the beginning of the play Manly is seen as a man who can only see the world in black and white. In his work on Restoration society, Ronald Bergman suggests that society had 'given up courtesy [and] morality in exchange for style, wit and pleasure' to the point that many circles saw it, as K.M Rogers puts forward, as so 'hypocritical that any moral person would

[20] Deleuze, pp. 88-89.
[21] Deleuze, p. 81.

have to condemn it'.[22] Indeed, that Manly 'can do a rude thing' reflects Ogden Birdsall's assertion that he can be seen as an 'extreme misanthropist [who is] completely and unreasonably intolerant' of societal hypocrisy. David Gelineau posits that 'the audience doesn't really [think] of Manly as [...] worthy of its admiration; he's not exactly evil, but rather [he is] preposterous', and it is in his pomposity and extreme hatred of hypocrisy that Manly is at his most humorous.[23]

Manly is unable to continue ostracising himself and remain sententious in a morally ambiguous society. To command that society must follow a law of sincerity implies that Manly must be exposed to the social pressure of immorality: particularly when he recognises Olivia's betrayal. Manly's desire to abide by a law of integrity is unsustainably illusory, or delusional. Alceste decides that he will 'De voir qu'avec le vice on garde des mesures; Et parfois il me prend des mouvements soudains De fuir dans un désert l'approche des humains' (1.1.142-144), but Manly's fantasy of a plain-dealing society keeps him within it, irrespective of pain and pleasure.[24] I would theorise that Manly's delusion of altering societal degeneration is comparable to the masochistic fantasy; his illusion is reminiscent of its formation– where he can direct situations and people – for his own pleasure and pain. Manly's hopeless illusory desire echoes Pinchwife's fantasy in *The Country Wife*, and as Antony Kaufman suggests Manly has 'created [...] a protective illusion' that attempts to sustain his reverence for sincerity.[25] Kaufman continues to suggest that Manly's idealisation

[22] Ronald Berman, 'Wycherley's Unheroic Society', *ELH*, 51 (1984), 465-478 (pp. 465-468); K.M. Rogers, 'Fatal Inconsistency: Wycherley and the Plain-Dealer', *ELH*, 28 (1961), 148-162 (p. 155).
[23] David Gelineau, 'Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 41 (2017), 29-58 (p. 31).
[24] To see that with vice one keeps measures; And sometimes sudden movements take hold of me to flee into a desert from the approach of humans [my translation].
[25] Ogden Birdsall, p.161; Antony Kaufman, 'Idealization, Disillusion, and Narcissistic Rage in Wycherley's "*The Plain Dealer*"', *Criticism*, 21 (1979) 119-133 (p. 122).

> enables [his] ego to deny feelings of […] emptiness that forces him to evade the necessity of recognizing and resolving the ambivalence which would be resolved if one were to face the actual world in a healthy and productive way.[26]

This blindness and isolation leads Manly to 'go where honest, downright Barbarity is profest; where men devour one another like generous hungry Lyons and Tygers' (1.1.p.12). As examined previously, Manly's words again reflect his illusory view that he is a pseudo-Hobbesian sovereign in 'a posture of War'.[27] He considers himself as the only man who can view the hypocrisy, or 'Barbarity' of society in a violent state of nature, devouring each other as 'hungry Lyons and Tygers'. Manly, by placing himself delusionally in a position of authoritative judgmental power, creates a social contract which negates Hobbes' view that if there is 'no common Power, [then] there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice', and therefore, no rules of right and wrong.[28]

Manly's plain-dealing fantasy extends to his desire for Olivia. In Act 1, we learn that Manly is in love with her – believing Olivia as misanthropic as him, Manly rapturously describes her as being

> […] so perfect a Beauty, that Art cou'd not better it, nor Affectation deform it; yet all this is nothing. […] She is all truth, and hates the lying, masking, daubing World, as I do; for which I love her.
>
> (1.1.p.12)

[26] Kaufman, p. 122.
[27] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Clarendon Press, 2012), II, p. 196.
[28] Hobbes, p. 196.

It is noteworthy that Manly refers to her as 'Art'– like Willmore's adulation of Angellica's portraits in *The Rover* – Manly fetishizes Olivia through her iconicity as his ideal masochistic torturer. Deleuze propounds that 'the object of the law and the object of desire are one and the same'; Olivia's 'Beauty' appears as the physical embodiment of his moralistic law and she is 'all truth'**.** Manly's misguidedly hyperbolic description of her sincerity marks his desire for her and highlights his belief that she will, ultimately, become his masochistic torturer.[29]

Manly's belief that he is the only righteous man in a world of hypocrisy can only exist when he forces himself into socio-isolation. Notably, Manly rails at Freeman that 'no man can be a great Enemy, but under the name of Friend' (1.1.p.12) to the only man who could claim to be his true friend. Manly's desire to be with Olivia implicitly illustrates that he has no wish to remain indefinitely isolated. One could theorise that Manly's absurdity, hyperbole, and belligerence mask what Deleuze proposes is a form of 'righteousness [that] leads to the masochist feeling 'guilty and […]the more strict [in their] obedience', which confirms the impossibility of abiding to the law of sincerity if he desires any form of masochistic contract.[30] Manly tacitly understands his love for Olivia will force him into the 'hypocrisy, knavery, cowardice' that he so fears, and ultimately, a masochistic fantasy that brings 'into play the very strictest application of the law', ending in 'the opposite of what might be expected'.[31]

We are introduced to Olivia in Act 2, lamenting the state of the world with her cousin Eliza which echoes Manly's discussion with Lord Plausible in Act 1. Olivia decries

[29] Deleuze, p. 85.
[30] Deleuze, p. 84.
[31] Kaufman, p. 126; Deleuze, p. 88.

Olivia: […] what a world 'tis we live in! I am so weary of it.

Eliza: Truly, Cousin, I can find no fault with it, but that we cannot always live in't; for I can never be weary of it.

Olivia: Oh hidious! you cannot be in earnest sure, when you say you like the filthy World.

Eliza: You cannot be in earnest sure, when you say you dislike it.

(2.1.p.13)

Ostensibly, Olivia's language is less argumentative than Manly's in Act 1 but it retains an aggressive tone, and again, deindividuates people to 'a world' which she is so 'weary of'. Olivia is a harsh caricature of Molière's parvenu Célimène: she is intentionally dissembling, hypocritical and flirtatious to navigate upper-class society, acknowledging that 'Puisque ma complaisance est sur tous épanchée; Et vous auriez plus lieu de vous en offenser' (2.1.498-499), but is candid about her need to adapt 'lorsque pour me voir ils font de doux efforts, Dois-je prendre un bâton pour les mettre dehors?' (2.1.463-464).[32] Olivia, in trying to conceal her hypocrisy, comes across as unbelievable, if not comical: her exclamation 'oh hideous' can be thought as a hyperbolic attempt at concealment that is confirmed by Eliza's parroting of Olivia. Whereas Manly attempts to resist hypocrisy – Olivia is incapable of being 'earnest' or openly sincere with her cousin.

Olivia's attempts at dissembling lead K.M. Rogers to suggest Olivia is both 'butt and villainess' within the play; however, Olivia acts in balanced dualism with Manly: his love, or masochistic fantasy, is created and dependent on the form and obligations

[32] Since my complacency is poured out on everyone; and you would have more reason to be offended by it [my translation]; When they make sweet efforts to see me, Should I take a stick to throw them out? [my translation].

of Olivia's contractual torture.[33] Manly's masochistic fantasy and obeisance of the law irrevocably changes upon his discovery of Olivia flirting with Lord Plausible and Novel in Act 2. With his belief in Olivia's sincerity and his masochistic fantasy destroyed, Manly accuses her of having

> fitted me, for believing you cou'd not be fickle, […] cou'd not dissemble Love, […] nor be in vain, […] nor break your promise, […] but I take not your contempt of me worse, than your esteem, or your civility, for these things.
>
> (2.1.p.23)

With Olivia's unmasking and the revelation of her abhorrence of Manly, he becomes 'tormented almost to madness […] by the intense inner conflict between his desire for Olivia and his hatred for everything she stands for', which effectively shatters his masochistic fantasy.[34] Accordingly, rather than suffering, as Sandra Sherman suggests, the 'singular humiliation of being fooled by a woman', his masochistic fantasy and the law that governs it is replaced by a new fantasy that is based on the pleasure and pain of revenge.[35]

In Act 4, scene 1, Manly devises with Fidelia a plan for him to sleep with Olivia in an act of revenge: his obsession with hypocrisy now becomes his fantasy. As Deleuze paradoxically theorises, the 'masochist is insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission [and] a logician of consequences […] and stands guilt on its head by making punishment into a condition that makes possible the forbidden pleasure'.[36]

---

[33] Rogers, p. 156.
[34] Ogden Birdsall, p. 167.
[35] Sandra Sherman, 'Manly, Manliness, and Friendship in "*The Plain Dealer*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 20 (1996) 18-30 (p. 25).
[36] Deleuze, p. 89.

Manly's punishment of Olivia will bring him the pleasure and pain of revenge 'upon her Honour, not her Life [...] Yes, so much she hates me, that it wou'd be a revenge sufficient, to make her accessary to my pleasure, and then let her know it (4.1.pp.61-62), which ultimately will become his own masochistic torture.

Rose Zimbardo argues that 'hypocrisy to hide [Manly's] deeper emotion becomes hypocrisy for its own sake'; nevertheless, hypocrisy has a purpose: Manly himself openly confesses 'my heart is too much in earnest to be fooled with, and my desire at height, and needs no delays to incite it' (4.1.p.48).[37] Effectively, Manly admits that he must experience the punishment of becoming a hypocrite to experience sexual pleasure: joining with, and submitting to '– a Whores, a Witches Love!' (4.1.p.50) is his contractual goal. Whilst Rogers advances that Manly is merely 'exploited by an evil woman', Manly has consciously made Olivia a torturer in his original fantasy of sincerity.[38] As a result of its failure, Manly seeks a different masochistic contract, one that Deleuze considers as 'the ideal form of the love-relationship' that is based on hypocrisy.[39] Deleuze's theory is perhaps overly inconsistent: the very nature of torture suggests that there can be little or no love – and, specifically, Manly and Olivia's relationship is far from ideal. Masochistic torture is inherently marked by cruelty and pain, desire and pleasure but this is based on contractual devotion rather than unbridled, tender and constant romance. Rather than the language of love, or actions, Derek Hughes suggests theirs is one of 'brute appetite' and 'savagery', and it is in their aggressive speech that Olivia provides an 'authentic experience' which binds both her

[37] Rose Zimbardo, 'The Satiric Design in *The Plain Dealer*', *Studies in English Literature, 1600-1900*, 1 (1963) 1-18 (p. 14).
[38] Rogers, p. 153.
[39] Deleuze, p. 75

and Manly into the masochistic contract where he will 'dispise, contemn, hate, loath, and detest [her] most faithfully' (2.1.p.26).[40]

In view of this, Jennifer Airey suggests that Manly's plan to sleep with Olivia 'undermines the distinction between desire and resistance; if all desires must be concealed and rejected then all resistance may be read, problematically, as a sign of desire'.[41] It is the culmination of Olivia's sexual desire and an 'expression of otherwise forbidden sexual impulses' that only Manly can provide in the culmination of his masochistic contract.[42] Under the cover of 'kind darkness' (5.1,p.80), Olivia states that she is freed from 'scandal and bashfulness' (5.3.p.80) that will allow Manly to sleep with her out of vengeance, leaving her shocked to be '– embracing him! [...] what means this? O'tis too sure, as well as my shame! – which I'll go hide forever.' (5.3.p.81). Manly's sleeping with Olivia concludes their contract. He has undergone the punishment that he had 'commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid'.[43] Hughes suggests, Manly remains as 'a force of virile energy [by] forcibly gaining restitution that the law denies'.[44]

At the denouement, Manly returns to seeking a new masochistic contract based on plain-dealing and sincerity. Unlike Alceste's retreat alone out of hubris and misanthropy, Manly tries desperately to remain a part of society – his exposure of Olivia satiates and vindicates his belief that society is ruled by hypocrisy and insincerity. However, Manly's masochistic need for pleasure and pain endures, and crucially, when Fidelia unmasks herself as a woman, Manly recognises her loyalty and

---

[40] Derek Hughes, '*The Plain-Dealer*, A Reappraisal', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 43 (1982) 315-336 (p. 321); Jennifer Airey, '"For fear of learning new Language": Antitheatricalism and the Female Spectator in "*The Country Wife*" and "*The Plain Dealer*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 31 (2007) 1-19 (p. 9).
[41] Airey, p. 13.
[42] Airey, p. 9.
[43] Deleuze, p. 88.
[44] Hughes, *The Plain-Dealer*, p. 335.

dedication to him throughout the play. She has seen his masochistic desire, failed contract and revenge without turning away from him. Manly understands that she will freely become his torturer, and he peaceably asks her, 'if thou art a *Plain-dealer* too, give me thy hand [...] *I will believe there are now in the World / Good-natur'd friends, who are not Prostitutes*' (5.1.83).

As previously stated above, Wycherley includes a parodic subplot that is not included in *Le Misanthrope* which depicts Widow Blackacre as Manly's comedic foil, but she is, I would suggest, the more plain dealing character within the play. The Widow is portrayed as a woman whose pedantic, excessive, and overbearing litigiousness is her attempt to remain the domineering masochistic torturer in widowhood. As we have seen, Manly creates and follows moralistic laws that reflect either his misanthropic or vengeful masochistic fantasies and are enshrined according to his emotional desires; whereas Widow Blackacre creates, follows and breaks laws to do whatever is necessary to retain her sexual independence and is far from hypocritical in her actions in the creation of her own masochistic desires.

Wycherley intriguingly continues the play's topsy-turvy nature, and disregards the stereotypical societal and theatrical dismissal of widows as belittled – mere cast-offs, or nymphomaniacs; instead, he presents the Widow as humorously aggressive to disguise an implicit challenge to patriarchal control.[45] As Helen Burke suggests, the play can be seen as an 'articulation of broader economic and sociosexual discourses' within the period, and the Widow's tenuous reliance on the law reflects the 'contemporary patriarchal nightmare' that male playwrights had often sought to

[45] Notable plays in the seventeenth-century that depict stereotyped widows are Thomas Middleton's *The Widow* (1616), Thomas Betterton's *The Amorous Widow* (*c.*1670) and Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress* (1677).

denigrate.[46] Indeed, her actions illuminate Deleuze's theory that female torturers 'typically figure as an object in the patriarchal system' and that the masochistic contract 'reverses [the] state of affairs by making the woman into the party with whom the contract is entered into', and ultimately, the Widow's place within patriarchal society and her reliance on the law allows her retention of her sexual liberation.[47] This contradicts Deleuze's theory that only a man can instigate a masochistic contract: the Widow illustrates that widows are in a unique, independent position to create and control their own fantasies and masochistic contract.[48]

Hughes suggests 'Manly's vengefulness and the Widow's litigiousness are complementary manifestations of the same impulse', and indeed, when we first meet the Widow in Act 1, she is attempting to force Manly to go to court with her to be a witness.[49] They comedically talk over each other, both attempting to discuss their own masochistic contracts: Manly asks about Olivia, yet the Widow is insistent about

Widow: My Suit [...]

Manly: Dam your Suit, how dos your Cousin *Olivia*?

Widow: My Suit, I say, had been quite lost; but now –

Manly: But now, where is *Olivia*? In Town? For –

Widow: For-to morrow we are to have a Hearing

Manly: Wou'd you'd let me have a Hearing to day.

Widow: But why won't you hear me?

(1.1.p.9)

[46] Helen Burke, '"Law-suits," "Love-suits," and the Family Property in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*', in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, ed. by Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne (The University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 89-113 (pp. 95-96).
[47] Deleuze, p. 92.
[48] The characterisation of an emancipated widow is also featured in Thomas Shadwell's *A True Widow* (1679), and in the character of Berinthia in John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696).
[49] Hughes, *The Plain-Dealer*, p. 326.

This conversation highlights the patriarchal attitudes towards widows – she demands 'why' she cannot be listened to, but interestingly, they both attempt to finish and repeat each other's sentences which mirror their masochistic desires. Their badinage reflects the Deleuzian 'acceleration of [masochistic contractual] clauses', but in contrast to his suggestion that the contract reverses the 'status of man and woman', here the Widow exhibits that she can compete to create her own masochistic fantasy.[50]

Subsequently, her commitment to her masochistic desire is emphasised within Act 3. Wycherley depicts the Widow at her most humorously litigious in the courts where she is fighting fiercely against Freeman's devious attempts to marry her for her money. Ultimately, the Widow's attempt at legal recourse would enable her to keep control of her financial jointure and, therefore, her sexual independence. Kaufman argues that the Widow's litigiousness represents her resentment towards 'her limited role as a woman [that is both] confining and degrading'; I would posit that she uses the law to refuse to submit to masculine control, and to define her own desire for a masochistic contract.[51] It is noticeable that she demands of her lawyers that they 'shall hear [and] shall be instructed' (3.1.p.36) and when she is rebuffed for her attempts, she decries that she is 'no common Woman; but a Woman conversant in the Laws of the Land, as well as yourself' (3.1.p.36) in an echo of Manly's righteousness.

Wycherley does not depict her as completely emancipated; instead, she is comically bombarded by the attempts of Freeman and Oldfox to control her, and to submit to their own masochistic desires. As Donaldson argues, 'the legal scenes [are based on] the code of law' – which indicates that she is not immune to socio-

[50] Deleuze, p. 92.
[51] Kaufman, p. 129.

patriarchal control.[52] The Widow's claim there 'is a saying; '*Take hold of a Maid by her Smock, and a Widow by her writings, and they cannot get from you.*' But I'll play fast and loose with you yet, if there be a Law' (3.1.p.42), highlights how easy it is for a widow to lose '*her writings*' by being forced into remarriage and the loss of her independence to remain decorous within society. Freeman remains obsessed with her becoming part of his fantasy. He is willing to be the 'first Man that ever began a love Intrigue, in *Westminster-Hall*' (3.1.p.42), and in stealing her legal papers, he forces her into his masochistic, and indeed, patriarchal control: as her son Jerry suggests, she is like 'a Bitch when she has lost her Puppies' (3.1.p.41).

Despite this, the Widow displays a belligerency like Manly's descent into hypocrisy, yet she chooses to fight against her submission. Rather than Manly's swift decision for revenge over Olivia, which is excessive, the Widow's, whilst also unbridled, ultimately fails in completely achieving the realisation of her masochistic fantasy. In Act 4, she declares that her son, Jerry 'wert not born in wedlock' (4.1.p.55) in an act of self-ruination, She does so, as Zimbardo suggests 'to protect her jointure and her life in courts', and with this, the Widow returns to the position of an unmarried woman.[53] When the Widow calls herself a prostitute, she opens herself up to men being able to force her into a masochistic contract. In his attempt to verbally assault the Widow, Oldfox has her gagged, telling her 'here is an Epigram [...] upon a cruel Lady; who Decreed her Servant shou'd hang himself, to demonstrate his Passion' (4.1.p.53) and although she is rescued by Freeman, Oldfox's sentiment is that her 'cruelty' is there for his pleasure.

Nevertheless, Wycherley does not completely leave the Widow in a position of submission. He returns to his inverted world in Act 5: to prove she is a whore, the

[52] Donaldson, p. 316.
[53] Zimbardo, p. 8.

widow is imprisoned for committing fraud, and Freeman again rescues her with the ultimatum that she has 'no other way to release [herself], but by the Bonds of Matrimony' (5.1.p.79). Thus, leaving the Widow decrying that she 'wou'd rather be deprived of life' (5.1.p.79); however, intriguingly, at the denouement of the subplot Wycherley allows her to remain unmarried and able to continue making her own masochistic laws. In discussion with Freeman, she boldly suggests that

> Widow: a settlement without a Consideration is void in the Law: you must do something for't.
>
> Freeman: Pr'ythee then let the Settlement on me be call'd Alimony: and the Consideration our Separation [...]
>
> Widow: [...] well, a Widow, I see, is a kind of *sine cure*, by custom of which the unconscionable incumbent enjoyes the profits, without any duty, but does that still elsewhere.
>
> (5.1.pp.79-80)

We are left viewing the Widow and Manly having renegotiated their masochistic contractual obligations and created a new form of masochistic contract and law. This is perhaps not the result that either had expected, but both have embraced their contracts and satisfied their desires. This desire and the formation of new masochistic contracts presents us with a conceptual inconstancy that is as capricious as Wycherley's genre in *The Plain-Dealer* – but as will be seen in *Sir Patient Fancy*, there is an oscillatory nature to the creation of masochistic laws.

Morbid Melancholy and Girl Power in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*

My study continues by applying Deleuze's Masochean contractual theory to illuminate and enrich the understanding of the sexual desires, relationships and psychological interplay between male and female characters in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678). Critical analysis of Behn's play suffers from a similar lack of research as *The Plain-Dealer* and previous studies have predominantly focused on investigating Behn's source material.[54] Throughout my examination, I will establish how Behn depicts hypochondria and its associated sexual anxiety as a means of controlling and maintaining the Deleuzian masochistic contract**.** This focus on a mental state shows how the masculine desire for a pleasure-pain relationship is controlled and interacts with the assertive personalities of Deleuze's three women of Masoch. Interwoven throughout this section will be a close analysis of how Behn alters her primary sources for *Sir Patient Fancy*. Although she has potentially borrowed from four of Molière's comedies: *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673), *Les Femmes savantes* (1672), *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) and *L'Amour médecin* (1665), my study will centre on how Behn's confirmed adaptation of *Le Malade imaginaire* and assumed borrowing from *Les Femmes savantes* augments her female characters' intelligence, freedom, and assumption of masochistic control.

[54] Prominent discussions on Behn's source material include: Claire Bowditch and Elaine Hobby, 'Aphra Behn's Adaptations: Paper and Stage Sources for *The Rover* (1677) and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678)', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 85 (2022), 131-150; Line Cottegnies, 'Aphra Behn's French Translations', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 221-234; Suzanne Jones, 'Early Modern English Translations of Molière', in *Molière in Context,* ed. by. Jan Clarke (Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 265-272; Claire Bowditch, 'Textual Materiality and Contemporary Literary Borrowings in the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis Comedies of Aphra Behn, 1678-1681' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Loughborough University, 2015) in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global < https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2322015066/B90638F02F674E43PQ/2?accountid=8630&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses> [Accessed 4 February 2025].

The critical indecision towards the genre of *The Plain-Dealer* can be, in part, levelled similarly at Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678). Robert D. Hume suggests that it is 'lighter [in] tone than any [of her] previous comedies' and that 'Mrs Behn is a la mode: the play is a low London comedy of cuckoldry – vigorous, farcical and dirty'.[55] Yet, in similarity to Wycherley's ambiguous, often perplexing and dissembling prologue, Behn admits to 'The Reader' that she is defending the play against the 'most unjust and silly aspersion' that the play '*was Baudy*' (preface. Sig. A1r).[56] Behn's play was produced during a time when the London playhouses began to tire of depictions of sexual excess, and her preface positions the play as moralistic – offering 'nothing that the most innocent Virgins can have cause to blush at' (preface. sig. A1r). Despite Behn's claims of decency, Robert D. Hume has suggested that *Sir Patient Fancy* 'did not flourish' in the theatre; however, the publishing of the Sir Patient Fancy highlights the divergence between a possible theatrical failure and print success which underscores the differing economies of the stage and publication.[57] The dramatist could secure profitability in print through the play's literary merit, political resonance, and their authorial reputation, even when it faltered in performance.[58] Hume offers is no specific explanation for the play's apparent failure, apart from Behn's hint of its 'Misfortune' (preface. sig. A2v) in the play's preface. Inevitably, Behn suffered criticism from her male critics: directing their ire towards her boldness and indecency in writing bawdily, to which Behn responded by questioning why it was 'the least and

[55] Hume, p. 328; Hume, p. 284.
[56] *The London Stage* lists the play as being performed on 17th January 1678, but notes that there is no 'certainty that this is the first performance, but a licensing date of 28 Jan. 1677/8 and Mrs Behn's statement in the Preface that she hurried the play into print suggest a premiere not far from this date Edition of 1678', *The London Stage*, pp. 266-267; Hume, p.328; Hume, p.284; Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy: A Comedy* (Richard Tonson and Jacob Tonson, 1678), [Hereafter, the text will be cited as *Sir Patient*].
[57] Hume, p. 329; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *The Publication of Plays in London 1660–1800* (The British Library, 2015), p. 48.
[58] Milhous and Hume, p. 48.

most Excusable fault in Men writers [...] *but from a Woman it was unnaturall*' (preface. sig. A1r.). Indeed, she humorously rebukes her critics by doubting their sexual prowess as 'Lovers by long absence, or those whom Age or Ugliness have rendered a little distant from those things they would fain imagin here –' (preface. sig. A1r.).

As I discussed in my examination of *The Plain-Dealer*, Molière had become a significant influence on Restoration comedy during the early 1670s but Behn appears to have 'been slow in coming to the French dramatist' in 1678.[59] The bawdy farce of *Sir Patient Fancy* evidences that she cannot have been unaware, as Suzanne Jones asserts, that English playwrights were influenced by Molière's 'experimentation', 'innovation' and ability to respond 'to convention' by the number of adaptations and translations on the London stage.[60] The accusation that she had plagiarised was seen as the play's biggest fault by her critics, and a close analysis of the play does reveal similarities to *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and *L'Amour médecin*, but I would suggest these are not as extensive to constitute an adaptation such as John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady; or, the Farrier Made Physician* (1672) or Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* (1673). Gerard Langbaine would accuse Behn of having 'borrw'd very much, not only from her own Country Men, but likewise from the French Poets'. In addition, Langbaine suggests that *Sir Patient* had a 'Hint' of *Le Malade*.[61] Nevertheless, critical condemnation of Behn's considerable reliance on Molière's source material is disingenuous but far-reaching – Behn had to admit to having a 'very bare hint from one [of Molière's plays],

[59] Todd, p. 231.
[60] Suzanne Jones, 'French Imports: English Translations of Molière, 1663-1732' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2016) in Oxford University Research Archive < https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8d86ee12-54ab-48b3-9c47-e946e1c7851f> [Accessed 4 February 2025] p.9.
[61] Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (George West and Henry Clements, 1691), p. 17; Langbaine, p. 21.

the *Malad Imagenere*' (preface. sig. A2v) and confronted her critics' charges that she had copied 'at least four *French* Plays' (preface. sigs. A1r-A2v).[62]

The extent of Behn's sources is critically elusive. As we have seen, contemporaneous critics accused her of plagiarising four French plays – to which she cleverly responded by suggesting 'how much of the *French* is in this, I leave to those who do indeed understand it and have seen it at Court' (preface. sig. A2v). Behn herself states that *Le Malade* was given to her 'translated by a Gentleman infinitely to advantage' (prol) and Todd surmises that it could have been Edward Ravenscroft, or the translator of *Tartuffe* – Matthew Medbourne – who supplied the translation of *Sir Patient Fancy*.[63] Claire Bowditch and Elaine Hobby's recent study of the stage sources for *Sir Patient Fancy* uncovered an unpublished translation of *Le Malade*, entitled *La Mallad*, by James Wright.[64] Bowditch and Hobby's work shows that Wright had translated Molière's play 'with some latitude of expression but with strict adherence to the original sense', and whilst this may be true, Wright has taken some liberties with the adaptation by altering Molière's plot sequence and altered certain characterisations.[65] Although Behn is 'curator, director, and author' who used multiple sources in *Sir Patient*, I would suggest that her characterisations can only be examined in relation to Molière's source material.[66]

Sir Patient Fancy presents us with two interwoven plot lines – all revolving around the titular Sir Patient, his daughter Isabella, nephew Leander and his beautiful

---

[62] Hereafter, the text will be cited as *Le Malade*.
[63] Plays such as Richard Brome's *The Damoiselle* (1653) and Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1606) are also considered as plot and character sources; Todd, p. 231.
[64] Claire Bowditch and Elaine Hobby, 'Aphra Behn's Adaptations: Paper and Stage Sources for *The Rover* (1677) and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678)', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 85 (2022) 131-150 (p. 140). Bowditch and Hobby, p. 140; Washington DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, *La Mallad* [manuscript] V.b.220; I would like to take this opportunity to thank Claire Bowditch for her help in accessing this manuscript.
[65] Bowditch and Hobby, p. 141; This study will continue to refer to Molière's original texts with page numbers, and refer to James Wright's translation, when necessary, with folio number.
[66] Bowditch and Hobby, p. 142.

second wife, Lady Fancy. The first plot follows Sir Patient and his farcical relationship with his wife who feigns love for him, but takes every opportunity to meet with her lover, Charles Wittmore. We discover that she married Sir Patient solely in the hope that he will die soon and bequeath her his fortune, ultimately giving her the freedom to marry Wittmore. Isabella has fallen in love with the neighbour's son, Lodwick; however, when Sir Patient accidentally discovers his wife with Wittmore, Lady Fancy pretends that Wittmore is Isabella's suitor called Fainlove. Sir Patient takes a liking to him and thinks Fainlove and Isabella should marry without delay.

Entwined with this, we follow Sir Patient's widowed neighbour, Lady Knowell, her son, Lodwick, and her plans to marry her daughter Lucretia to the idiotic Sir Credulous Easy. Lady Knowell enjoys antagonising Sir Patient with her vivaciousness and criticism of his morose hypochondria. On a visit to Sir Patient, she enrages him with her talking and laughter, making him resolve to leave for the countryside. So that she can continue her affair with Wittmore, Lady Fancy convinces Sir Patient that he is sick and must remain at home in London. Lady Knowell sees that Lucretia loves Leander and pretends to flirt with him to test his fidelity, much to the horror of her family and Sir Patient.

In a bawdy case of bed-hopping and mistaken identities between the characters, Sir Patient is led to believe that Isabella has been illicitly fornicating with Lodwick – bringing dishonour and annulling her betrothal to Fainlove/Wittmore. In a farcical scene, Sir Patient rushes to his bedroom and collapses on the bed believing he is ill, not knowing that Lady Fancy and Wittmore are in the same room and must escape it without discovery. Although his doctors comedically attempt to diagnose Sir Patient unsuccessfully, Lady Knowell admits to Leander that she was feigning her love for him and allows him to marry Lucretia, and Isabella slips away to marry Lodwick.

Leander is sceptical of Lady Fancy's true intentions and persuades Sir Patient to feign death to test her. She scarcely mourns him before searching for his money and readies Wittmore for a life of passion; Sir Patient wakes up having heard everything. He agrees to divorce her and gives her money so that she can live with Wittmore in happiness; Isabella is forgiven her dishonour, and his moroseness abruptly transforms into vivacity.

Alongside Behn's plot, it is important to understand the plot of *Le Malade* to recognise what Behn 'repeats from a source verbatim, what is taken but remade, and what is discarded' in her adaptation.[67] The plot of *Le Malade* follows Argan's obsessional health fixation and his determination to marry his daughter, Angélique, to his doctor's son, Thomas Diafoirus. The play begins with Argan having a hypochondriacal frenzy whilst his maid, Toinette, tells him to stop being foolish. Ultimately, he is only calmed by his scheming wife, Béline, who keeps telling him that he is sick. He demands that Angélique marry Thomas, she refuses and confides in Toinette that she has fallen in love with Cléante. In a pique of rage, Argan calls for his notary so he can cut her out of his will and give all his money to Béline – which was her goal when she married him. Over the course of the play, Argan is told repeatedly by both Toinette and his brother Béralde that he is not ill, and that his myriads of doctors are all frauds. Toinette disguises herself as a doctor to prove a point, and then Béralde tells Argan of Béline's trickery and they plan for him to play dead to prove her dishonesty. When she sees the dead Argan, Béline rejoices and plans to get his money – only to be shocked and embarrassed when he wakes. Argan plays the trick on Angélique to test her faithfulness, and he is surprised by her devastation. He wakes again and allows her to marry Cléante, on the condition that he become a doctor.

[67] Bowditch and Hobby, p. 150.

Behn has retained the main relationships in her plot between the characters from Molière's original: Sir Patient/ Argan married to Lady Fancy/ Béline and his elder daughter Isabella/Angélique. Whilst Bowditch and Hobby suggest that Behn captures 'several of the paradoxes and complexities' from Molière, and John Wilcox argues that Behn's play was different 'because she has put an entirely different sort of flesh and blood on those bones' – there are limitations to her differences.[68] Instead, she repositions and alters Molière's characteristics in an innovative experimentation in adaptation: creating a farce that is built around women's expectancy of freedom, companionship and creditable humour.

Waiting, delay and anticipation are key conceits within the play; for example, Lady Fancy must wait until Sir Patient leaves or dies to be with Wittmore, Isabella bides her time until she can marry Lodwick and Sir Patient endlessly anticipates being cured. Nevertheless, it is Sir Patient's hypochondriacal mania, obsessional personality, and a search for a cure for his maladies that are the comic foundation of the play.[69] Unlike Argan's neurotic listing of his treatments in Act 1, scene 1 in *Le Malade*, Behn intriguingly builds a picture of Sir Patient and his fixations – without introducing him until Act 2 – deftly mirroring and heightening the sense of anticipation within the play's structure. During Act 1, Lodwick tells Leander that Sir Patient is 'Mad enough already' and 'fit [...] for Bedlam' (1.1.p.13), to which Lodwick vexatiously retorts that 'between his [Sir Patient's] continual imaginary sickness, and perpetual Physick, a

[68] Bowditch and Hobby, p. 142; John Wilcox, *The Relation of Molière to Restoration Comedy* (Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 147.
[69] The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that use of the noun 'Hypochondria' to describe a mental condition 'characterised by the persistent and unwarranted belief or fear that one has a serious illness, typically accompanied by over-interpretation of physiological changes or minor symptoms as indications of such an illness and by some degree of depression or anxiety' was not used until the twentieth century. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, during the seventeenth century, hypochondria was defined as a 'form of melancholia characterized by the (supposed) generation of black bile and vapours in the hypochondria, as the sites of the liver and spleen' or a 'a disorder characterized by low spirits and complaints of physical symptoms', 'Hypochondria', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].

man might take more Pleasure in an Hospital' (1.1.p.13). Indeed, at the beginning of Act 2, Lady Fancy voices her displeasure by describing him as plaguing her

> With his company, he's so fond of me, he scarce gives me time [...] he waits on me from room to room, hands me in the Garden, shoulders me in the Belcony, nay, does the office of my women, dresses and undresses me, and does so smirk at his handy-work.
>
> (2.1.p.14)

Her description suggests Sir Patient is a dominating and overly libidinous nuisance that she tries to avoid, Behn contradicts this knowledge upon his entrance by visually depicting him as being dressed '*in a Night-gown*', waking up, and with no sexual undertones. His state of undress exposes his vulnerability and is a visual representation of his emasculation; rather than acknowledging Lady Fancy's obvious cuckoldry with Wittmore, he is consumed by the 'Twelve Purges for this present *January,* –– as I take it, good Mr. Doctor, I took but Ten in all *December*. –– by this rule I am sicker this Month than I was the last ––' (2.1.p.16). His health anxiety blinds him to Lady Fancy 'entertaining a lewd fellow of the Town' (2.1.p.16) and his ignorance reflects what Deleuze suggests is the masochist needing 'to believe that he is dreaming, even when he is not'.[70] In similarity to Manly's delusion in *The Plain-Dealer*, Sir Patient's hypochondria acts as a delusional mask: his increasing anxiety is a camouflage – an illusion in which he attempts to alter and retain his masochistic contract with Lady Fancy. Sir Patient's health and Lady Fancy's pandering towards

[70] Deleuze, p. 72.

him ultimately cloud his belief that the masochistic contract remains binding, even when outwardly, Lady Fancy's behaviour suggests that the contract has concluded.

Sir Patient's longing for Lady Fancy's cosseting and his hypochondriacal obsession with 'being sicker' reflects, to a certain extent, Deleuze's argument that the masochist's personality is overwhelmed by

> the whip or the sword that never strikes, the fur that never discloses the flesh, the heel that is forever descending on the victim, are the expression, beyond all movement, of a profound state of waiting closer to the sources of life and death.[71]

Lady Fancy's reluctance to sleep with Sir Patient can be taken as the 'fur that never discloses the flesh' but his obsessional behaviour suggests that we cannot take Deleuze's theory in its strictest sense – that of a torturer solely providing pleasure and pain. Sir Patient's anxiety is paradoxical: his health is the reason which keeps Lady Fancy's tortuous 'whip or sword' from striking, repeatedly claiming that 'Affliction will come' (2.1.p.19) and that he is 'very sick, alas, [and] have not long to dwell amongst the Wicked' (2.1.p.19), therefore creating his own personal pleasure-pain fantasy which alienates his torturer. This is his own 'masochistic art of fantasy': his hypochondria acts to keep Lady Fancy contractually bound as his torturer – as she herself states to Wittmore, 'doubt not my power over Sir *Patient*' (2.1.p.16).[72]

Sir Patient's incongruous desire for both Lady Fancy and ill health reflects and augments the pleasure-pain relationship between Molière's Argan and Béline. Molière portrays Béline as mawkish and cosseting of Argan, and in a scene that bears some

[71] Deleuze, p. 70.
[72] Deleuze, p. 72.

correlation between both plays, we can see the convergence and divergence in both playwrights' characterisations. In *Le Malade*, Béline orders Argan to

> Béline: *Levez-vous, que je mette cecy [un oreiller] sous vous… Mettons celuy-cy pour vous appuyer, et celuy-là de l'autre costé. Mettons celuy-cy derriere vôtre dos, et cét autre-là pour soûtenir vostre teste.*
>
> Argan: *[…] il faudra plus de huit Medecines, et de douze Lavemens, pour reparer tout cecy.*
>
> Béline: *La, la, mon petit Amy, appaisez-vous un peu.*
>
> Argan: *Ma Mie, vous estes toute ma consolation.*
>
> Béline : *Pauvre petit Fils.*
>
> (1.6.p.33-34)[73]

In this conversation, there is a sense of cruelty in Béline's kindness: the visual depiction of the masochistic contract between them is based on her implicit

[73] Béline: Sit up, let me put this [pillow] under you. Let's put another one to support you, and another on the other side. Let's put this one behind your back, and this one to support your head.
Argan: […] it will take more than eight medicines, and twelve enemas to cure all this.
Béline: There, there, my little boy, calm down a little.
Argan: My dear, you console me.
Béline: Poor boy [my translation]; Molière, *Le Malade imagainaire* (Chez Daniel Elzevir, 1674), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS fonds français RF 3586. The analysis of Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* in this chapter is drawn from a manuscript text, whilst my reading of *Le Misanthrope* is from a twenty-first century printed text. Physical manuscripts and printed texts coexist in a complex relationship: scribal manuscripts submitted for publishing potentially allowed playwrights to control their work; however, we are unable to determine the relationship between manuscript and published text if an original submission is not extant, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *The Publication of Plays in London 1660–1800* (The British Library, 2015), pp. 47-48. Analysis of a manuscript can offer insights into the intent, staging practices and the performative nature of Molière's work, whilst printed texts emphasises issues of public dissemination, editorial intervention, and the commercial or political forces that had the potential to shape a text's reception, Suzanne Jones, 'Printing Stage: Relationships between performance, print, and translation in early English editions of Molière', *Early Modern French Studies*, 40 (2018), 146-165 (p. 164).

exacerbation of Argan's hypochondria and giving him the pleasure of being babied in a curious mother-son dynamic.[74]

Behn offers Sir Patient no such indulgent behaviour from Lady Fancy; for example, when she exclaims

> Lady Fancy: Sick! oh heavens forbid –– how does my dearest Love?
>
> Sir Patient: [...] –– mercy upon me –– (*falls back*) I'me lost, I'm gone! [...] Oh, oh, –– I'me a dead man, have me to bed, I die away, undress me instantly, send for my Physicians, I'me Poyson'd,[...]
>
> Wittmore: [...] how finely thou hast brought him to his journies end!
>
> Lady Fancy: There was no other way but this to have secur'd my happiness with thee.
>
> (2.2.p.27-29)

Lady Fancy makes no attempt to console Sir Patient in this farcical scene: her desire to form a masochistic contract with Wittmore has driven her to play abusively on Sir Patient's health anxiety. There is no kindness in Lady Fancy's reaction – her exclamation of 'heavens forbid', and sycophantic calling Sir Patient 'dearest Love' belies her exasperated weariness at having to pander to him at the expense of her own freedom. Her claim that 'There was no other way' to pacify Sir Patient suggests a sense of conscious cruelty towards him that both places her within his masochistic fantasy, his 'journies end', and allows her to take control of the contract, in her favour and without his knowledge.

[74] In manuscript RF 3586 the translation is: grandmother and grandson [my translation].

As we shall see, Sir Patient's imagination is at the core of his characterisation and his masochistic desire. Character names throughout Restoration drama often reflected character traits, and in Behn's play the name of Sir Patient Fancy is no different. Behn transcribed Molière's French '*malade'* into the English 'patient' and '*imaginaire'* became 'fancy'. However, during the seventeenth century, 'fancy' was also seen as a form of 'melancholy' or being morose.[75] As previously mentioned, hypochondria is a twentieth-century psychological term, but Robert Burton wrote extensively on his views of melancholic patients in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). He viewed melancholy as a 'continuall Madnesse or Dotage, which hath an acute feaver annexed' coming from an 'inflamation of the Braine'.[76] Indeed, it is notable that Sir Patient claims 'my Bowels burn, I have within an *Ætna*, my Brains run round' (2.1.29) when he first believes he is sick.

Thomas Hobbes wrote on the dangers of fancy, suggesting that it 'is caused by difference of mens passions' and the morose man views 'love and dislike' as 'one thing, some another; and therefore some men's thoughts run one way, some another; and are held to, [...] the things that passe through their imagination', but ultimately 'a great Fancy is one kind of Madnesse'.[77] Hobbes reiterates that this 'subjects a man to causelesse fears; which is Madnesse commonly called MELANCHOLY'.[78] As a result, Sir Patient's fancy – that of hypochondria – is a form of melancholic madness which helps retain his masochistic contract with Lady Fancy. The Deleuzian theory that the 'masochist is morose: but his moroseness should be related to the experience of waiting and delay' reveals how Sir Patient's hypochondria and his endless search for

[75] Hobbes, pp. 26-48.
[76] *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was a popular medical treatise during the seventeenth century, going through six republications, the final being in 1651; Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, 3 vols (Oxford University Press, 1989), I, p. 132.
[77] Hobbes, pp. 104-106.
[78] Hobbes, p. 112.

cure-alls correlate with his fanciful wait for Lady Fancy to carry out her masochistic contractual duties.[79] Indeed, Lady Knowell sums up Sir Patient's sickness as 'nothing but imagination' (3.1.p.31) in a truthful indictment of his moroseness and the steadfastness of his marriage.

In comparison to Sir Patient, Behn's female characters, such as Lady Fancy and Lady Knowell, are portrayed as intellectually and emotionally shrewd, and like Widow Blackacre in *The Plain-Dealer,* they are willing to create their own masochistic contracts. Nevertheless, Behn implicitly disguises their desires within her continued critique of marriage and male hypocrisy. Behn portrays women's claustrophobic imprisonment within socio-moralistic rules to depict them as sharing the masochist's state of waiting. Robert Markley suggests that 'the object of female desire must be a man of whom parents and guardians disapprove; defying their wishes becomes the only way for heroines to articulate the principle that women must be free to choose their husbands and reject old, ugly, foolish [...] suitors', yet it takes the length of the play to arrive at this position for its heroines.[80] Janet Todd argues that *Sir Patient Fancy* was Behn's first play where she 'attempted to include women in the libertine space' but only 'the wisest' of her female characters in subsequent plays would see that the ability to enjoy sexual freedom could only be 'a fantasy space'.[81]

Hughes' analysis of the characterisation of Lady Fancy suggests that she is 'based, to be sure, on a scheming, manipulative wife in Molière's [play] but given a dignity and attractiveness lacking in the original'; the knowledge that she is waiting to complete her contract with Wittmore is, to a greater extent, substantially more

[79] Deleuze, p. 71.
[80] Robert Markley, 'Behn and the unstable traditions of social comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 98-117 (p. 105).
[81] Todd, p. 233.

manipulative and less decorous than Béline's actions.[82] Behn sets Act 4, scene 4 in Lady Fancy's bedroom, where she is '*discovered with* Wittmore *in disorder*' (4.4.p.63). Behn does not elucidate whether it is Lady Fancy's clothing, bed or both that is in disarray, but it creates a dramatic irony: the audience would be aware of the sexual undertones of the staging. Nevertheless, Sir Patient comically remains oblivious to the chaos in full view. Lady Fancy humorously attempts to distract Sir Patient by mimicking his hypochondria: her duplicity hides any suspicion of her wrongdoing and deviously reminds Sir Patient that their masochistic contract tenuously still exists. Sir Patient commands her to

> Sir Patient: Come hither [...] my little Apes face, –– come –– come I say ––– what must I come fetch you? –– Catch her, catch her, catch her, ––– catch her, catch her, catch her.
>
> Lady Fancy: Oh Sir I am so ill I can hardly stir.
>
> Sir Patient: I'le make ye well, come hither, ye Monky face, did it, did it, did it? alas for it, a poor silly fool's face, dive it a blow and I'le beat it.
>
> Lady Fancy: You neglect your Devotion, Sir.
>
> (4.4.p.65)

Behn's play on the phrase 'Apes face' is both a term of endearment and a reflection of Lady Fancy's aping Sir Patient's hypochondria which suggests her acting according to his contractual wishes. Her becoming 'so ill' implicitly underlines her desire to leave Sir Patient's fantasy – reminding him that he neglects his 'Devotion' of being sick so that she can contract with Wittmore. It is notable here that Sir Patient's repetition of

[82] Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 36.

'catch her' and 'did it' sounds childlike towards Lady Fancy, echoing Béline's cosseting speech and treatment of Argan.

Lady Fancy's power comes from her desire to escape her marriage, but Lady Knowell's, like that of Widow Blackacre, comes from her position of widowhood. Her Molièrian counterpart does not occur within *Le Malade* and it has been suggested that Behn borrowed Lady Knowell's character arc from Molière's earlier play, *Les Femmes savantes*.[83] The play follows sisters Armande and Henriette and their differing views of marriage. Armande is an intellectual who believes marriage is a worthless prison sentence and all Henriette wants to be is a wife. The play focuses on the trials and tribulations of Henriette's love for Clitandre and her attempts to avoid an arranged marriage to Trissiton. Crucially for this thesis, Molière includes the characterisation of a femme-fatale aunt, Bélise, who comically believes that Henriette's paramour Clitandre is in love with her.

Behn's characterisation of Lady Knowell and her similarity to Bélise stimulates substantial critical disagreements. Claire Bowditch suggests that there 'are a number of key departures' from *Les Femmes*: Lady Knowell is portrayed as intelligent and successfully uses the lack of romantic intrigue which Bélise has for Chrysale in Molière's play to criticise masculine hypocrisy.[84] Yet Janet Todd suggests that Lady Knowell is an exemplar of Behn's 'satiric attack' on women – in frustration at male playwrights' ability to discuss sex.[85] I would posit that Lady Knowell is a continuation of Hellena's characterisation in *The Rover*, which encompasses the pendulous nature of the three women of Masoch: showing her masochistic nature as well as a

[83] However, Claire Bowditch asserts that the Lady Knowell plot line can also be recognised from the James Shirley play *The Constant Maid; or, Love Will Finde out the Way* (1640), Bowditch and Hobby, p. 146; There is no record of *Les Femmes savantes* being produced on the London stage during Behn's lifetime. Hereafter, the text will be cited in the text as *Les Femmes*.
[84] Bowditch and Hobby, p. 146.
[85] Todd, p. 239.

combination of the hetaeric and sadistic natures. This is possible only through the amalgamation of the overly libidinous character of Bélise and the strong-willed matriarch Philaminte from *Les Femmes*.

Judy Hayden suggests that Lady Knowell appears as a 'silly learned woman [that] satisfied her male audience' by depicting her as both sexual and overly educated in a male sphere.[86] Lady Knowell is perhaps the wisest of all the characters within the play, which closely corresponds to Philaminte's ability to question Chrysale's lack of intellect. In Act 2, scene 7 of *Les Femmes*, Philaminte has had to dismiss the maid, Martine, as Chrysale was too scared to do so and equates his inability as an

> [...] *indignité pour ce qui s'appelle Homme,*
> *D'etre baissé sans cesse aux soins matériels,*
> *Au lieu de se hausser vers le spirituels!*
> *Le corps, cette guenille, est-il d'une importance,*
> *D'un prix à meritier seulement qu'on y pense,*
> *Et ne devons-nous pas laisser cela bien loin?*
>
> (2.7.p.28)[87]

As previously discussed, Lady Knowell sees through Sir Patient's hypochondriacal absurdity, and manages to complete what Lady Fancy cannot, that of breaking his masochistic contract.– Lady Knowell tells her that

---

[86] Judy Hayden, 'Of Privileges and Masculine Parts: The Learned Lady in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 42 (2006) 317-331 (p. 323).
[87] indignity for what is called man
To be constantly lowered to material cares,
Instead of rising to the spiritual!
Is this body, this rag, of any importance,
Or a price worth only thinking about,
And don't we have to leave that far away? [my translation; Molière, *Les Femmes savantes*, (P.Prome, 1672), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS fonds français R1453, fol. 2.

> [You are] a slave, a very household Drudg, –– Oh, faugh, come, never grieve, –– for Madam, his Disease is nothing [...] a Melancholy [...] I cou'd prescribe a most potent Remedy, but that I am loth to stir the envy of the College.
>
> (3.1.p.31)

Hayden suggests that Behn rejects 'the idea that intellectual capacity and gender [are] mutually exclusive', but again, in a link with Widow Blackacre, Lady Knowell is an independent thinker, with little care for gender restrictions, and is able to create her own masochistic contract.[88] Ostensibly, Behn portrays her according to the stereotype of the libidinous widow; however, rather than appearing as the ridiculous contrast between Bélise and Philaminte she intermingles these characteristics to portray Lady Knowell as the Deleuzian masochistic woman: using her sexual nature and intelligence as an empowerment to challenge the masculine world. Lady Knowell acts the widowed coquette with Leander throughout the play, testing his fidelity through his 'foolish unambitious heart' (3.2.p.32) should he marry Laura Lucretia.

It is in the denouement of the play in Act 5 in which the women of the play flourish in their masochistic power. Although Annette Kreis-Schnick argues that the ending of *Sir Patient* is 'utterly constructed" to provide an artificially positive resolution to the plot lines, Behn allows both Lady Knowell and Lady Fancy to make their masochistic fantasies real.[89] When Lady Fancy believes that Sir Patient is dead she is allowed to contract with Wittmore, which will permit him to

[88] Hayden, p. 318.
[89] Annette Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theater in the Early Modern Period* (Associated University Press, 2001), p. 59.

> claim thy Rites of Love without controll, without the contradiction of wretched [...] Jealousy: Now, undisguis'd thou maist approach my Bed, and reign o're all my Pleasures [...] of which this minute I create thee Lord.
>
> And thus begin my homage. –––

(5.3.p.87)

The contractual 'control' of Sir Patient has now been broken – whilst thinking he was dead – Lady Fancy is free to become part of Wittmore's fantasy as her 'Lord', with her 'homage' of pleasure and pain. Behn, in an act of female assertion, goes further than Wycherley dared with Widow Blackacre, letting Lady Knowell remain free from the prison of marriage, and in doing so, overturns the stereotypical view of the widow. Her reaction to Leander's admission that he 'cannot live confin'd' (5.1.p.73) is a damning indictment of both marriage and cuckoldry, her response to him being that 'I shall not stand with you for a Mistress or two; I hate a dull morose unfashionable Blockhead to my Husband, nor shall I be the first example of a suffering Wife Sir; Women were created poor obedient things' (5.1.p.73).

Sir Patient's character arc is analytically challenging: Behn devotes the play to highlighting his melancholia, obsessiveness, and adherence to patriarchal rules. Yet, in a Lazarus-like act, Sir Patient is resurrected and hurriedly sees the error of his ways, stating to Lady Fancy that

> Methinks I find an inclination to swear, –– to curse my self and thee, that I cou'd no better discern thee; nay, I'me so chang'd from what I was [...] I'me so truly convinc'd I have been a beast and an ass all my life.

(5.3.p.89)

His alacrity suggests an allegorical finality to his story arc – being 'so chang'd' in his behaviour and able to 'turn spark' (5.3.p.91), which leaves the audience comparing him to the emotional, intellectual, and powerful women of the play, asking them to consider whether his fragile masculinity, and by extension the masculine sphere, is far more simplistic and lacking in reason than they thought.

Behn's use of hypochondriacal madness and dangerously educated women within a singular play allows Behn to write characters who continue her work begun in *The Rover*. Women are central to the creation, depiction and response to masochistic fantasies and desires. Behn's borrowings and modifications from *Le Malade imaginaire* and *Les Femmes savantes* remove her from any charges of a personal critique of patriarchal control, and her adaptations of Molière's plays allow her to embrace and augment the role of female characters on sexual fantasies. Their humorously exaggerated duplicity highlights the foolishness of men: they create and attempt to control the masochistic fantasy, but it blinds them to the reality of matriarchal sexual autonomy and desires. Unlike Molière, Behn does not give her male characters a restoration of absolute patriarchal control and a hyposexual satisfaction of desires; instead she leaves them emasculated and submissive – her female characters are triumphant in their control of the male masochistic fantasy and contractual terms. This female tortuous mastery of the masochist is not limited to Behn's work. Masochistic men continue to permit female empowerment: contractually authorizing women to place men into a position of submission, to create pleasure-pain and implicitly sow disorder. The final analysis of this chapter on *The Princess of Cleve* invites the question whether women are limited to torturing emasculated men, or whether they can tame the hypermasculine, overly libidinous rake.

Degeneracy and Disorder in Nathaniel Lee's *The Princess of Cleve*

Both Wycherley and Behn's adaptations mark the continued popularity of translating and adapting French theatrical drama for the English stage during the 1670s. However, there was little interest in adapting novels for the Restoration stage until Nathaniel Lee produced *The Princess of Cleve* (*c.*1680), a complex reworking of Madame de Lafayette's novel *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678).[90] Lee's play gained renewed attention in the late twentieth century when it was republished, and as Michael Cordoner suggests, the reprint offers 'the first modernized' edition of one 'of the most brilliant' plays of the Restoration comedy canon.[91] However, his adaptation of de Lafayette's historical romance has remained a disconcerting and mercurial play for critics.[92] Previous studies have primarily focused on its ambiguous genre and offered searing damnations of Lee's adulteration of source material, characterisation, and his authorial intent. This study will examine how Lee's loose adaptation from a French novel to the stage allows him to create a unique masochistic fantasy and how the limited, if not conservative, attention to the play's genre affords an opportunity to apply Deleuze's Masochean masochistic theory to Lee's adaptation. By re-evaluating

---

[90] *La Princesse de Clèves* by Madame de la Fayette was translated into English by a 'Person of Quality, at the Request of some Friends' and was published in 1678, *The Princess of Cleve. The Most Famed Romance. Written in French by the Greatest Wits of France, Rendered in English by a Person of Quality, at the Request of some Friends* (R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1679); Robert D. Hume points out that Lee worked from the translation, copying the translation error of 'Clèves' as 'Cleve', Robert D. Hume, 'The Satiric Design of Nat Lee's "The Princess of Cleve"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 73 (1976) 117-138 (p. 133); Hume, *English Drama*, p. 123; Unfortunately, *The London Stage* does not give a definite date for the premiere of the play or if it reached the stage as the 'date of composition is uncertain', *The London Stage* gives various dates that it could have been performed, the earliest being 1680 at the Dorset Garden Theatre, *The London Stage*, pp. 290-291; For the purposes of this thesis I will be using the circa date of 1680; *Princess of Cleve* ([n.pub.], 1689); Hereafter, all citations in this thesis will refer to this text, unless indicated otherwise; Whilst the imprint does not identify a publisher, a 1689 edition printed by Abel Roper suggests that the two are likely variant states of the same text, *Nathaniel Lee, The Princess of Cleve* (Abel Roper, 1689).

[91] Nathaniel Lee, 'The Princess of Cleve', in *Four Restoration Marriage Plays*, ed. by Michael Cordoner and Ronald Clayton (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 89-174.

[92] There is no record of this play having been staged in 1680, or any contemporaneous audience reviews.

Lee's characterisation, this examination seeks to gain a greater insight into the creation and upholding of the law that governs the masochistic contract, and how both the law and contract can be broken. This leads to an examination of how immorality, specifically libertinistic licentiousness and cuckoldry are not only a condition of the masochist-torturer contract but are used to implicitly disguise the masochist's sexual anxieties and masochistic desire.

Like Wycherley's ambiguity in his prologue to *The Plain-Dealer*, Lee offers no clarity towards the genre of *The Princess of Cleve*. In his dedication, Lee capriciously calls the play a 'Farce, Comedy, Tragedy or meer Play' (Ded. sig. A2r) in what can be considered a compelling effort to confound his critics. Lee's ambivalence has caused the scant twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism of *The Princess of Cleve* to remain consistently unsure about the 'amalgam of elements' that the play contains.[93] Throughout Robert D. Hume's evaluation of the play, he offers no definitive opinion on its genre – merely suggesting that it is either satirical or tragi-comic and, perhaps in an overreach of opinion, Thomas B. Stroup argues that the play should be taken as a proto-sentimental comedy due to its 'emphasis upon pity, the domestic moral problem, [and the] natural goodness of man [...] make it a sentimental comedy', but he neglects to consider Lee's own exaggerated plots of intrigue and debauchery.[94]

The Princess of Cleve is a tumultuous play that presents us with two interwoven plot lines which orbit around the Duke Nemours' libertinistic and indiscriminate pursuit of women. At the beginning of the play, we learn that Nemours has fallen in love with the titular Princess of Cleve – newly married to the Prince. Undaunted by her marriage, Nemours is determined to woo her. Nevertheless, we learn that he is far

[93] Hume, *English Drama*, p. 355.
[94] Thomas B. Stroup, '*The Princess of Cleve* and Sentimental Comedy', *The Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935) 200-203 (p. 203).

from devoted to her and Nemours meets with his former lover, Tournon – who is now his pimp – to arrange other sexual assignations. She criticises him for his inconstancy, particularly towards his fiancée, Marguerite, but she agrees to procure women for him.

Nemours has little time for Marguerite, deceiving her throughout the play to avoid marrying her. Despite her promise, Tournon tells Marguerite of Nemours' infidelity, and Marguerite swears that she will punish him by disguising herself and making him fall in love with her. Away from this, Nemours' hedonistic and lascivious behaviour increases – with little concern for his reputation. Concurrently, we see the Prince and Princess ceaselessly discussing their unhappy marriage: the Prince decrying his sexual failure and the Princess' indifference towards him; the Princess is visibly disappointed by the marriage and struggles with her desire for Nemours. Ultimately, the Princess tells the Prince that she loves Nemours, causing his mental breakdown and his threat to commit suicide.

At the denouement of the play, Nemours holds a masquerade ball which Marguerite attends in disguise, teasing him into a sexual frenzy before finally unmasking herself in triumph. The Prince enters the ball in a rage and is killed in a duel with Nemours. Nemours' emotions are contradictory, oscillating between guilt and guiltlessness, whilst the Princess is left inconsolable and culpable for her treatment of the Prince – firstly refusing to see Nemours and later admitting to him that she cannot countenance a relationship with him. Nemours is left bereft, and the play ends with him repenting his immorality, and willing to marry Marguerite.

I would suggest that modern critics are reactionary and simplistic in their positions towards Lee's morally distorted adaptation of the source material, rather than viewing Lee's play as a separate, if not bold, entity. Hume summarises critics' responses to the play as ones of 'disgust, nausea, and revulsion', and considers the play

'worthless, chaotic, [...] a rotting dung heap'.[95] As will be examined later, Lee's originality lies in his creation of a sex-farce parody – his 'Massacre of *Paris*' (Dedication, sig.A2v) – that is fashioned from his amoralistic distortion of de Lafayette's source material. To elaborate on the assertion that the play is a farce, we must revisit John Harwood's theory that a play can be considered farcical in nature if traditional authority and morality has been eliminated from a play.[96] Lee's significant alteration of the French source material focuses farcically on the rake Nemours' unrestrained immorality, sexual depravity and confuses his audience, 'for when they expected the most polish'd Hero in *Nemours*, I gave 'em a Ruffian reeking from *Whetstone's Park*' (Dedication, sig.A2v).[97] Although Lee does retain the tragic plot of the Prince and Princess of Cleves – they are relegated to secondary roles – his main plot comedically and hyperbolically mocks the prince's masculinity, sexual frustration, and eventual fate.

Lee, as Hume argues, 'brings the two value systems [tragic morality and comic immorality] together and lets each expose the hollowness and inadequacy of the other', but this suggests an independence and direct contrast between the plot lines.[98] Yet Lee's plot lines are not separated from each other; instead, they merge throughout the play to create a causality which augments the farcical humour. Notably, the play's title remains the same as de Lafayette's novel, but Lee focuses on the comical exploits of a dissipated rake as opposed to the tragic love affair and downfall of Lafayette's princess; Lee's dumbfounding of audience expectation creates a partly suppressed humour. As Paulina Kewes argues, the audience were 'compelled to re-examine their assumptions

[95] Hume, *Satiric Design*, p. 133; Hume, *English Drama*, p. 350.
[96] Harwood, p. 87.
[97] Whetstone's Park, located close to Lincoln's Inn Fields, was considered a 'place of very bad reputation' and 'loose character'. It was mentioned in Dryden's *Mr Limberham* (1679) and later in Ned Ward's periodical, *The London Spy* (1698–1700), Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London: Volume 3* (Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878) p. 50.
[98] Hume, *Satiric Design*, p. 138.

about the original in light of what was made of it on stage' in a state of nervous, if not humorous, uneasiness.[99] Deleuze argues that in tragedy there is a comic force – and Lee's plot structure suggests that the apparent serio-tragedy highlights the humour, whilst the humour makes the tragedy risible.[100]

Unlike the nuanced adaptations of Molière's plays by Wycherley and Behn, Lee ostensibly creates a hard sex-farce and a parody of de Lafayette's novel. I would suggest that Lee's removal of the original novel's moralistic tone in favour of an amoralistic one in the play takes away the original source's profundity. It is in its hyper-sexual superficiality that the play can be cast in a parodic light, one that allows Lee to create a momentary reflection on the absurdity of both morality and immorality in contemporaneous society.[101] Tara and Philip Collington's critical assessment of Lee's adaptation of the source material suggests that it is closer to de Lafayette's characterisation and is 'more elaboration than interpretation, more elucidation than adulteration'.[102] Nevertheless, the parodic, extremely libidinous direction of the play suggests a humorous originality that is lacking from the expression of moralism within the source material. Margaret Rose hypothesises that a parodist will use literary tools such as 'juxtaposition, addition, condensation and discontinuity' to alter the source

---

[99] Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England 1660-1710* (Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 79.
[100] Deleuze, p. 86.
[101] Much of the criticism of the play focuses on the extent to which Lee's characterisation of Nemours is a biographical commentary on the dissipation of the recently deceased John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Anne Righter highlights that there is a direct link between Nemours' characterisation and Rochester's behaviour which cannot be ignored throughout the play, and Robert D. Hume suggests that Lee has created a satirical attack on Rochester's religious conversion and renunciation of his extreme libertinistic desires. There is little scholarly consensus on the extent of Rochester's influence on Nemours' characterisation. However, critics have agreed that in Act 1, scene 2, Nemours' lament that the dead Rosidore 'was the Spirit of Wit – and had such an art in guilding his Failures, that it was hard not to love his Faults […]' (1.2.p.7) is an obituary to Rochester. Whilst there is a biographical potential between Rochester-Nemours, I would suggest that this is a highly subjective view, and for the purposes of this thesis, I will reassess Nemours as a fictional character. Anne Righter, 'Chatterton Lecture on an English Poet, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 53 (1967) 47-69 (pp. 47–69); Hume, *Satiric Design*, p. 118.
[102] Tara Collington and Philip Collington, 'Adulteration or Adaptation? Nathaniel Lee's "*Princess of Cleve*" and his Sources', *Modern Philology*, 100 (2002) 196-226 (p. 197).

material and as will be seen, Lee has explicitly relied on these changes to construct a parody in his characterisation.[103] Lee as a parodist appreciably understands the characterisation of the novel, and the conflicting attitudes towards France in England during the 1670s – his adaptation for the English stage 'creates a new structure' which allows his characters to deftly parody the turgid sentimentality and 'elite' courtliness of de Lafayette's work; it is an act of 'creative literary criticism' which lampoons the hypocrisy of respectability and libertinistic immorality of the English court.[104]

It is notable that at the start of the play, Nemours is presented as being responsible and tender; however, his language belies his struggle between being outwardly moralistic and inwardly wishing to act upon his immoral desires. In conversation with Bellamore in Act 1, scene 1, Nemours advises him to

> stick to clean Pleasures, deep Sleep, moderate Wine, sincere Whores, and thou art happy; Now by this damask Cheek I love thee; keep but this gracious Form of thine in health, and I'll put thee in the way of living like a man.
>
> (1.1.p.2)

Nemours' use of the imperatives 'stick' and 'keep' suggests he is attempting to staunchly guide the young Bellamore, in a paternal manner, towards a happy, respectable, and moralistic lifestyle: advocating 'sleep', moderation, and sincerity as ways to live 'like a man'. Nevertheless, it suggests Nemours suffers some fear for Bellamore's integrity: Nemours highlights Bellamore's 'damask Cheek' and 'gracious

[103] Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 83.
[104] Collington and Collington, p. 223; David Roberts, '"Ranked Among the Best": Translation and Cultural Agency in Restoration Translations of French Drama', *The Modern Language Review*, 108 (2013) 396-415 (p. 411); Collington and Collington, p. 224.

Form' that is continually in danger of being ruined. Despite this, there is an oscillation in their relationship which changes from anxious paternal advice to rivalry synchronously. Nemours' speech is bordering on performative and increasingly becomes contradictory – seemingly becoming unable to follow his own advice – particularly in his desire to woo the Princess.

After this emotive speech, Nemours commands Bellamore to spy on the Princess and report when she awakes: calling him his 'sweet-faced pimp' (1.1.) at the same time he is fearful that 'Ravishing shou'd follow' (1.1.p.2) Bellamore and destroy Nemours' 'sober design' (1.1.p.2) for the creation of a masochistic contract. What is more, one could theorise that Nemours' anxiety, moralistic uncertainty and desire reflect what Deleuze would describe as a 'masochistic art of fantasy'.[105] The vacillation in his desire and behaviour defines Nemours' need for a Deleuzian pleasure-pain contract that ultimately has an 'ambiguous destination' throughout Act 1, scene 1.[106]

Nemours' marked fluctuation in moral and amoralistic desire is indicative of his ostensible incapability of settling on any form of masochistic contractual terms with either the Princess, his fiancée Marguerite, or his scheming pimp, Madame Tournon. In particular, the capriciousness of his sexual desires depends on whom he is talking to, and his language reflects his diverse needs. His lack of certainty reflects his anxiety towards gaining a torturer – with little regard as to who will contract with him – and an indecision as to what these contractual terms should be. Although Deleuze theorises that the masochist willingly places themselves in a perpetual state of waiting, I would argue that Nemours is an exception to Deleuze's theory. Nemours is not disposed to wait, and careers impatiently towards making a contract to allay his sexual anxiety – rather than taking pleasure from waiting. Nevertheless, his sexual

[105] Deleuze, p. 72.
[106] Deleuze, p. 92.

anxiety and unfulfilled masochistic desire implicitly forms the postponement of his pleasure and pain. In Act 1, scene 2, Nemours speaks with Tournon, who confronts him about his distasteful desire for the 'Ruining of bodies and Damning of Souls' (1.2.p.4), calling him an

> Tournon: Inconsiderate, horrid Peer, will you Damn your Soul deeper and deeper, can you be thus insensible of your Crime?
>
> Nemours: Why, there's it, I was as a man may be, very dry, and thou kind Soul gav'st me a good draught of Drink; now 'tis strange to me, if a man must be Damn'd for quenching his thirst.
>
> Tournon: [...] who wou'd have thought you cou'd delude a Woman thus, and a Woman of Honour too [...] your Grace has a cunning Tongue.
>
> (1.2.p.5)

Tournon directly challenges Nemours' avidity and demands to know how he can reconcile his 'Crime' of being unable to settle on one woman whilst declaring his faithfulness to each of them. The double meaning of Tournon's claim that Nemours' has a 'cunning Tongue' confirms that he is only too aware that he is verbally and sexually adept at the persuasion of women. Nemours, rather than protesting his innocence, justifies his deviancy by callously claiming he was 'as a man may be', and metaphorically equates his sexual needs with 'quenching his thirst'. He claims himself to be no different to any other man, or potential masochist, who can 'persuade, and [...] train his torturer', attempting to find the right torturer for his pleasure-pain fantasy.[107]

[107] Deleuze, p. 75.

This is exemplified by his apathetic attitude and refusal to be singled out by Tournon as 'horrid', claiming that it is 'strange' if a 'man must be Damn'd' for his desire, and implies in an uneasy generalisation that all men equally suffer from anxiety, indecision, and a need to experience pleasure-pain. Nemours' actions would suggest that he

> is not a strange being who finds pleasure in pain, but that he is like everyone else, and finds pleasure where others do, the simple difference being that for him pain, punishment or humiliation are necessary prerequisites to obtaining gratification.[108]

Nemours' sexual bravado is analogous with other libertinistic characters during the period; for example, Horner in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, or Willmore in Behn's *The Rover*, yet he is singled out by critics, perhaps hypocritically, for being 'a monster, though 'a glamorous and successful' one.[109] Although Nemours' masochistic desire can be considered 'like everyone else['s], his critical condemnation, as discussed previously, is tainted by Lee's source material. Throughout the play, like Willmore or Horner, Nemours' promiscuity can be seen as obsession and illuminates what Deleuze would consider as a 'ritualistic activity [that] is essential to him' – his hunt and anxiety for a contract fuels Nemours' masochistic fantasy.[110]

Accordingly, Lee echoes the libertinistic fear of marriage and sexual restriction which dominated plays of the 1670s and he stresses this aversion through his depiction of the volatile relationship between Nemours and Marguerite. At the beginning of the

[108] Deleuze, p. 71.
[109] Hume, *Satiric Design*, p. 125.
[110] Deleuze, p. 94.

play, Nemours avoids seeing Marguerite for fear of being married to her; however, in Act 2, scene 1, she decides, in an act of oscillation between being the Deleuzian sadistic woman and the masochistic torturer to disguise herself to punish him for his inconstancy by making him fall in love with her impersonation. Marguerite tells Tournon that 'despite / [...] thee and him [Nemours]' (2.1.p.16) she will sell her 'Soul to Hell, / If a Woman can be worth the Devil's purchase' (2.1.p.16) in an act of retaliation, and an enaction of his tortuous pleasure-pain. Indeed, her act as the Deleuzian masochistic woman is reflected in her hyperbolic cry of 'Revenge, Revenge, and shew thyself true Woman. / Down then, proud Heart; down Woman, down. I'll try / I'll do't, I've sworn, to curb my Will or dye' (2.1.p.19) that will attempt to tie him into a masochistic contract of she will 'dye'.

The relationship between Nemours and Marguerite eventually highlights his libertinistic hypocrisy, and reflects his masochistic anxiety caused by a desperate need for a sexual conquest. In Act 3, scene 1, Nemours attempts to woo the disguised Marguerite, in what Deleuze would suggest is an attempt to gain 'the victim's consent [and show's the masochist's] ability to persuade' by coaxing her into a distinct hedonistic fantasy.[111] Nemours tells Marguerite that she can

> Nemours: be no Devil, thou art so fraid of a Sinner; for you refus'd me just now, when I profer'd to sell my self, and seal the Bargain with the best of my Blood.
>
> Marguerite: But if I shou'd permit you, cou'd you find in your heart to ingender with a damn'd Spirit?

[111] Deleuze, p. 75.

Nemours: Yes [....] For know, thou bewitching Creature, I have long'd any time this seven years to be the Father of a *Succubus* ––

(3.1.pp.32–33)

As a result, Nemours' masochistic desire can be viewed at its most extreme in this scene. He is willing to 'sell' himself to 'seal the Bargain' of Marguerite becoming his torturer – in the form of a Faustian pact – to create and contract his masochistic fantasy. His hyperbolic speech highlights that he has been waiting anxiously for 'seven years' to create such a contract, whilst satisfying what Deleuze would suggest is the 'mythical complex of masochism' with the supernatural 'succubus' who will satisfy his pleasure and pain.[112]

As previously discussed earlier in this section, Madame de Lafayette's novel focuses on the Prince and Princess of Clèves' marriage and doomed love; however, Lee instead, chooses to place it as a secondary plot. One could consider that Lee has done this purposefully to alleviate the libertinistic fear of sexual failure highlighted by Nemours' constant desire to create a masochistic contract, but also as a warning against the destructiveness of libertinistic desire. Whereas Nemours is inexhaustible in his hunt for a masochistic torturer, the Prince of Cleve is depicted in juxtaposition to him. The Prince, as Hume suggests, is portrayed as ridiculing 'the ineffectuality of the whining heroic ethos' that was prevalent on the stage during the 1670s; nevertheless, the Prince illuminates the failure as a libertine, as well as the Deleuzian anxiety at the loss of both the masochistic contract, fantasy and torturer.[113]

[112] Deleuze, p. 94; The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Succubus' as a 'demon in female form supposed to have sexual intercourse with men in their sleep', 'Succubus', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].
[113] Hume, *English Drama*, p. 356.

To illustrate this, in Act 1, scene 1, Bellamore saucily tells Nemours that the Prince has enjoyed 'a night of pleasure [with the Princess] –– the first too!' (1.1.p.2) but we are never invited to view the Prince and Princess as a happy, newly married couple. Deleuze suggests that the masochistic contract should alleviate the anxiety that fuels the hunt for a torturer, yet the Prince is first viewed in Act 1, scene 3 as anxiety ridden and dejected. His fantasy of a masochistic contract formalised by his marriage has been disabused by the Princess: soliloquising that 'Last night I found it in her cold Embraces; / Her Lips too cold –– Cold as the Dew of Death: / And still whene'er I prest her in my arms, / I found my Bosom all afloat with Tears' (1.3.p.12) in a sad lament. The Princess' coldness and 'dew of death' reflect her position as the masochistic ideal woman. Her coldness and cruelty or 'Poyson and Health, [...] I loath the Cordial of my Husband's love; / But when Nemours my Fancy does recal, / The Bane's so sweet that I cou'd drink it all' (1.3.p.15) not only shows her desire to create pleasure-pain for Nemours, rather than her husband – but is an open display of creating pain with no pleasure. The Princess of Cleve has created a role reversal in the relationship dynamic: she has reversed the status of woman and man – having transcended the terms of the masochistic contract that Deleuze suggests must remain intact to create pleasure-pain.[114] I would posit that rather than becoming the sadistic woman, she remains as the masochistic ideal of the 'ambiguous destination' that is both the Prince and Nemours' fantasy.[115]

Consequently, the Prince's masochistic contractual failure, anxiety, and sexual inadequacy continue to dominate his relationships with both the Princess and Nemours. The Prince is portrayed as apathetic and in complete contrast to the audacity of Nemours: rather than striving to achieve his contract with the Princess by any

[114] Deleuze, p. 92.
[115] Deleuze, p. 92.

means, the Prince despairs and ultimately, admits defeat. His deathly desire is hyperbolically comic when juxtaposed with Nemours' farcical promiscuity. At the climax of the Prince and Princess' failing marriage in Act 3, scene 2, the Prince absurdly exaggerates his desire for death, claiming that

> I'll end my self,
> My Thoughts are grown too violent for my Reason.
> By this last usage, oh! Thou hast undone me;
> [...] I wonder now that I have liv'd so long:
> Confess and then divulge, make me your Bawd ––
> [...] No more –– Farewel ––
> [...] But you your Wish with lov'd *Nemours* shall have,
> And shortly see your Husband in the Grave.
>
> (3.1.p.42)

Although the Prince's exaggeration that he will 'end' himself, and has 'liv'd so long' sound tragic, they have an element of comedy in the excessive extremes he will go to keep his masochistic fantasy. Importantly, his insistence that he be made the Princess' 'Bawd' is an unusually explicit demand that she return to him as his torturer. Comparably to Pinchwife in *The Country* Wife, the Prince both admits and accepts that that being cuckolded is his only option to retain his masochistic contract.

In Act 4, scene 1, Nemours and the Prince fight a duel over the Princess. Nemours' bravado and arrogance leads him to admit to the Prince that it is 'true, I am in love, / In torture, racks, in all the hells of love, / A hopeless, restless and eternal love' (4.1.p.51) in an open confession of his 'love' and surety of his masochistic contract. That 'torture' that the Princess gives to him provides a paradoxical resolution

or ‘restless and eternal love’ that allays his anxiety. Nemours’ admission of the masochistic contract between him and the Princess serves to highlight what Deleuze would suggest as ‘the very type of a culture-bound relationship that is artificial’ which epitomizes the masochist-torturer relationship.[116] Whilst this proposal is focused on the masochistic contractual connection, I would suggest that this three-way relationship highlights how this artificiality and anxiety stretches to the relationship between the two masochists. Nemours’ insincerity towards the Prince is apparent during the duel; continually volte-facing he states that there is no ‘Man upon Earth I love so well’ (4.1.p.49), but humorously claims immediately that there is no man he ‘cou’d take so much from as this Prince of *Cleve*’ (4.1.p.49) in the hope of quelling his anxiety towards finalising his contract with the Princess. Indeed, the dual ends with the Prince questioning whether Nemours will ‘love me too / As formerly?’ (4.1.p.53), Nemours answering ‘I swear far more than ever’ (4.1.p.53) in an act of hypocrisy.

It is after the Prince’s death that we see a marked change in Nemours’ behaviour, libidinousness, and sexual anxiety. With the Princess now free to become his masochistic torturer, grief and guilt alter his masochistic fantasy – her refusal of Nemours places him in the same position as the Prince had been previously. Rather than contemplating his existence without the Princess, he uses this pain to create a new fantasy. Nemours’ reaction to the Princess illustrates Deleuze’s assertion that the masochist needs ‘pain, punishment [and] humiliation’ that are ‘necessary prerequisites to obtaining gratification’: creating a new fantasy for Nemours, growing ostensibly from the Princess’ despair.[117] In Act 5, scene 2, we see the beginnings of his new fantasy: Nemours focuses his masochistic desire on the Princess, the Prince’s death having ‘wrought my Conversion, I grow weary of my wild Courses, repent of my

[116] Deleuze, p. 92.
[117] Deleuze, p. 71.

Sins, am resolv'd to leave off Whoreing' (5.2.p.64), but his masochistic punishment now comes from her refusal to settle their masochistic contract.

Nemours' anxiety and humiliation come to a climax in Act 5, scene 3. Finally, he finds the Princess; nevertheless, unlike the Deleuzian theory that there must be a contract between masochist-torturer, Nemours' pleasure-pain fantasy is made reality without any form of such agreement. In an act of supplication, he kneels before the Princess and tells her

> Nemours: I am resolv'd to kneel an Age before you. […]
>
> Princess: Rise, I conjure you, rise […]
>
> Nemours: Strike me not dead
> With Duty's name. By Heav'n, I Swear you're free
> As Air, as Waters, Winds or open Wilds,
> There is no Form of Obligation now;
> […] 'tis utmost Duty now to keep that Love
> You have confess'd for me.
>
> (5.3.p.67)

Nemours' pleading that he 'will kneel an Age' is representative of his desire that the Princess will allay his anxiety and continue within his masochistic fantasy. In his speech we can see a subtle shift within the structure of his fantasy – swearing that she is now 'free as Air, as Waters, Winds' – he allows her to make up her own contractual terms as his torturer, rather than being bound by his terms. This is reminiscent of the Prince's entreaties earlier in the play to create a formal contract with the Princess; Nemours is cognizant that 'there is no Form of Obligation now' for her to create a

formal contract, indeed, he is offering her the ability to contract on her own terms or 'Duty', and that whatever she decides upon, it will keep him in pleasure and pain.

In view of this, a hyperbolic sense of resolution and references to death pervade Nemours' speech throughout the denouement of the play. Seemingly, his exaggerated promises are humorously exaggerated in a desperate attempt to appear remorseful for his hedonistic behaviour and its consequences. His pleading and supplication at the Princess' feet, claiming 'each day by slow degrees / I dye away' (5.3.pp.69-70) can be seen as comedic rhetoric particularly if one considers his libertinistic recklessness which has dominated the play. Indeed, his parodic juxtaposition between death and sexual desire verges on a mockery of the finality of death. Once Nemours has been spurned by the Princess, his excessive claims of dying belie his anxiety under the guise of sexual bullishness: he wagers that he will 'Bed her eighteen months three weeks hence, at half an hour past two in the Morning' (5.3.p70) ignoring the failed masochistic contract and his failed sexual conquest.

Ultimately, Nemours remains an enigmatic character, coming full circle to the start of the play: beginning with how to live life, he ends the play repeatedly alluding to death and dying. There is a chaotic dual meaning to his final words – he laments that the man who 'well Repents [...] will not Sin, yet can, / But Death-bed Sorrow rarely shows the man' (5.3.p.71). We are left debating whether he is discussing the end to his libertinistic desires, or the end of his hunt for a masochistic contract.

These plays by Wycherley, Behn and Lee have received little modern critical attention, and mixed critical reception during their original productions. The contemporaneous responses ranged from the laudability of *The Plain-Dealer*, the accusations of plagiarism towards Behn for *Sir Patient Fancy,* or in the case of Lee's *The Princess of Cleve*, so severely damned by critics that we can infer only through the

claims made on the title page that it was produced, at some point, on the London stage. The playwrights' adaptations are disquieting and have often diverged from their well-known French source materials, and in doing so it has allowed them to create uniquely assertive pieces of writing for the English stage. Although this suggests an enigmatic, or obfuscating authorial intent, by openly viewing Wycherley, Behn and Lee's plays as an enigma paradoxically provides some clarity – their contradictions create an intended comedic disorder – in which the playwrights implicitly critique societal influences on the nature of men and women.

This inconstancy of genre is contrasted by the playwrights' psychologically nuanced, intelligent, and forthright characters who challenge the confining societal perceptions of respectability, and sexual roles of men and women. Humorous portrayals of weak, delusional, and lascivious men are contrasted with intelligent, strong-willed women who surpass and control their male counterparts. This study has called attention to Wycherley's questioning of why widows were stereotypically viewed within the theatre as sex-starved figures of fun, rather than confident, commanding, and independent women. The playwrights' characterisations suggest that the masochist-torturer is not a fixed gender role, but both men and women can move between roles in a further generation of disorder within the male sphere.

Nevertheless, throughout the plays, the male masochist is unwaveringly driven by the desire to find a torturer and to form a contract. This contract creates order out of chaos by formally setting out the terms for the masochist's required pleasure-pain, and thus allowing him to bind himself contractually to her. As has been seen, this unity requires both parties to agree to it, and the sexual freedom that the masochist gives to his torturer effectively allows women to develop their own autonomy in excess of the masochist's contractual expectations. Disorder is created by this dominant female power existing outside of the masochistic contractual parameters – which ultimately

leads to a patriarchally undesired gender reversal – and, perhaps unsurprisingly, men are forced into an unwanted position of submission that offers pain with no pleasure.

As will be seen in the next chapter, the masochistic desire and fantasy is often left unsatisfied for both the married man and rake alike – turning them to physical aggression and mental destruction. This unsatisfied masochistic desire of men, and the continued domination and sexual freedom of women, not only displays the delights of the pleasure-pain contract but also reveals the unsustainable, disturbing, and ruinous nature of the masochistic fantasy.

Chapter Five

Beyond Masochism: The Reality of Conformity

The farcical and darkly comic plays that have been analysed within this thesis have progressively revealed how masochistic desires are born from a submissive sexual fantasy. The humorous missteps, laughable intrigues and failed libidinous assignations that have come to characterise Restoration comedy can be viewed as offering an alternative, percipient interpretation when seen through a Deleuzian lens. The plays are exemplary portrayals of how a perpetual need to conduct or submit to these absurd situations is an ostensible hunt, not only for male sexual conquest, but also female sexual freedom during a time of hypocritical sexual didacticism of honour and virtue. The comedic situations and rivalrous love-hate relationships foreground the Deleuzian principle that the masochistic fantasy is based on the desire for tortuous humiliation which is orchestrated by an ideal torturer. My study in the previous chapter revealed that the masochist and torturer is a gender-fluid concept, rather than the male masochist-female torturer paradigm, and crucially this sheds new light on female assertiveness within Restoration theatre. As I have highlighted, the masochist and torturer actively seek each other and ultimately create a formal contract that defines their desires, sexual obligations and duties that will provide pleasure-pain, submission and dominance.

Yet the Deleuzian masochistic desire is born out of fantasy, and it must necessarily find reality, or the theatrical representation of reality, to be fulfilled. However, reality, both contained on the stage and outside the theatre is unpredictably capricious – it can both satisfy and disappoint, please or frustrate with unique consequences for the masochist's fantasy. The plays within this chapter, Thomas

D'Urfey's *The Marriage Hater Match'd* (1692), John Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* (1697), and, finally, E. Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671) all attempt to wrestle illicit sexual desire with contemporaneous societal demands for conformity and morality. The plays of Polwhele and Vanbrugh are representative of how new dramatic voices were afforded a freedom of expression which was unencumbered by attempting to surpass their previous works, whilst D'Urfey's is exemplary of a career that was in a state of constant renewal to keep pace with societal flux. This chapter explores how each playwright's approach to cultural expectations shapes their characters' masochistic fantasies, and how their desires reciprocally attempt to question the reality which exists outside the theatre.

In resistance to the continued representations of overt lasciviousness on the stage, the renewed voices of social moralists in 1690s society viewed marriage, monogamy and virtuousness as the only approaches towards sexual reformation. The discussion of the plays by D'Urfey and Vanbrugh will show how the playwrights sought to navigate this sententious climate by blending farcical sex-boom comedy with the desire for a more conservative comedy rooted in moral didacticism. This examination will explore how the playwrights endeavoured to avoid gratuitous sermonising at the same time as attempting to retain and grow their popularity within the theatre. The threat and fear of marriage had been a stereotypically dissolute driving impetus of Restoration sex-boom comedy, but D'Urfey and Vanbrugh turn away from this trope to critique the absurd reformative belief in marriage, or the need to deny sexual freedom, by focusing on futile misogamy and failing spousal relationships. Therefore, this study aims not only to evaluate the success of the playwrights' criticism in the face of reality, but to interrogate their ability to give an alternate, or indeed any solution, to the problem of moralistic reformation.

I will conclude with an examination of Polwhele's play in a return to the amoralistic climate of the early 1670s and will reveal a distinct uniqueness of her attitude towards male and female sexual freedom. The positioning of this study of Polwhele's *The Frolicks* within the chapter allows a reactive and responsory critique of D'Urfey and Vanbrugh's ambiguous attitudes towards moralism and uncovers her unexpectedly progressive stance towards the traditional role of women, marriage, and its reformative qualities. As will be seen, Polwhele uses her representations to challenge the ideology that misogamy is uniquely a male problem, or that women cannot be masters of their own destiny. Polwhele, writing during a time of masculine domination within the theatre, directly challenges the realities of the hypocritical moralistic social construct of feminine virtuousness, honour, and the patriarchal control of sexual desire. This discussion of her work attempts to answer the question whether women – playwright or character – have had invariably assertive solutions to masculine hypocrisy and fears, only for them to be continually dismissed by patriarchal hubris.

This chapter simultaneously explores how a Deleuzian reading of *The Marriage Hater Match'd*, *The Provok'd Wife* and *The Frolicks* allows for a clearer understanding of the masochistic contract in relation to female assertiveness and control of desire. Applying the theory of Masochean masochism to these plays offers the potential to provide a new manifold understanding of the underlying themes of the comedies and Deleuze's theory: how the masochistic desire influences female self-assurance, and if these are challenged by or capitulate to societal and moral conformity. This allows for a closer investigation of the sexual fluidity of the masochist-torturer paradigm, particularly in relation to the realism of remaining trapped and submissive within a failing marriage. Whilst a masochist can be either male or female, this study seeks to ascertain whether the masochist must operate within gendered rules and if these have

a direct influence on the terms and longevity of the masochistic contract. Again, an analysis of *The Frolicks* in contrast to D'Urfey and Vanbrugh's plays provides a deeper understanding not only of the positionality of male playwrights, but also their differing treatment of masochistic characterisations. This will create an understanding of how each playwright's attitude to dissention or adherence to societal rules has the potential to alter Deleuze's theory and influence whether the masochistic sexual fantasy is cyclical, finite, or a sustainable desire in the face of moralistic and societal conformity.

Guilt and Misogamy in Thomas D'Urfey's *The Marriage-Hater Match'd*

In the following section, I will examine how comedic theatrical trends during the early 1690s changed dramatically in response to the new royal court's wish to distance itself from the libidinous courts of Charles II in a move towards moralism. As we shall see, the playwright Thomas D'Urfey was able to keep step with these contemporaneous shifts in taste for a more sentimental, moralistic comedy and retain the humour of the sex-boom plays that had defined the 1670s. As I will explain, D'Urfey focuses skilfully on the nuances of his female characters' social standing and their friendships that highlights and critiques their hyperbolic desire or abhorrence of marriage in a comment on the continued socio-moralistic hypocrisy surrounding sex and vice. Subsequently, I will use my analysis to illuminate and evaluate Deleuze's gender-centric masochist-torturer relationship and his assertion that a masochistic contract creates a new man who can be trained by his torturer into being obedient, subservient and compliant.

The suggestion of moral didacticism and the repentance of libertinistic behaviour during the denouement of *The Princess of Cleve* was to become a popular

recurring theme within the theatre during the 1690s. The turbulent religious, political, and social climate during the latter half of the 1680s, and a fragmented movement away from the overly libidinous sex-boom comedies of the previous decade had led playwrights, such as Thomas Southerne and William Congreve to strike 'out vigorously in contradictory directions during the busy and increasingly stormy 1690s' to please the audiences' shifting moralistic tastes.[1] After the Revolution of 1688–1689, William III and Mary II sought to bring order and peace to the nation in the wake of the chaotic socio-political uncertainty that had defined James II's reign. As Maria José Mora and Manuel Gómez-Lara suggest, one of William and Mary's primary objectives was to bring about a 'moral reform [in order] to consolidate their position' as legitimate monarchs after the deposition of James II.[2]

Mora and Gómez-Lara assert that William and Mary presented themselves as 'the leaders of a "Godly Revolution" that would put an end to the corruption and debauchery associated with the courts of Charles and James II', and William sought to 'restore the country to God's favour' in order to bring a renewed moralistic sensibility against 'Adultery and Fornication' within the country.[3] In William's manifesto to the Bishop of London, he desired a

> General Reformation of the Lives and Manners of all Our Subjects, as being that which must Establish Our Throne, and Secure to Our People in their Religion,

[1] Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 381.
[2] Maria José Mora and Manuel Gómez-Lara, 'Revolution and the Moral Reform of the Stage: The Case of Durfey's *The Marriage-Hater Matched* (1692)', in *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England, 1660–1737, From Leviathan to Licensing Act*, ed. by Catie Gill (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), pp.145-156 (p. 145).
[3] Mora and Gómez-Lara, p.145; William III, *His Majesties letter to the Lord Bishop of London to be communicated to the two provinces of Canterbury and York* (Printed by Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb, Printers to the King and Queens most Excellent Majesties, 1689), p. 4.

> Happiness and Peace; all which seen to be in great Danger at this time, by reason of that overflowing of Vice.[4]

William's moralistic policy reflected the need to cement the legitimation of his monarchical power, and moreover, William himself needed to exert his masculine dominance position as joint ruler, and had no desire to 'become a mere prince consort' to Mary.[5] In a comment attributed to William by Gustaff Johannes Renier, William states – in what can only be thought of as an outburst of masculine hubris – that 'No man can esteem a woman more than I do the Princess, but I am so made that I cannot think of holding anything by apron strings' and to do so would mean his immediate return to Holland.[6] William's outward display of masculinity can be considered, as Owen Brittan suggests, as a form of public affirmation that can 'strengthen both formal institutionalised power [...] and subtle informal power such as [...] public approval' that would allow him to legitimately attempt to curb immorality within the country.[7]

Sex, sin, and vice had been the mainstay themes of sex-boom comedy, but William's new hierarchic moralism began to filtrate down to the theatre. The theatre had, by degrees, moved away from being at the centre of the royal court and aristocratic society during the late 1680s, and after its reopening in 1689, the United Company received no Royal patronage.[8] Nevertheless, there was 'a pressure' on playwrights to align themselves 'with the values of the new court' to produce new

---

[4] William III, p. 4.
[5] Wouter Troost, *William III the Stadholder King* (Routledge, 2005), p.216; Troost, p. 209.
[6] Gustaff Johannes Renier, *William of Orange* (Peter Davis Limited, 1932), p.126.
[7] Owen Brittan, 'The print depiction of King William III's masculinity', *The Seventeenth Century,* 33 (2017) 219-239 (pp. 220-221).
[8] *The London Stage* notes that the last production at Theatre Royal Drury Lane was *The Squire of Alsatia* on 17th May 1688, and the possible next production to be staged at Drury Lane was *The Fortune-Hunters* on 1st March 1689, *The London Stage 1660–1700,* ed. by William Van Lennep (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. 365-370.

comedy in a didactical form of entertaining morality plays.[9] That is not to say that libidinous comedy disappeared completely from the stage: sex-boom set pieces became implicitly reframed and refined to disguise immorality under a semblance of morality. Peter Holland describes how it became increasingly difficult to pitch the right tone to the right audience during the early 1690s which, as Robert D. Hume suggests, was reactionary to the audiences' moralistic standpoint.[10] However, there was a prolific resurgence in the production of new comedies during the 1691–1693 seasons that marked another turning point in fresh dramatic voices who were more inclined to produce sentimental comedy.[11]

The established playwright Thomas D'Urfey was able to navigate successfully the unpredictable changes in dramatic tastes by understanding 'what audiences were laughing at and not laughing at'.[12] John McVeagh's extensive research on D'Urfey's canon highlights that he was 'a favourite with four successive monarchs: Charles II, James II, William III and Anne' – a significant achievement – with a prolific theatrical career spanning thirty two plays between 1676–1703.[13] Despite this, D'Urfey's work has been divisive critically since its production, and a scholarly spotlight on his plays before '1980 was patchy, superficial, always unfavourable, often unfair', and McVeigh's research has so far marked a lonely point of critical attention.[14] During his lifetime, D'Urfey was attacked critically for his immorality by Thomas Shadwell and Jeremy Collier, but lauded by Charles Gildon and Gerard Langbaine, who 'laught

[9] Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 139; Mora and Gómez-Lara, pp. 147-148.
[10] Holland, p. 139; Hume, p. 381.
[11] Hume, p. 381; The new comedies included Thomas Southerne's *The Wives Excuse* (1691), William Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693) and George Powell's *A Very Good Wife* (1693), *The London Stage*, pp. 402-420; Holland, p. 131.
[12] John McVeagh, *Thomas Durfey and Restoration Drama* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000), p. 100.
[13] McVeagh, p. 5; There is an inconsistency in the spelling of D'Urfey or Durfey amongst critics, for the purposes of clarity I will refer to him as D'Urfey.
[14] McVeagh, p. 13.

heartily at his Plays, which is one end of Comedy, or Farce at least; and if the Criticks will deny him to be a good Writer of Comedy, they must allow him a Master of Farce'.[15] Modern criticism continues to reflect contradictorily on D'Urfey's work: Kathleen Lynch suggests that he was a 'mediocre dramatist', and paradoxically, McVeagh, in his own criticism, tempers his perspective of the playwright's writing as being 'not great' but it has 'modest merit and interest'.[16]

I would posit that D'Urfey's enduring success and divisiveness lies within his ability to blend libidinous farcical comedy and a swift response to societal change: particularly the move away from libertinism in favour of monogamous marriage and refusing to commit wholly to prevailing socio-moralistic theatrical trends. D'Urfey's equivocation is foremost within *The Marriage-Hater Match'd* (1692) which contains 'moralistic moments' but 'remains constantly surprizing' to the audience.[17] It is the complex combination of surprising moments which ostensibly promotes virtuousness and implicitly critiques it under the guise of a libidinous farce.

The plot is, by Restoration standards, uncomplicated; however, the large cast of characters and their motivations adds complexity. The main plot revolves around the widowed Lady Subtle's fortune, her desire to keep it, and those trying to gain control of it. Sir Philip Freewit, the titular marriage-hater, has been bequeathed Lady Subtle's fortune by the dead Sir Solomon, but on the proviso that Sir Philip marries her. His libertinistic lifestyle and hatred of marriage means he has no intention of

---

[15] Jeremy Collier objected to D'Urfey on three counts: 'I. *His Profaneness with respect to Religion and the* Holy Scriptures. II. *His Abuse of the Clergy*. III. *His want of Modesty and Regard to the* Audience', Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, (S. Keble, R. Sare, and J. Hindmarsh, 1698), p.196; Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (George West and Henry Clements, 1691), p.179.

[16] Kathleen Lynch, 'Thomas D'Urfey's Contribution To Sentimental Comedy', *Philological Quarterly*, 9 (1930) 249-259 (p. 249); McVeagh, p. 14.

[17] *The London Stage* notes that there is no exact date of the first production; however, 'the play was entered in the *Term Catalogues,* February 1691/2 [and] in all probability, it was first acted not later than January 1691/2', *The London Stage*, p. 404; The play was popular enough to be revived four times in 1699, but there is no record of a modern production of the play, *The London Stage*, p.520; McVeagh, p. 100; McVeagh, p. 108.

marrying the widow as he has broken off their engagement once before. Sir Lawrence Limber schemes to have his son Bias marry Lady Subtle, albeit she has her own strategy to protect her fortune by marrying her idiot Dutch cousin, Van Grin, and ridding herself of Sir Philip. The plot follows Sir Philip's attempts to get hold of Lady Subtle's financial documents with the help of Lovewell, who we later discover is his jilted mistress, Phoebe, in disguise. She is helping him on the promise that he will marry her if they gain Lady Subtle's fortune, although Sir Philip has no intention of marrying her either. Interspersed through this action we follow the cabal of Lady Subtle's family and friends' comedic schemes to get married. Her sister Berenice toys with Captain Darewell, the gluttonous Lady Bumfiddle tries to act as a marriage broker for Sir Lawrence's daughter Margery, and La Pupsey attempts foolishly to ensnare Sir Brainless. The play ends farcically with Lady Subtle still in control of her fortune, Sir Philip's plan in tatters and tricked into marrying Phoebe. None of the cabal's seven marriages are joyous ones: the happiness of Sir Brainless and La Pupsey is short lived on the discovery that she was once an actress, although Van Grin realises too late that marriage to Lady Subtle is a loveless one, and her fortune will never be his.

Robert D. Hume's assertion that the play is merely about 'the taming of the rake' with a 'well-wrought assortment of knaves and fools', is an oversimplification of the characterisations within the play.[18] Hume's focus on the male characters supports a one-dimensional stock view of their attempts at and failures to achieve libertinistic freedom. Hume's lack of consideration of the play's female characters reflects Sir Philip Freewit's bemoaning in Act 1, scene 1, that women's 'Virtue is a rank Cheat in most of the Sex, when once a Womans Pride promotes her Chastity, her Virtue is the

[18] Hume, p. 394.

greatest Vice she has' (1.1.p.3).[19] In contrast to the superficiality of his male characters, D'Urfey creates a diversity of female characters who are psychologically nuanced, intractable, and uninhibited in their criticism of patriarchal hypocrisy. As stated, he was skilled at pleasing the audience, and whilst the growth of female spectators has been 'largely obscured by time and their response to the plays they watched was [...] lost or never recorded', his characterisations could be construed as reacting to this increase: reflecting the evolution of the matriarchy that would be evidenced later in Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins*.[20]

The depiction of the diverse group of women – representing differing stations, ages, and marriage status – once again illuminates the Deleuzian natures of the three women of Masoch. This female 'cabal' (2.1.p.15) allows us to view the natures of the women in sharp contrast throughout their interactions with each other. It is in how they each aim to control the masochistic desires of the men, and their own masochistic inclinations that reflects Deleuze's suggestion that their infliction of pleasure-pain creates a new, submissive man. Nevertheless**,** Deleuze is unable to give any firm intimation to his question 'what does "becoming a man" signify?', merely suggesting that 'to become a man is to be reborn from the woman alone, to undergo a second birth'.[21] In light of this, I would suggest that this irresolution qualifies Deleuze's reasoning for the masculine need for sexual pleasure and masochistic submission, but I would counter his partiality by positing that it affords a deeper understanding of the specificity of female domination and completion of the masochistic contract. To illustrate, in Act 2, scene 1, the widowed Lady Bumfiddle states comedically that 'no

[19] Thomas D'Urfey, *The Marriage-Hater Match'd: A Comedy* (R. Bentley, R. Parker, and Sam. Briscoe, 1693).
[20] Jean I. Marsden, 'Commanding Eyes: Female Spectators and the Restoration Theatrical Repertoire', *Études Épistémè,* 42 (2022), (para. 2 of 27) https://journals.openedition.org/episteme/15472 [Accessed 4 February 2025].
[21] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), p. 99; Deleuze, p. 100.

Man durst put a thing to me, but snap I had him in a moment; [...] and afterwards made him look so like a Fool' (2.1.p.12), and Berenice metaphorically sums up her domination of Captain Darewell as using 'him like a dog [...] I can't help it faith, 'tis in my Nature' (2.1.p.11) – it is in a woman's 'nature' to be in control of men, viewing them as tameable and submissive 'like a dog'. Within the play, women, rather stereotypically, must be seen to outwardly engender virtuousness, but they establish and disguise their own sexual desires, and at the same time, they manipulate men into feeling guilty for their own overly libidinous behaviour.

Consequently, the female masochist, her virtuousness disguised as desire, and the nature of treating men like an animal can be best characterised by La Pupsey, her lapdog Adonis, and her secret desire to marry Sir Brainless. In Act 2, scene 1 we are introduced to her as a farcical, if not embarrassing member of the cabal, providing Lady Subtle and the ladies with a 'rare Diversion [...] the best Comedy will be acted here' (2.1.p.14) in anticipation of watching La Pupsey's desperate, and unrequited attempts at wooing Sir Brainless. Her endeavours are reminiscent of the earlier mentioned Masochean masochists' key conceit of waiting, delay, and anticipation within her fantasy. La Pupsey's wait for Brainless' attention manifests in her hyperbolically sycophantic language and servile flattery; she addresses him comedically

> Your Lordship is the Original of all good breeding, your bel ayr is incomparable, and your Address has something in it so soveraignty graceful, [...] your Lordship's dress is always so *à Droite Novelle et à propos*, [...] I have found his *French* vein, and will accordingly humour it.
>
> (2.1.p.15)

La Pupsey calling Sir Brainless 'your Lordship' and remarking on 'his good breeding' is panegyric, and his 'soveraignty' suggests an expression of her willingness to appear subservient to his regality. However, her remark on his 'good breeding' has a double meaning: ostensibly it is a comment on his lineage, but implicitly it can be read as a reference to the play's obedient dog motif.[22] La Pupsey views him as her desired potential torturer, one that can be trained into becoming entirely dependent upon her, and as submissive as a lapdog. Her increasingly hyperbolic adulation of his superior French taste to flatter and tempt him into her sexual fantasy; indeed, her speech could be read both as a flattery of his French fashion or as an admission that she is willing to perform oral sex, or 'humour' his '*French* vein'.[23] Although Lord Brainless is wise to the 'shell of her Complements' (2.1.p.15), and is more concerned with Berenice, there is an essence of his desire to enter a masochistic contract with La Pupsey.

Her exaggerated attempt to entice Sir Brainless, which has not been contractually completed, has transposed her Deleuzian masochistic guilt on to him. This reversal reflects Deleuze's theorization that 'guilt is turned completely upside down: it is both at its deepest and most absurd', yet her inversion of guilt and guiltlessness does not unreservedly correlate with Deleuze's assertion that guilt must be 'an integral part of the masochist's triumph, and ensures [...] liberation'.[24] La Pupsey has achieved masochistic triumph and liberation precisely through her guiltlessness and the absurdity of making Sir Brainless feel guilty for his emotional

[22] *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Breeding' as 'Bringing to the birth; hatching; production of young' of domesticated animals during the seventeenth century, and 'Origination, production, development', 'Breeding' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [Online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].
[23] Gordon Williams defines "Vein" in *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* as 'allusive of sexual parts' and 'penis-application', Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols (The Athlone Press, 1994, III, pp. 1124-1125.
[24] Deleuze, p. 101.

ignorance: particularly through her competitiveness with Berenice for his affections. La Pupsey continues to humorously pander to Brainless, telling him that she is

> La Pupsey: [...] pleas'd extravagantly with your Lordships particularity in your Stockings to day.
>
> Brainless: Gad, Madam, I must needs own I would not give three-pence for Human Life, but for the honour of being esteemed by the Fair Sex, for – [...] Mrs *Berenice* [...] upon my asking her what Stockings she thought became my Leg best, told me buff colour, or yellow – implying Jealousie [...]
>
> La Pupsey: Nay, we of our Cabal do allow that *Berenice* has some wit.
>
> Brainless: Afterwards I ask'd your Opinion [...] and you told me a Pink [...]
>
> La Pupsey: Your Lordship's most humble Servant
> He's very obsequious of late, I hope he will marry me [*Aside*].
>
> (2.1.p.15)

His sudden about-turn on asking La Pupsey's opinion about something as superficial as stockings marks the ostensible beginnings of his guilt. This volte-face could be viewed as mere preservation of her dignity, but La Pupsey's aside on his obsequiousness 'of late' highlights that she is training him into a new, guilt-ridden man that she can masochistically contract within marriage.

As demonstrated above, D'Urfey's use of the dog imagery to represent the women's treatment of men as animals or play-things as part of the masochistic pleasure-pain contract is illuminated by La Pupsey's ownership and relationship with her lapdog, Adonis. Deleuze's assertion that a woman 'typically figures as an object in the patriarchal system' is called into question when they become a female masochist

and therefore, become the subject in a matriarchal system.[25] La Pupsey's adoration and control of Adonis, or 'Dony', is exemplary of the culmination of the Deleuzian Masochean masochist contract – obedient, submissive, and concerned with pleasure-pain. Her infantile serve and return conversation belies an implicit demand for obedience, commanding the dog to

> [...] come my Jewel, come and sit down with thy Mistress, and love her, and kiss her, [...] that's my sweet Creature, that's my Soul, my Joy, my Life, kiss *Dony*, kiss thy own Mistress agen *Dony* , and so I will, says he, [...] Nay, fye *Dony*, fye; now you don't kiss fair, now you lick me *Dony*, you do [...] what then, says he, what if I did, 'tis no more then I us'd to do, and no more than you like neither, says he? [...] ye lye, ye dear Creature you, and get ye gone from me.
>
> (2.1.p.15)

La Pupsey's inanity shows the ability to train her dog to become her anthropomorphic proxy lover who is her 'Soul' and 'Joy' that can pleasure her in a specific way and is able to send him away if he does not satisfy her, or 'kiss fair'.

To look at this relationship in another way, I would posit that La Pupsey and Adonis represent a differing interpretation of the Deleuzian segregated masochist and torturer paradigm: their relationship demonstrates that there is the potential to enjoy being masochist and torturer synchronously. Adonis' ventriloquised reply, by La Pupsey, that he kisses her 'no more then I us'd to' and 'no more than you like' highlights the terms of their masochistic contract, although this reverses the torturer-masochist model that has been previously examined within this thesis. Instead, the

[25] Deleuze, p. 92.

dog's actions now cause her significant pleasure and pain before she causes his by sending him away. Additionally, D'Urfey naming the dog Adonis references the mythological tale of Venus and Adonis – popularised by both Ovid and William Shakespeare – to implicitly add nuance to this topsy-turvy masochistic relationship. Importantly, in both works Adonis is seen as beautiful but indifferent to Venus' desire. Ovid describes how Adonis is 'now more / handsome than ever, / enough to attract even Venus' who would later become 'entranced by our young man's beauty, [until] she cared no more'; although Shakespeare depicts Venus as 'red and hot as coals of glowing fire / He red for shame, but frosty in desire' in an act of putting Venus in a state of pleasure-pain.[26] These retellings shine a light on La Pupsey's treatment of Adonis to convince Brainless of the masochistic pleasure and pain they could both enjoy should he marry her.

La Pupsey and Brainless' flirtatiousness highlights the Masochean masochists' obsession with ritualistic activity. As Deleuze states, ritualism 'is essential to him, since it epitomizes the world of fantasy' and, as previously discussed in chapter three, the contract is humorously 'caricatured' to reflect the 'ambiguous destination' that the masochism will take.[27] Brainless' fixation on his stockings approaches a form of fetishism – a means of signalling his masochistic desire – that quells his fantasy when the cabal take 'no more notice of my Stockins, than if a fool had wore 'em' (2.1.p.16). La Pupsey takes this opportunity to fixate upon and signal her desire, that 'the Spirit of dullness has posses'd 'em sure; hah, what think'st thou, Jewel? [Adonis] thou woud'st have created my Lord better' (2.1.p.16) in order to mould him into her perfect

[26] Ovid, 'Book X', in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by David Raeburn (Penguin Classics, 2004), pp.380-419, ll. 521-523; Ovid, *Book X*, l. 529; William Shakespeare, 'Venus and Adonis', in *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen (Bloomsbury Press, 2022), pp. 131-229, ll. 34-35.
[27] Deleuze, p. 94; Deleuze, p. 92.

masochistic submissive. Again, by talking to Adonis she brings the depiction of the perfect masochistic relationship to the attention of Brainless.

Importantly, Brainless sees La Pupsey's obvious desire to contract with him. She orders Adonis to perform the same actions to Brainless in an echo of her desire, telling him to 'go, kiss him, and love him, and tell him a pretty Story' (2.1.p.16) to spotlight her need to share the masochistic–torturer dynamic with Brainless. He exclaims that 'this is as extravagant a language as her other, I'll try to imitate her –– And if you can ask Questions, you can answer, *Dony*, who is your bedfellow, *Dony*? […] you happy Creature you' (2.1.p.16) in a confirmation that he is willing to enter the masochistic contract. La Pupsey's willingness, and the contractual terms of this hybridity of masochism, is confirmed when she suggests that

> 'tis not impossible to teach him [Adonis] *French*, for I was saying to him t'other day, *En passant*, *Monsieur le Chien, je suis vôtre tres humble Servant*, and I vow to my thinking, turning about with a *French* Grimace, *Madamoiselle dit il*, *je suis vot Serviture* [28]
>
> (2.1.p.16)

She is his subservient '*humble*' masochist, he is her servant. Brainless ultimately accepts La Pupsey's terms, wistfully commenting that he envies Adonis' 'happiness, and with my self in his condition, for to be so carressed by you, must be the extremity of happiness' (2.1.p.17). The guilt that Brainless is pressurised into feeling by La Pupsey – for his ludicrous ignorance of both her romantic advances and his masochistic desire – illuminates a necessary component in the formation of their

[28] By the way, Mister Dog, I am your most humble servant […] He said: my Lady, I am your servant [my translation].

masochistic contract. His comically compelled guilt allows her to mould him into what can be interpreted as the Deleuzian idealised 'new man', reborn as both her torturer and masochist at the formation of their contractual relationship.[29]

Rather than remaining as a positive element, the coercion of guilt can be seen as a destructive force within the masochistic contract – one that exceeds the fine balance between pleasure-pain and leads to desperate attempts to recreate or remain within the masochistic fantasy. D'Urfey comedically reflects and manipulates his male characters' emotional ignorance, particularly in the aftermath of the disintegration of the relationships between Sir Philip Freewit, Phoebe and Lady Subtle. D'Urfey continues the theatrical sex-comedy conventions by presenting Sir Philip as a stereotypical rake-figure – a marriage hater, egotistical and an opportunist – yet D'Urfey deftly adds nuances to Sir Philip's 'libertinistic' stock character. Ostensibly, he can be seen as a two-dimensional figure, but there is a contradictory duality to Sir Philip's personality that is reminiscent both of Nemours' feigned repentance at the start of *The Princess of Cleve*, and his genuine remorse at its denouement. Rather than Sir Philip journeying towards an emotional awareness by the end of the play, we see this conflicting, if not hypocritical, facet of his psyche from the outset. His repentance and remorse have been seemingly forced upon him after being rejected by Lady Subtle who 'rails [at him] most dreadfully' (1.1.p.3), to the extent that he is completely uninterested in continuing his libertinistic lifestyle, or in continuing a relationship with Phoebe. Sir Philip's lack of interest in libertinism and marriage is another characteristic of the Deleuzian 'new man' – one that is 'reborn from the woman alone', but unlike Deleuze's suggestion that this is a component of the creation of a contract, Sir Philip's own guilt destroys his masochistic desire.[30] In Act 1, scene 1, he reveals the

[29] Deleuze, p. 100.
[30] Deleuze, p. 100.

crux of his marriage-hating – he was once engaged to Lady Subtle, but he was jilted when she discovered that Phoebe was his pregnant mistress. Since this rejection, Sir Philip states that he has 'a strange Antipathy to Marriage, which (not my want of Love) has been the cause of my not doing thee [Phoebe] the common Justice, in a recompensing that dear Virgin Treasure thou gav'st up to my Arms' (1.1.p.2) in an admission of his culpability at his abandonment of Phoebe. Sir Philip's 'Antipathy' is a disavowal of his own actions to both her and Lady Subtle, which also belies an uncertainty towards whether he should feel guilty. This uncertainty correlates with Lady Subtle's forming him, through their masochistic partnership, into becoming a 'strange' new man who has been ejected from his masochistic fantasy – leaving him unable to create a new contract with Phoebe.

Deleuze's theorisation that 'guilt is turned completely upside down [and] is an integral part of the masochist's triumph and ensures his liberation' allows another interpretation of Sir Philip's avoidance of marriage, or his reluctance to resume intimacy.[31] It is in his denial of marriage, or re-entering any form of masochistic relationship, that creates his own personal form of liberation. Sir Philip's lack of guilt that he was made to feel by Lady Subtle for the ruination of their relationship ensures that his pleasure-pain can continue to be experienced. Moreover, Sir Philip sees 'Marriage [as] such an unreasonable reward' (1.1.p.3) for the financial impetus of gaining Lady Subtle's fortune. His masochistic punishment of self-denial 'resolves the anxiety arising from guilt and makes possible the forbidden pleasure' and Sir Philip turns the guilt completely upside down'.[32] To avoid the dispelling of his personal masochistic fantasy he superimposes his guilt onto her by hyperbolically casting doubt on her virtuousness, questioning

[31] Deleuze, p. 101.
[32] Deleuze, p. 101.

Sir Philip: Her Mourning? why has the Snake then battened in the skin of her Hypocrisie so long? [...] the Devil's in her; why this is quite contrary to a Widows Policy, she should have new wash'd and furbish'd up the premises longer before this for a new Comer [...]

Darewell: Ha, ha, ha, I have heard of your Whoring too, Sir, she has told us all within yonder.

Sir Philip: Ay, and would have told thee of her Husband's Cuckoldom too, as well, if she had not a design to draw another into the noose.

Darewell: [...] this is malice, all the World allow her to be virtuous.

Sir Philip: They allow her to be proud indeed, and consequently ill natur'd and reserv'd.

(1.1.p.3)

The use of the Fall of Eve imagery of 'Snake' and 'Devil' implies that Sir Philip has no blame in his fall from Lady Subtle's favour, and it is ultimately her loss that she is not with him, and her actions absolve him of all guilt. Sir Philip attempts to persuade Darewell that it is she who is 'contrary' to the stereotypical libidinous widow trope by not having 'wash'd and furbish'd up the premises' for a new lover. Nevertheless**,** he overreaches in the apportioning of guilt, veering towards 'malice' rather than an insinuating, humorous implication that allows the viewer to doubt his utter conviction of blamelessness. This perverse belief suggests the artificiality of masochistic fantasy which leads the audience to question whether the emotional clauses to the contract should be seen as defined and visible junctures between masochist and torturer.

As indicated above, Sir Philip is the Deleuzian new man who is submissive, humiliated, and the product of Lady Subtle's masochistic torment. However, Deleuze's

schema for the masochist and torturer relationship does not offer any resolution to its contractual end. I would suggest that Sir Philip and Lady Subtle's relationship is an exemplar of how the masochist and torturer remain contractually bound within their masochistic contract, albeit paradoxically not in a relationship. Sir Philip and Lady Subtle have no desire to re-enter the masochistic fantasy but both seemingly remain in a cycle of masochistic desire for each other. Sir Philip remains submissive to Lady Subtle whereby he is tortured by the lure of her fortune, and she appears to remain submissive to Sir Philip in order to retain her fortune – reflecting what Deleuze suggests is 'a complex strategy to protect his world of fantasy and symbols' – the symbol here is fortune and freedom.[33] In a return to the animal trope, Lady Subtle tells Sir Philip and her would-be masochistic husband, Van Grinn, in Act 3, scene 1 that she 'will use [them] like Crows, Magpies and Jackdaws; I will do more than ever Providence did for ye – I will put something into your Heads, something of weight, Puppies, not a word more, march' (3.1.p.25). In an echo of La Pupsey, Adonis and Sir Brainless, Lady Subtle sets out her contractual terms, 'putting something' into Sir Philip's and Van Grinn's heads by telling them they are as trainable as 'puppies' who she can mould into new men and who will then 'march' at her command.

The couple's comedic game of deceptive and controlling behaviour continues throughout the play: each attempting to avoid returning to a formal masochistic relationship, yet each acting as if they are still operating within the terms of the contract. In Act 4, scene 2, we see that Sir Philip has unsuccessfully attempted to gain Lady Subtle's papers, and they both openly admit their masochistic demands, Sir Philip conceding that

[33] Deleuze, p. 165.

Sir Philip: My damnation is preparing and here are my Tormentors ready …]

Lady Subtle: Now for my Game with him, I'll try what Wit he has, now Fortune turns the scale – […] Fool, thou shalt be my Days and Nights, diversion, I'll never eat but the Theme of all the Jests, shall be Sir *Philip's* Wit, Sir *Philip's* Humour, and when I go to Bed, my very Woman viewing the Jewels, shall even burst with Laughing, and cry out, oh silly, silly, silly Marriage-hater.

(4.2.pp.40-41)

Sir Philip's unsuccessful attempt at stealing the fortune damns him into submission to Lady Subtle. To win her fortune he must marry her, and she must become his 'Tormentor' by destroying his own masochistic fantasy. Lady Subtle takes on the mantle of the typical Deleuzian torturer – cold and cruel, creating pleasure and pain for her victims, but in contravention of the contract that both masochist and torturer freely enter. Lady Subtle forces the masochistic torture onto Sir Philip. Her delivery of pain will consume her 'days and nights' by mirroring Sir Philip's masochistic desire, and his 'Wit' and 'Humour' are reflected back to him. Lady Subtle's humorous demolition of Sir Philip ends with the epitome of callousness towards a man and libertine. She calls into question the size of his manhood and virility. When 'viewing the Jewels' she 'burst(s) with Laughing' to belittle, control and demand the submission of her victim.

As indicated earlier, the masochistic-torturer paradigm is not solely between Sir Philip and Lady Subtle, but includes his mistress, Phoebe. Lady Subtle's use of guilt means his desire to return and enter a masochistic contract with Phoebe is forestalled throughout the play. Notwithstanding Phoebe's illegitimate child with Sir Philip, another way of looking at their relationship is that she refuses to believe their

masochistic contract has ended and she laments questioningly 'Why then smile Fate, whilst I my wit pursue, / For such a Fortune, such a Husband too, / What won't a Maid in my condition do?' (1.1.p.3).[34] Indeed, she chooses to appear as a man called Lovewell to remain close to Sir Philip and to be able to persuade him to return to their original masochistic fantasy. Although their relationship is ostensibly controlled by Sir Philip's constant attempt at outwitting marriage to Phoebe, it is she who is in control of him. She uses the transference of guilt of his desertion, and her pregnancy, to keep the desire of pleasure-pain clear within his mind both as a remembrance and a restitution of the relationship they once enjoyed, and she believes can be revived.

Lady Subtle uses her sexuality and fortune to control Sir Philip, but Phoebe wears a masculine costume to appear his equal in social position and patriarchal authority; this disguise allows her to withdraw from the stereotypically incessant protesting of a spurned lover, or that of an obedient, submissive, and subjugated fallen woman. Her ambiguity of gender – the audience only infer that she is a woman throughout the whole play – can be read as a form of the Deleuzian new man.[35] We see her journey towards a Deleuzian rebirth unfolding as the play progresses: in Act 3, scene 3, Sir Philip again tells Phoebe that

---

[34] A critical discourse on illegitimacy within the theatre was popular in the face of the moralistic stance of the audiences. Kate Gibson's research suggests that 'disorder was […] the main narrative function of illegitimate characters' by highlighting the immorality of having children out of wedlock. However, D'Urfey uses Phoebe and Sir Philip's child as a repercussion 'to create jeopardy and illustrate the comic or subversive consequences' of extra-marital sex, rather than a serious critique of its vice and sin. More pertinently, Gibson further theorises that theatrical portrayal was 'used to illustrate the subversive potential of female sexual agency' which, as discussed, defines the characterisation of Phoebe, Kate Gibson *Illegitimacy, Family, and Stigma in England, 1660-1834* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 34. As will be investigated later in this chapter, the comedic narrative use of illegitimacy occurs in both John Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* and E. Polwhele's *The Frolicks*.

[35] The character of Phoebe/Lovewell is gender ambiguous, the character would have been recognisable to the audience. During the play's initial run, the part was played by the popular actress, Elizabeth Barry, *The London Stage*, p. 404; Thomas Southerne also employed female-male crossdressing in *Sir Anthony Love: or, The Rambling Lady* (1690), the heroine, Lucia, is disguised as the titular Sir Antony throughout the play, and in similarity to Phoebe in *The Marriage-Hater Match'd*, the audience could only infer that Sir Anthony was a woman as the character was played by the actress Susanna Mountford, *The London Stage,* pp. 388-389.

Sir Philip: I will always love thee, thou may'st assure thy self

Lovewell: Love me, and keep me like a Slave dishonour'd thus [...] perform your Promise, and take me for your Wife.

Sir Philip: My wife, then I should never love thee more.

Lovewell: Have I not purchas'd thee with Toyl and Study, paid with my Labour and industrious Wit, a Ransom for repeal of my Dishonour, nay, brought ye a fortune too beyond your hopes [...] you know y'are mine by bargain.

(3.3.p.31)

It is here that we see the summation of Phoebe's transference of guilt on to Sir Philip – she no longer wishes to be kept like a 'Slave dishonour'd' with a desperation to return, through marriage, to the masochistic contract with which they were once bound. Phoebe becomes a new 'man' who sees Sir Philip as having been contractually 'purchas'd' by 'bargain' and therefore, hers to control.

Subsequently, Phoebe, dressed as Lovewell, signals that she desires to be both his masochist and torturer as both man and woman; she suggests there is 'no truth nor honour in the Sex, no Balmy Cure for betray'd Innocence too fondly trusting in deceitful Man? Ah, no, I find there is not, let Cunning then, the Woman's never failing Art assist me' (3.3.p.32) which uses both her masculine disguise and her true gender in which to control Sir Philip. I would posit that the 'never failing Art' of cunning not only allows the women of the play to torture the men, but also to enjoy being masochistic themselves: by transposing guilt on to men, women are free to create a unique fantasy that perfectly balances their implicit sexual desire with explicit gender

roles. This unique, gender specific fantasy creates the Deleuzian new man – or woman, who can train and control their masochist into submission.

Female tortuous control extends to the dissatisfaction of the male fantasy and an unsatisfied masochistic desire. Ultimately, within the play D'Urfey's female characters all marry – '*Hymen* has been sacrific'd to sufficiently [...] six Couple have lovingly paid their Devotion to his Altar' (5.3.p.49); however, the new wives themselves have carefully steered their husbands into matrimony and generated a pleasure-pain torture of frustration in, as Darewell suggests, a '*Marriage Masquerade*' (5.3.p.48). At the denouement of the play, La Pupsey finally coerces Lord Brainless into marrying her with her hyperbolic platitudes 'like a little God' (5.3.p.49) and he takes the 'place of Monsieur *L'Chien*' (5.3.p.53) – although in a cruel twist, once he is ensnared in her desire, he is ashamed by discovering she is a retired actress in a metatheatrical joke. An unmerciful torture is saved for Sir Philip by both Lady Subtle and Phoebe. Lady Subtle escapes his fortune hunting by tricking him into marrying Phoebe, cursing that

> I hope she'll [Phoebe] make thee pay for 'em, – and since merely to abuse me thou hast Married – for still I know thou hatest it; may Discord, Jealousie, hated Barrenness, with all the Curses of the Marriage-State, be perpetual plague.
>
> (5.3.pp.47-48)

Phoebe's cunning act of stealing Lady Subtle's papers ensures that Sir Philip remains miserably penniless and compounds his pain by tricking him into marrying her. She vows that 'I'll keep thee poor, thus I'm reveng'd of thee, I'll never pay thee for my infamy' (4.2.p.40). In an act of final control, Sir Philip must join Phoebe's masochistic

contract and conclude his marriage-hating fantasy – 'the Marriage-Hater Catch'd at last' (5.3.p.51).

The Reality of Marriage in John Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife*

Comedy would become increasingly conservative during the 1690s, with playwrights, such as Thomas Southerne and William Congreve, producing work that highlighted the immorality of a libertinistic lifestyle – with only tacit gestures of bawdiness to please a dwindling desire for risqué material. This ill-defined progression from the libertinistic, abrasive comedy to the instructive, sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century is clearly exhibited in John Vanbrugh's comedy of marital discord *The Provok'd Wife* (1697).[36] Vanbrugh's work has received more critical attention than Thomas D'Urfey's; however, modern scholarly research is predominantly concerned with his architectural career. The analysis of *The Provok'd Wife* to date focuses on the historical implications of the protagonists' hostility, failing marriage and the spectre of divorce. In this part of the chapter, I will consider how the depiction of marriage, and its collapse, illuminates Deleuze's theory that a symbolic ritual leads to the culmination of the masochistic contract, and how the dynamic of pleasure-pain can be created through the guilt of a failed marriage. The question which arises is whether extreme hostility between the masochist and torturer can form part of a masochistic fantasy – or is a rejection of masochistic desire. Finally, I will investigate whether

[36] *The London Stage* notes that the date for the 'first performance of the play is not known'; however, it was advertised 'in the *Post Boy,* 11-13 May 1697, suggests that it was first acted about mid-April'; the play remained popular, being revived on an almost yearly basis until 1800, *The London Stage*, p. 477; The play continues to be popular and was staged in 2019 by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Shakespeare Company, (2019) https://www.rsc.org.uk/restoration-plays/the-provoked-wife> [Accessed 15 January 2025].

sentimentalism creates a destructive or a beneficial potency to masochism which allows for its continuity.[37]

John Vanbrugh's career as playwright began during a time of significant change within the London theatres. After the acrimonious split within the United Company in 1695, two theatre companies were created – the reformed United and Betterton's – which generated an increased demand for plays and, in causality, led to a surge in new dramatic voices writing for the London stage.[38] As previously stated, Thomas D'Urfey's theatrical career would continue; however, Vanbrugh and his contemporaries would fill the creative vacuum left by established dramatists, such as Wycherley, having long left the theatres and others, including Dryden, who were coming to the end of their theatrical careers.[39] The moralistic standpoint of audiences became entrenched as the decade continued, and the decline of overtly libidinous comedy, which D'Urfey had successfully navigated, continued to impact the stage. Brian Cormon suggests that, 'libertinistic values [were] replaced by a new set of social virtues that emphasize the importance of honesty, decency, amiability, and integrity' that would attempt to openly condemn and reform rather than reflect the libidinous behaviour which had defined previous comical portrayals.[40] As Richard Blackmore remarks in the preface to his poem *Prince Arthur* (1695), a playwright's '*chief business is to instruct, to make*

[37] This doctoral thesis aims to expand on the research on representations of love in Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* and *The Provok'd Wife* for my master's dissertation, Dominic Boden-Tebbutt, 'Masochean Masochism in Restoration Comedy' (unpublished master's dissertation, Queen Mary University of London, 2020).
[38] Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 377; Colley Cibber would laud Vanbrugh's ability to successfully respond to the need for new plays, stating that 'Sir *John Vanbrugh*'s Pen, is not to be a little admir'd, for its Spirit, Ease, and Readiness, in producing Plays so fast upon the Neck of one another', Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber* (George Faulkner, 1740), p. 127; For example, William Congreve's *The Old Bachelor* was staged in 1693 and Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* in 1696.
[39] William Wycherley's last play was *The Plain Dealer* in 1675, Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* was staged in 1687; Edward Ravenscroft produced plays in 1694 and 1697. Dryden's theatrical output was sporadic during the 1690s: five plays were produced 1690-1694, but there is a six-year absence from the theatre before his final play in 1700.
[40] Brian Cormon, 'Comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk, pp. 52-69 (p. 65).

Mankind Wiser and Better' rather than revelling in licentiousness and bodily pleasure.[41]

When D'Urfey wrote *The Marriage-Hater Match'd* there was no stable critical consensus about morality-immorality; the theatre remained seen as sinful, vice-ridden and in need of reform. The essayist James Wright lamented that 'Plays should be (and have always been in the best Reform'd and most Civilized times) Moral Representations, but now most of our New Comedies are become the very Pictures of Immorality' which highlights the oscillatory subjectivity of socio-moralistic views.[42] *The Provok'd Wife* was to suffer critically from accusations of 'lewdness' by Jeremy Collier in his pamphlet *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698).[43] In an attempt to moralise the theatre, Collier attacked several playwrights, including Dryden, Wycherley and Vanbrugh for their indecency and profanity, stating that '[N]othing has gone farther in Debauching the Age than the Stage Poets, and Play-House' (sig.A2r). Vanbrugh publicly defended the play against Collier, arguing that it was a realistic rendering of contemporaneous hypocritical socio-morality and that the

> Stage is a Glass [a mirror] for the World to view it self in; People ought therefore to see themselves as they are; if it makes their Faces too Fair; they won't know they are Dirty, and by consequence will neglect to wash 'em. [44]

[41] Richard Blackmore, *Prince Arthur. An Heroick Poem* (Awnsham and John Churchill, 1695), sig. A1r.
[42] James Wright, *Country Conversations* (Henry Bonwicke, 1694), p. 4.
[43] Collier, p. 143.
[44] John Vanbrugh, *A Short Vindication of The Relapse and The Provoked Wife, From Immorality and Prophaneness*, (H.Walwyn, 1698), p. 46.

Vanbrugh would later concede that if the play was immoral, then he 'might have been excus'd for the Writing, tho' liable to some Blame for the Publishing it' in a flippant retaliation towards the critic.[45] Vanbrugh's irresoluteness on the play's moral stance, like his predecessors Wycherley and Lee, has led to critical indecision on his unclear positionality within the hard or sentimental comedy traditions. Paul Mueschke and Jeanette Fleisher's significant research on the life and works of Vanbrugh suggests that he has 'never been adequately defined', and has 'suffered the penalty of "not belonging" to either genre'.[46] They suggest tentatively that Vanbrugh is a sentimentalist – his work is 'essentially an optimistic falsification of human nature by exalting a standard of impeccable but conventional morality'.[47] In contrast, Robert D. Hume is forthright in his suggestion that Vanbrugh 'is largely of the hard comedy persuasion', but admits that his characters are more nuanced than the 'blunt sex characteristics' of sex-boom comedy.[48]

As previously investigated within this thesis, the libertine's avoidance of marriage was a common trope within plays of this period, and a keystone of any critical accusation of immorality. Nevertheless, *The Provok'd Wife* was ostensibly part of a growing dramatical focus on the depiction of marriage after a rake's reformation.[49] Yet Vanbrugh esoterically chooses to question if reformation is an unrealistic achievement; to examine whether marriage can provide any pleasure, and whether virtuousness is merely a masquerade for licentiousness. I would posit that the *The Provok'd Wife* is a realist play, and Vanbrugh ostensibly writes in the sentimental

---

[45] Vanbrugh, p. 49.
[46] Paul Mueschke and Jeanette Fleisher, 'A Re-Evaluation of Vanbrugh', *Modern Language Association*, 49 (1934) 848-889, (p. 848).
[47] Mueschke and Fleisher, p. 850.
[48] Hume, p. 414.
[49] Cormon, p. 65; Marital discord was not a new trope: divorce was a subject of Edward Howard's *The Womens Conquest* (1670), Thomas Betterton's *The Amorous Widow* (c.1670),Thomas Shadwell's *The Humorists* (1670) and Nathaniel Lee's *The Princess of Cleve* (1680); whilst Thomas Shadwell's *The Woman Captain* (1679), and E. Polewhele's *The Frolicks* (1671) focus on marital discord.

tradition. Within an emotionally disturbing plot, which should stereotypically lead to sexual reformation, Vanbrugh's moralistic pragmatism creates nuanced characters, in a dark comedy, that offers a damning social critique on the contrariety of moralistic revolution**.** Vanbrugh deftly dramatizes the humour that emerges from observational realism to highlight the hypocrisy of a virtuous society, which was seemingly unable to purge the desire for libertinistic freedom from either reality, or the theatre.

There is a simplicity to the plot of *The Provok'd Wife*, and a limited cast of characters allows the viewer to focus on the intricacies of their relationships. The play is framed by the vitriolic breakdown of the marriage between Sir John and Lady Brute – Sir John rueing that he married her out of lust, and she for his money. The pair constantly bicker and insult each other, both knowing that divorce is an impossibility. Lady Brute and her niece, Bellinda, discuss how she can escape the marriage, and out of anguish, Lady Brute considers adultery with the gallant, Constant. At the same time, Constant's friend Heartfree has met with the foolish Lady Fanciful to deter her romantic intentions and told her that she is everything he despises in womanhood. She believes his cruelty is a declaration of love and falls more in love with him. After this altercation, Heartfree sees Bellinda and, uncharacteristically, falls in love with her. Later, Sir John decides to go out for the evening, and Lady Brute and Bellinda take the opportunity to meet Constant and Heartfree in Spring Garden. Lady Fanciful sees Heartfree and Bellinda together and becomes jealous, vowing to win Heartfree by any means possible. The foursome decide to return to Lady Brute's house, but Sir John returns early having been arrested for his drunken behaviour, and Constant and Heartfree must hide. The pair are discovered by Sir John, who wrongly accuses Constant of cuckoldry – Constant denies this and proposes a duel, only for Sir John to hastily retreat from the confrontation. Lady Fanciful dramatically appears and pretends to be married to Heartfree but is exposed as a fraud. At the denouement,

Heartfree marries Bellinda, and we are left viewing Sir John and Lady Brute as unhappy as they were at the beginning of the play.

Robert D. Hume is unequivocal in labelling *The Provok'd Wife* as 'cold' and 'one of the harshest marital discord plays in the whole period', which is an apposite view of Sir John and Lady Brute's embittered attitudes towards each other.[50] Nevertheless, Hume's statement has the potential to be inexact; he simply views the Brutes' marriage failure in essence, rather than examining the elements and reasoning behind their unhappiness. Scholars, such as Cormon and Hume, highlight that Vanbrugh 'looks more thoughtfully at the problems of dysfunctional marriages', and that he is 'not against marriage', but they offer a limited examination of the Brutes' conflict.[51] It is only when we closely view the roots of their hyperbolically brutal antagonism, specifically towards the nature and inescapability of marriage, that we see the entirety of Vanbrugh's comedic critique of the appearance of virtuousness through moralistic reformation.

As investigated within the preceding chapters, I have posited that the masochistic contract is comparable with the law and contract of marriage, and how the contract forces the masochist to become the Deleuzian idealised 'new man' who can be trained into reformation and submission by a female torturer.[52] In consideration of this Deleuzian process, I would suggest that as the play opens, Sir John Brute has finalised his pleasure-pain contract through his 'two years' Marriage' (1.1.p.1) to Lady Brute, but his masochistic fantasy does not correlate with the contractual reality.[53] At the beginning of Act 1, scene 1, he soliloquises that 'No boy was ever so weary of his

[50] Hume, p. 261; Hume, p. 414.
[51] Cormon, p. 65; Hume, p. 414.
[52] Deleuze, p. 100.
[53] John Vanbrugh, *The Provok'd Wife: A Comedy* (R. Wellington, and Sam. Briscoe 1697).

Tutor' (1.1.p.1) and that his expectation of marriage has 'debaucht my five Senses, Every thing I see, every thing I hear, every thing I feel, every thing I smell, and every thing I taste – methinks has Wife in't' (1.1.p.1). His use of the word 'debauched' is a play on words: rather than the sexual indulgence that he had contracted for, his masochistic fantasy has been negatively debauched – its destruction has become a panoptical sensory frustration and obsession.[54] Moreover, his continual use of double entendre can be seen as a subtle critique that neither libidinous behaviour nor sentimentalism are reasons for marriage. The play opens with him vehemently stating 'What cloying meat is Love – when Matrimony's the Sauce to it' (1.1.p.1), punning on the word cloying as both gratifying desire and the cause of loathing.[55]

Sir John's barbarous declaration that his marriage has been a failure, and destroyed his masochistic desire can be viewed as a new form of punishment – although one that he is submitting to unwillingly. He believes that by marrying a 'young Lady, a fine Lady, a Witty Lady, a Virtuous Lady' (1.1.p.1) he has gained societal respectability through the formation of a masochistic contract with Lady Brute. Yet the 'secret Curse entail'd upon the very Name of Wife' (1.1.p.1) has destroyed his masochistic desire. His risible attack shows his frustration at being confined and caught between having contracted with Lady Brute in the false belief in the continuation of pleasure-pain, and the need for visible virtuous domesticity. Sir John's impasse illuminates Deleuze's theorisation that 'the masochist should not by contrast be regarded as gladly submitting to it [the punishment]. The element of contempt in

[54] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Debauch' as both 'to seduce from virtue or morality; to pervert, deprave, or corrupt morally; esp. to corrupt or deprave by intemperance, or sensual indulgence' and 'to damage or spoil in quality, 'Debauch' in The Oxford English Dictionary [Online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].
[55] *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Cloy' as both a 'to satiate, surfeit, gratify beyond desire)' and 'to overload with food, so as to cause loathing; to surfeit or satiate (with over-feeding, or with richness, sweetness […] of food)', 'Cloy' in The Oxford English Dictionary [Online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025]; The word 'cloy' could also be read as or an implicit jibe by Vanbrugh at societal need for virtuousness.

the submission [...] conceals a criticism and a provocation'.[56] Sir John exploits the institution of marriage and virtuousness to rationalise his submission, and his comedically hyperbolic vehemence belies an unintentional enjoyment of the pleasure and pain that his wife brings him by remaining within an unhappy marriage.

It is ironic that Sir John believes that his marriage is a new, masochistic punishment rather than pleasure-pain from a positive connubiality. His painful remonstrance and pleasurable antagonism of Lady Brute reflects Deleuze's suggestion that scrupulous application of 'the law', or marriage subverts the moral law, and Sir John's and Lady Brute's exchange demonstrates how the law's 'absurdity [...] provoke[s] the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or conjure'.[57] When Sir John meets Lady Brute in Act 1, scene 1, he goads

> Sir John: Six to four you had been in the wrong [...] again; for what I lik'd yesterday I don't like to day, and what I like to day; 'tis odds I mayn't like to morrow.
>
> Lady Brute: But if I had ask'd you what you liked? [...] I wish I did but know how I might please you.
>
> Sir John: Ay, but that sort of knowledge is not a Wife's Talent.
>
> Lady Brute: What e'er my Talent is, I'm sure my Will has ever been to make you easie.
>
> Sir John: If Women were to have their Wills, the World wou'd be finely govern'd!
>
> (1.1.p.2)

[56] Deleuze, pp. 87-88.
[57] Deleuze, p. 88.

Sir John's argument is deliberately obtuse. His changeable dislike of something 'yesterday', 'to day' or 'to morrow' highlights his desire to continue with his submissive punishment – and to provoke Lady Brute into discovering new ways to create his pleasure and pain. His verbal goading and sparring are his form of absurd personal entertainment, attempting to force Lady Brute back into the position of his torturer, but on his contractual terms rather than her own 'talent'. Nevertheless, he humorously refuses to listen to her admission that she has always had the 'Will' to make him 'easie', and it has not altered since their marriage. Lady Brute suggests implicitly that he has placed himself in this new, unwarranted submissive position – which reflects the Deleuzian disorder that marital harmony was meant to prevent. Sir John's comical rejoinder to her that men would be 'finely govern'd' if women had 'Wills' highlights his forced submission to her punishment through their continuing hostility.

Ostensibly, Sir John's submission reflects Deleuze's theorisation that the masochist 'zealously' embraces' the law so that he can 'partake of its pleasures', but Deleuze is overly exact in this hypothesis.[58] His overall, if not sweeping, conjecture limits the masochist to abiding by the law of the contract; however, Deleuze does not allow for any variation in the torturer's demands, or the masochist becoming bound to a contract that fails to fulfil their desire. Sir John's effectual imprisonment by the law raises the question of whether remaining within the marriage, and being forced into submission, can be considered truly as masochistically pleasurable. Sir John's provocation of Lady Brute illuminates his contradictory situation: his masochistic contract has been broken, but he cannot control its renewal or pleasure; he is under duress to embrace his marriage, but his zealousness lies in escaping its legal constraints.

[58] Deleuze, p. 88.

Derek Hughes suggests that Vanbrugh appropriates 'the language and rituals of justice' to claim the 'privilege of power' with which to portray the couples' unattainable and bitter desire to be free from each other.[59] Hughes' use of the words 'justice' and 'power' are an outwardly compelling analysis of Sir John's language and behaviour, but I would suggest that Sir John's judicial language echoes that of the Deleuzian legal language he used to form the masochistic contract with Lady Brute. As previously discussed in my analysis of *The Plain-Dealer*, judicial power and lexis are used to secure the terms of the masochist-torturer contract, yet Vanbrugh presents a counterpoint to this: justice and power now necessitate remaining within a contract that cannot be terminated. Or to put it differently – he must remain married. In Act 5, scene 5, after he finds Constant hiding, Sir John laments

> What the plague did I marry her for? I knew she did not like me; if she had, she wou'd have lain with me [...] But that's past, and I have her. And now, what shall I do with her – [...] Shall I die a Heroe? or live a Rascal? –– Why, Wiser Men than I, have long since concluded, that a living Dog is better than a dead Lion.
>
> (5.5.p.74)

Sir John evokes the biblical proverb that '[he who is] joyned to all the living, there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion' to highlight his reality: that of remaining humble in the face of Lady Brute's continuing torture.[60] He admits that he would rather continue to live as a submissive and lowly 'Dog' rather than losing his

[59] Hughes, p. 397.
[60] *The Holy Bible Containing The Old Testament and The New: Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised by His Majesties Special Command,* Authorised King James Version *(Printed by Charles Bill, and the Executrix of Thomas Newcomb deceas'd; Printers to the King and Queens most Excellent Majesties, 1692)*, Ecclesiastes, 9.4.

stature as a feeble 'dead Lion' in an admission that it better to endure, rather than resist, his fate. Equally, I would suggest that Sir John's words are reminiscent of the same animalistic metaphor that Thomas D'Urfey employs in *The Marriage Hater Match'd*. Sir John's identification with a 'living Dog' implies that he would rather remain a trained masochist who will perpetually be tortured with no pleasure, rather than a deceased beast who has neither the possibility of creating a masochistic fantasy, nor obtaining the virtue of marriage. Hughes suggests that the Brutes represent a 'humanity mocked by commandments' that foregrounds the problems of marriage.[61] Despite this, their resentful disunion could be understood through Deleuze's assertion that the 'masochist aims not to mitigate the law, but [...] emphasise its extreme severity' which 'results in [...] enslavement [...] as the dreadful object of the contract'.[62] Sir John's self-searching and questioning of 'the plague' that made him marry Lady Brute, and his morbid lexis highlights ostensibly, with some exaggeration, the severity of his punishment. The inescapability of his marriage and the destruction of his masochistic fantasy, which has not provided tortuous pleasure, merely leaves him to endure the pain from remaining enslaved to his marriage contract. It could be argued further that Sir John's language reflects what Deleuze proposes as exemplifying 'the very type of a culture bound relationship that is artificial', a 'caricatured' restriction on outlook and character which is created by society and obliges Sir John to remain within a marriage for the sake of respectability.[63]

This mocking caricature of marriage as a form of enslavement, and the couple's vitriolic behaviour towards each other, blurs the contractual distinction between who is the masochist, and who is the torturer. Lady Brute is as accountable as Sir John for

[61] Hughes, p. 396.
[62] Deleuze, pp. 91-92.
[63] Deleuze, p. 92.

the marriage failure – marrying him for his money and then refusing to sleep with him – causing his torture, and his cruelty is a torture inflicted upon her. In contrast to his excessive retaliatory tyrannical behaviour, Lady Brute offers an understated emotional complexity within the conflict. It is in Lady Brute's emotional intelligence that we see her at her most tortuous, and tortured. After her sparring with Sir John in Act 1, scene 1, she admits to Bellinda that

> I thought I had Charms enough to govern him; [...] my Vanity has deceiv'd me, and my Ambition has made me uneasie. But some comfort still; if one wou'd be reveng'd of him, these are good times; a Woman may have a Gallant, and a separate maintenance too –– The surly Puppy – yet he's a Fool for't [...] But who knows how far he may provoke me. I never lov'd him, yet I have been ever true to him.
>
> (1.1.pp.2-3)

Her ability to 'govern' Sir John in his masochistic fantasy has failed, and Lady Brute has been 'deceiv'd' into thinking that creating a contract could have been possible. Mueschke and Fleisher argue that Lady Brute has been 'endowed [...] with sufficient intelligence to enable her to approach her problem rationally', and here she self-assuredly acknowledges she must continue his torture as he is 'a surly Puppy' who is 'a Fool' for her delivery of pleasure-pain.[64]

Lady Brute is aware that by remaining within the loveless marriage her position as masochist must also involuntarily continue – questioning how far she can be provoked by his heartless torture, and equally the pleasure she is receiving, continues

[64] Mueschke and Fleisher, p. 873.

to keep her 'ever true to him'. Lady Brute's statement that being 'reveng'd' would lead to 'good times' with a 'Gallant' illustrates Deleuze's theory that the (typically male) masochist sees

> the law as a punitive process and [...] begins by having the punishment inflicted upon himself; once he has undergone the punishment, he feels that he is allowed or indeed commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid.[65]

The law, and the socio-moralism of virtuousness, demands that Lady Brute must remain punitively within the marriage – the marriage breakdown and enduring 'barbarous usage' (1.1.p.5) by Sir John is her punishment. Nevertheless, her choice of words in this speech signifies the beginnings of her desire to find an extra-marital lover to experience pleasure with – contravening the law of monogamous marriage, to also regain control of her masochistic desire and position as torturer. Lady Brute claims that finding pleasure elsewhere is her right as an abused wife, asserting that 'Coquetry is one of the main ingredients in the natural Composition of a Woman' (1.1.p.5) and that her desire is 'vengeance, which of all Vengeance pleases women best' (1.1.p.5).

As previously examined, there is a blurring of masochist-torturer positionality between the married couple; however**,** Lady Brute's desire for the gallant, Constant, displays her need to create a new position as torturer, turning him into a 'poor Creature [who is] so Spurr'd on by desire, and so rein'd in with fear' (1.1.p.4). Throughout the play, the equivocal flirtatiousness in their dialogues reveals their desire to form a masochistic contract with each other, although Lady Brute consistently remains in a

[65] Deleuze, p. 88.

position of dominance. She governs and tortures Constant through her teasing avoidance of intimacy, her marital status, and a hypocritical appearance of virtuousness – aligning herself with the coldness and cruelty of the Deleuzian Masochean ideal woman. In Act 2, scene 1, Constant admits to Heartfree that he would

> Constant: almost wish to see my cruel Mistress make the self-same use of what Heaven has done for her, [...] but she's cold [...] still cold as the Northern Star.
>
> Heartfree: So are all Women by Nature, which makes 'em so willing to be warmed.
>
> Constant: Oh, don't profane the sex! prithee think 'em all Angels for her sake, for she's virtuous even to a fault.
>
> (2.1.pp.16-17)

Constant's admission that she is a 'cruel Mistress' and 'cold' conveys with little ambiguity that Lady Brute has the mercenary harshness of his idealised woman – who can torture him unrelentingly into a submissive position. Equally, Constant's analogizing of Lady Brute as being as cold 'as the Northern Star' suggests that her cruelty is his guiding light, leading him towards being her masochist: her tantalising offer of pleasure and pain has become his all-consuming desire. Constant dismisses Heartfree's assumption that women can be devilishly 'warmed' to give pleasure – retorting that woman, and by extension Lady Brute, offer both a pleasure and pain through their angelic virtuousness.

Lady Brute's exploitation of virtue as masochistic torture illuminates Deleuze's theorisation that 'the masochist is obsessed; ritualistic activity is essential [...] since it epitomizes the world of fantasy'– her preoccupation with appearing virtuous is

ritualistically proper within societal rules.[66] Her apparent unwavering integrity hypocritically allows her to create her own fantasy with Constant and, therefore, creates her own 'essential rite' that leads to their pleasure-pain.[67] During their assignation in Spring Garden, Lady Brute teasingly suggests to Constant in Act 4, scene 4 that

> Lady Brute: you think me scandalously free, Mr *Constant*. I'm afraid I shall lose your good Opinion of me.
>
> Constant: My good Opinion, Madam, is like your Cruelty, never to be remov'd.
>
> Lady Brute: But if I shou'd remove my Cruelty, then there's an end of your good Opinion.
>
> (4.4.p.56)

In this playful exchange, Lady Brute, by her own admission, admits that Constant's desire for her could be viewed 'scandalously' by society, and that a 'good Opinion' is paramount to her appearance of socio-respectability.[68] These references present an apparent paradox to her ostensible declaration of virtuousness: she cannot be seen as respectable and satisfy Constant's lust; however, she satisfies his lust by being seen as cruelly virtuous. To question either her implicit or explicit appearance would mean the end of the sexual fantasy. Lady Brute's claims of moral excellence perform as a manifold rite of seduction, a way of honouring what Deleuze suggests is a 'myth' – her

[66]Deleuze, p. 92.
[67] Deleuze, p. 92.
[68] David Roberts' research on scenography in Restoration theatre suggests that the representation of parks and gardens on stage would have come to be seen by the audience 'as a place of libertine control, where the hero's command of events nonetheless suffers an embarrassing lapse', David Roberts, 'Caesar's Gift: Playing the Park in the Late Seventeenth Century', *ELH*, 71 (2004) 115-139 (p. 118).

fabled virtuousness – acting as a rite of moral protection, and as a method for signalling her masochistic desire, torture, and Constant's submission.[69]

For this reason, Lady Brute's masochistic fantasy with Constant can be seen as a tacit and indecent rebellion against the hypocritical unwritten rules of a respectable, moralistic society. Carlos Gómez's study of the depiction of courtship in Vanbrugh's plays highlights that the 'major issue in Vanbrugh's marital discord plots is not [...] divorce but the potential consequence of its nonexistence, a woman's adultery [is] more disruptive than divorce, since it jeopardizes the foundation of patriarchal society' – a perspective that is not entirely absent from Lady Brute's characterisation.[70] In response to Sir John's rage at potentially being cuckolded in Act 5, scene 2, Lady Brute concedes that

> Most of 'em [men] think there is no such thing as Virtue consider'd in the strictest notions of it: And therefore when you hear 'em say, Such a one is a Woman of Reputation, They only mean she's a Woman of Discretion. For they consider, we have no more Religion than they have, nor so much Morality [...] I'm afraid the want of Inclination seldom protects any of us.
>
> (5.2.p.65)

Lady Brute is conscious that she is bound by the hypocritical need to remain within her marriage and is mindful that there is an artificiality to her proposed relationship with Constant. She is aware that adultery is viewed as immoral, but her summation of the interplay between the sexes confirms that virtue and morality have

[69] Deleuze, p. 92.
[70] Carlos Gómez, 'Courtship, Marriage Vows, and Political Metaphor in Vanbrugh's "*The Relapse*" and "*The Provoked Wife*"', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 1 (2001) 93-123 (p. 107).

become synonymous implicitly with affected superiority, sex and vice. Lady Brute forthrightly, if not nihilistically, decries socio-morality as having 'no such thing as Virtue', and that there is little concern for morality or religion within society – sex is, and always has been, its moral currency.

However, Lady Brute is incapable of escaping from the accountability of societal guilt. As investigated earlier in the chapter, Deleuze suggests that masochistic guilt should lead to liberation, but this theory is consistent with Lady Brute's masochistic desires. The guilt created by her desire merely returns her to a position of moralistic obedience rather than a liberating sexual freedom and fantasy, making her 'Uneasie in my Ambition' (5.1.p.64). Whilst Deleuze theorises that 'the law now ordains what it was once intended to forbid; guilt absolves instead of leading to atonement, and punishment makes permissible what it was meant to chastise', the law countermands and ultimately destroys Lady Brute's desires.[71] At the denouement of the play, her guilt at the potential loss of her respectability should she sleep with Constant frustrates her 'forbidden pleasure' that Sir John's punishment should allow.[72] She knows that she must return to the loveless marriage with Sir John, and laments to Bellinda that

> Lady Brute: we pretend what we will; but 'tis a hard matter to Live without the Man we Love.
>
> Bellinda: Especially when we are Married to the Man we hate.
>
> (5.1.p.65)

As examined above, Lady Brute returns to Sir John with a masochistic contract in place, but it is far from the pleasurable fantasy that contracting with Constant would

[71] Deleuze, p. 102.
[72] Deleuze, p. 89.

have given her. Her conceding defeat reflects what Deleuze names imprecisely as 'dramatic masochism' that acts as a precursor to 'moral or sentimental masochism' – which in this context is Lady Brute's agonised return to Sir John and the moralistic status quo.[73]

The play concludes with Sir John and Lady Brute remaining trapped within a strained marriage. Critics such as Hume, Mueschke and Fleisher focus on Vanbrugh's exposure of the 'merciless and depressing clarity' of an unhappy marriage with a lack of 'comic spirit' and does little to suggest a solution to the 'problem of incompatibility' between the couple.[74] However, a Deleuzian interpretation of the open-ended denouement illuminates how Sir John and Lady Brute's masochistic fantasy returns full circle: offering no definitive solution to their entrapment within a legally unbreakable contract. The couple's little pleasure must come from their antagonistic punishment of each other, their pain from the perpetual inescapability of their marriage – or 'the surly Husband's Fate' (5.5.p.78).

Rebellion and Conformity in E. Polwhele's *The Frolicks*

Throughout this chapter I have focused upon the exceptional continued success of Thomas D'Urfey and the new voice of John Vanbrugh during the 1690s to illuminate the theatrical move towards the sentimental comedy that would rise to popularity in the eighteenth century. However, it is important to place both D'Urfey's and Vanbrugh's work in the context of comedic trends since 1670. As I have examined above, D'Urfey evolved his drama to swiftly reflect moralistic tastes, and Vanbrugh's

[73] Deleuze, p. 101.
[74] Robert D. Hume, 'Marital Discord in English Comedy from Dryden to Fielding', *Modern Philology*, 74 (1977) 248-272 (p. 261); Mueschke and Fleisher, pp. 878-889.

playful humour questioned conformity and didactic reformation. Their advances were a progression of the celebration and critique of sexual immorality, patriarchal hypocrisy, and the falsity of feminine virtue that had defined comedy theatre throughout the Restoration period. Innovative Playwrights during the 1670s, such as Wycherley and Etherege, as well as D'Urfey's continued success, provided creative enrichment for future dramatists that would initiate, encourage and define later plays, but at the core the moralistic problems of sex, vice and virtue dominated the theatre as much during the 1670s as in the 1690s. The influx of playwrights during the 1690s marked a turning point in the comedy drama: the new theatrical voices had the same freedom in the theatre to evaluate societal hypocrisy as the previous generation of writers of the 1670s.

The beginnings of libidinous comedy that questioned the control of moralistic authority is exemplified by E. Polwhele's comedy of female rebellion and misogamy, *The Frolicks or The Lawyer Cheated* (1671).[75] By taking a chronological retrogression to the theatrical immoralism of early 1670s, I will examine how Polwhele's play is a revolutionary work which highlights D'Urfey's and Vanbrugh's lack of resolution on moralism and the role of women. My examination will uncover Polwhele's attitude towards female sexual freedom, and a critique of patriarchal domination. Moreover, I will focus on how Polwhele's farcical play began the 1670s by questioning the contradictory nature of sexual freedom, particularly the justifiability of masculine libertinistic freedom and the hypocritical need for female virtuousness. This section will investigate how Polwhele's implicit criticism of marriage advances the idea that virtue is a false doctrine, and that moralistic reformation is an impossibility. Furthermore, I will analyse how Polwhele depicts a masochistic contract – from

[75] There is an inconsistency in the spelling of her name as either Polwhele or Polewheele, for the purposes of clarity I will refer to her as Polwhele.

fantasy to conclusion – throughout the play. Finally, in consideration of this analysis of the contract, this study will attempt both to illuminate and evaluate Deleuze's theory that the masochistic fantasy and contract are based on subjection, conformity and hostility.

E. Polwhele's career as a playwright is obscure – with only two plays extant in manuscript form, little is known about her life or work. Her first play *The Faithful Virgins* (*c.*1670), a rhymed tragedy, has no definitive record for its production on the stage, but the manuscript shows that it was licensed for production by the Duke's Company *c.*1670.[76] *The Frolicks* suffers from a similar uncertainty. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume have suggested that it was written between 1670–1671, but with no production noted by *The London Stage*, it is hard to know whether the play was ever produced on the stage. Polwhele herself remains an enigmatic figure; what is written about her can be considered as mere conjecture; what can be argued for is that along with Aphra Behn, Polwhele was one of the first female playwrights writing for the London stage.[77]

Polwhele describes herself in her dedication to Prince Rupert as 'an unfortunate young woman' who is 'encouraged much by Mistress Fame' (dedication, p.57) to have written and attempted to have the play produced.[78] Her claim that she is

[76] Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'Introduction', in *The Frolicks, or The Lawyer Cheated* ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 13-49 (p. 40); Oxford Dictionary of National Biography notes that '*The Faithful Virgins* survives as an anonymous manuscript (Bodl. Oxf., MS Rawl. poet. 195). On folio 49*r* appears the notation, 'This Tragedy apoynted to be acted by the dukes Company of Actors only leaving out what was Cross'd by Henry Herbert' (master of the revels), and it was presumably performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields about 1670', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *E.Polewheele* (2004), < https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-45820> [Accessed 4 February 2025].
[77] Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *E.Polewheele*.
[78] Elizabeth Polwhele, *The Frolicks or The Lawyer Cheated* ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 55-138.

> youthful, [but] no scholar, and what I write I write by nature, not by art. My careless stars so heedlessly do guide me as if they were unconcern'd with me, and my affairs lead me to nothing that is fortunate.
>
> (dedication, p.58)

is evocative of Ariadne's claim of ignorance in her preface to *She Ventures, and He Wins*. In a parallel to Ariadne's anonymity, Polwhele's obscurity creates its own mythology and fantasy that allows a bold female point of view, and although Polwhele appears self-effacing, her words belie an assertiveness of 'unparallel'd boldness, as I am a woman' (dedication, p.57). Polwhele's highlighting of her gender suggests an act of rebellion against misogynistic male critics who would later damn Behn. As I have previously suggested in chapter two, women writers represent the sadistic female in the triumvirate of the women of Masoch. Women playwrights created powerful female characters who illuminate Deleuze's theory that a sadistic woman's 'actions are prompted by a man or [...] performed in conceit with a man, [and] whose victim she is always liable to become'.[79] Polwhele, like Ariadne and Aphra Behn, uses her comedy to tortuously hold her audience in thrall of female defiance, desire and sexual freedom.

Unlike Behn, Polwhele's obscurity and lack of other existing work is reflected in the negligible critical attention that *The Frolicks* has been paid since its composition.[80] From a twenty-first-century critical perspective, Youmi Jung suggests that Polwhele's scholarly neglect comes from a critical desire 'to keep Aphra Behn as the "first" commercial female playwright'.[81] Indeed, Gilli Bush-Bailey theorises that it is male critics who have 'unconsciously' placed Behn into a hierarchy of 'best' male playwrights

[79] Deleuze, p. 48.
[80] Youmi Jung, 'Creating the New Breed of Comic Heroine in Elizabeth Polwhele's *the Frolicks* (1671)', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 36 (2023), 486-494 (p. 487).
[81] Jung, p. 487.

and have therefore detrimentally separated her from other contemporaneous female playwrights such as the 'shadowy' E. Polwhele.[82] Undoubtedly, Behn is popular critically, but both she and Polwhele brought a new freedom of expression to the stage from a female point of view and Polwhele's work during the early 1670s has an extraordinary progressivist stance towards the hypocritical patriarchal view of submissive women, marriage, and sexual freedom. It is for this reason that I would submit that *The Frolicks* demands fresh scholarly attention.

As I have examined throughout this thesis, theatre during the early 1670s was in a state of flux: comedic trends and audience tastes would oscillate widely along with current socio-political events and moralistic fashions. Milhous and Hume suggest that there was 'a sense of indecision' amongst playwrights in 1670 which influenced the direction of comedic presentations.[83] Heroic comedy, as exemplified by Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode* and Aphra Behn's debut *The Forc'd Marriage* (1670), was to rapidly fall out of favour with audiences, whilst translations and adaptations of Molière's plays, such as Edward Ravenscroft's *The Citizen Turned Gentleman* (1671), were to become a prominent mainstay of the London stage during the decade.[84] This fluctuating period of creativity led to the rise of the farcical sex-boom comedy that would come to dominate and define the decade. After writing the tragic *The Faithful Virgins*, Milhous and Hume assert that Polwhele crudely 'moved all the way to low London comedy' in *The Frolicks* to produce a play which was 'lively, realistic, and distinctly bawdy'.[85]

---

[82] Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage* (University of Manchester, 2006), pp. 31-32.
[83] Milhous and Hume, p. 17.
[84] Milhous and Hume, p. 17.
[85] Milhous and Hume, p. 19; The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'Low' as 'relating to the realm of the mundane or commonplace; […] considered to be inferior in quality and refinement', Milhous' comments are somewhat unfair considering the rise in popularity of comedy on the London stage at that period. 'Low' in *The Oxford English* Dictionary [Online]. https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025].

With interconnecting plot lines, *The Frolicks* is an intricate, if not disjointed play. The main plot centres around Clarabell and her humorous escapades to avoid marriage. Clarabell is beautiful and self-assured, but exasperates her father, Swallow, by ignoring his pleas for her to marry. After Clarabell meets the gallant Rightwit, much to her annoyance, she falls in love with him. When the foolish lawyer, Mr Zany and the young knight, Sir Gregory, come to woo Clarabell, she teases them into fighting over her – to the amusement of Rightwit. Clarabell and Rightwit continually attempt to outdo each other's mischief; when he takes Zany and Sir Gregory to the tavern, she dresses as a man and persuades Zany and Sir Gregory to dress as women before stealing their clothes and Rightwit has them arrested. When they are released, they revenge themselves by tying Rightwit's bastard children to his back; although Clarabell sees this, she refuses to untie him. Rightwit repays her by tying the children to Swallow, who then has him imprisoned for unpaid debts. Again, she pretends to be a man and tricks the jailor to allow Rightwit to escape. Clarabell admits that she loves Rightwit and tells him that he must get Swallow's consent so they can marry. Rightwit realises that he has no chance of getting Swallow to agree, so he disguises himself and tricks Swallow into telling him how to marry without a father's permission, little realising that Rightwit is talking about Clarabell. The couple take his advice and get married, much to Swallow's anger.

The second plot follows Sir William and Lady Meanwell's recent but failing marriage. Lady Meanwell has been seduced by London's entertainments and its sexual freedoms but is held back by her old and moralistic husband. She repeatedly threatens to cuckold Sir William, although he refuses to believe that she will do so. Lady Meanwell makes every attempt to go out into the city and Sir William's servant, Ralph, suspects her of having cuckolded her husband already with Makelove – and attempts in vain to persuade Sir William that this has happened. In a double standard, he knows

that Sir William has been conducting an affair with the bawd, Procreate. Their bickering and petty jealousies escalate throughout the play and culminate in Sir William discovering Lady Meanwell and Makelove discussing how to hide their relationship. She blames Sir William for her actions, although he behaves as if nothing has happened and we leave the couple as dissatisfied as they were at the start of the play.

Milhous and Hume unfairly suggest that 'as a work of literature the play is clearly scrappy, superficial, and lacking significant form' and can make 'no extravagant claims for [its] literary merits'.[86] They do concede that 'the author uses stock elements in mostly well proven ways' and that there are 'signs of real flair and skill' in Polwhele's work.[87] Nevertheless, it is in the play's disjointed, farcical sex-boom superficiality that Polwhele tacitly projects a considered, equivocal view on libertinism, monogamy and a criticism of virtuousness. The main plot of Clarabell and Rightwit – the would-be lovers trying to outmanoeuvre each other – is contrasted with the frustrating monogamy of the marriage of Sir William and Lady Meanwell. Polwhele's contrasting characters invite the audience to consider the couples' approaches to marriage.

To recapitulate my discussion in this chapter: the masochistic contract is comparable with the marriage contract and is the catalyst for the forcing of the Deleuzian 'new man' into the tortuous position of moralistic reformation and sexual submission.[88] In view of this theory I would suggest that, similar to Sir John and Lady Brute in *The Provok'd Wife*, the newly married Sir William and Lady Meanwell exemplify the completion of the masochistic contract and an unsatisfactory reality. Sir William's return to London having married the country ingenue, Lady Meanwell,

[86] Milhous and Hume, p. 32.
[87] Milhous and Hume, p. 32.
[88] Deleuze, p. 100.

follows the stock trope of London's lure of sex and vice corrupting the innocent country wife. However, Polwhele chooses not to depict Lady Meanwell's journey towards sexual transgression; instead we view Lady Meanwell transformed by the sexual freedom of the city and threatening cuckoldry as a means of masochistic torture. During the couples' entrance in Act 1, Lady Meanwell declares that

Lady Meanwell:	There is no Elysium but this London [...] What wretched fools are those that forsake this soul-charming city for the dirty, melancholy country.
Sir William:	Why dost thou fix thy eyes so steadfastly upon me, ha?
Lady Meanwell:	Methoughts you were the handsom'st man in the country – but here there are so many that excel you, that now in my opinion you are nobody.
Sir William:	Thou speakest with such an innocent freeness that what you say'st is not force to make me jealous, or I should envy all that you so think excel me.
Lady Meanwell:	Nay, now let me go again.
Sir William:	Take your swing.

(1. 45-60)

Lady Meanwell's disparaging of the 'wretched fools' that decide to leave London highlights her position of dominance which is built on the sexual freedom of 'the soul-charming' city. To return to the 'dirty' and 'melancholy' countryside would mean the destruction of any sexual fantasy in favour of the banality of moralism and submission. Her choice to parallel London with Elysium is a powerfully compelling statement on the nature of the city, and her position within it. Elysium, or the Elysian Fields, was

described by Homer as a place 'where living is made easy for mankind', it was a paradise, a place of indulgent pleasure that was seen as the 'Islands of the Blessed' for those chosen by the gods to reside in.[89] Lady Meanwell's desire to stay in the Elysium of London places her in the position of being chosen by the gods – a hero who is permitted to enter this place of freedom, pleasure and gratification, but the wretched and forsaken must experience hardship and pain.

This sexual freedom has created a duality to her masochistic and tortuous desire. It has augmented and clarified the realisation that her marriage does not correlate with her fantasy, and therefore she gives herself a guilt-free licence to seek another masochistic contract. She retains simultaneously the pleasure of torturing Sir William with the threat of gaining her sexual freedom by cuckolding him, telling him that she once regarded him as the 'handsom'st man in the country' but he has now been reduced to a 'nobody'. Lady Meanwell's torture of Sir William is compounded by her play on the word country: ostensibly it can be understood as a sweeping statement on Sir William's unsurpassed good looks throughout the nation; implicitly she has reduced him to one of the 'wretched fools' from the countryside who deserves punishment for their sexual repression. This confounds Sir William's view of his wife's oscillating desire – she is his cold and cruel torturer who attempts to make him acquiesce by fixing her eyes 'so steadfastly' on him, but he is unable to fully comprehend her form of torture. He sees her claims as both an 'innocent freeness' that 'is not force[d] to make [him] jealous', but her threat to cuckold him creates his

[89] It should be noted that Polwhele's missing play is entitled *Elysium*, although nothing is known about its form or genre, Judith Milhouse, 'Two Plays by Elizabeth Polwhele: "*The Faithfull Virgins*" and "*The Frolicks*"', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 71 (1977), 1-9 (p.6); Homer, 'Book 4', *The Odyssey*, trans. by E.V. Rieu and D.C.H. Rieu, (Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 41-62 (p. 55); Hesiod, 'Works and Days', in *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia,* ed.and trans. by Glenn Most (Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 86-153.

tortuous 'envy'. Ultimately, he baits her into deciding by demanding that she 'Take' her 'swing'.

Lady Meanwell's contemptuous torture of Sir William, and his uncertainty towards the form of his pleasure-pain illuminates Deleuze's theory that 'the masochist should not be regarded as gladly submitting to [...] the element of contempt'.[90] Sir William, for the sake of respectability and avoidance of public embarrassment has no desire to be exposed as a cuckold, Yet Lady Meanwell's contempt for monogamy and virtuousness is a form of masochistic torture that gives him pleasure-pain. As the play unfolds, we follow Lady Meanwell's attempt to cuckold Sir William, and in Act two, Sir William's oscillatory belief and disbelief in his wife's actions climaxes when Ralph questions

Ralph:	Will you yet believe you are a cuckold?
Sir William:	Hold thy tongue, or I will make thee eat it.
Lady Meanwell:	Heaven and earth: my husband! [...] Nay, be angry and look scurvily. For 'tis my aim to be reveng'd a little for the defeat you have given us all this while in not letting us have you sooner.
Sir William:	I do not like such odd revenges, madam. If 'tis your pastime to afflict me, let your trim humour practice some other way. (*She weeps*).
Lady Meanwell:	I never can be merry but you are horn-mad. I will go seek some wretched cave to languish out my youth in where the

[90] Deleuze, pp. 87-88.

sun's light, nor human conversation, ne'er shall find me

[…]

Sir William: I do believe thou wast in jest, my dear. I prithee don't afflict and shame me before all this company.

Lady Meanwell: I am your shame.

(2. 419-442)

Sir William's anger towards Ralph anticipates Pinchwife's reaction to Margery upon his discovery of her supposed infidelity in *The Country Wife*. Notwithstanding that the thought of being cuckolded is painful for Sir William – for it to be openly spoken about forces him to admit his failure to satisfy his wife – it also provides a pleasure that he cannot truly understand. Deleuze asserts that masochism is 'a certain combination of pain and pleasure' and that it is 'a function of feeling or sentiment' which is reflected in Sir William's emotional dysregulation.[91] Despite Ralph's question, Sir William remains unable to acknowledge the pleasure he receives from Lady Meanwell's tortuous sexual freedom. His demand that Ralph 'Hold' his 'tongue' is an act to prevent exposure, but also a silent admission that his indecision was a form of pleasurable submission. Lady Meanwell seizes control of Sir William's lack of resolution, directing him to look 'angry and look scurvily' and openly declaring that it was her 'aim to be reveng'd' to create his masochistic pain. She furiously admits that it was his delay or 'not letting us have you sooner' that has frustrated his fantasy and forced a premature conclusion to their contract.

To look at their argument another way, Lady Meanwell bemoans the end of her masochistic fantasy – Sir William's refusal to accept her extra marital sexual freedom,

[91] Deleuze, p. 101.

and his demand that she 'practice some other way', shatters her independence. Her masochistic desire and contract depend on her polygamy, and she can never 'be merry' trapped within a monogamous marriage. However, there is a duality to the end of her fantasy, and although it is destroyed, she immediately creates a new fantasy that gives her both pleasure-pain: bitterly torturing Sir William by withdrawing from him and forcing his submission. Deleuze hypothesises that a 'superpersonal element [...] animates the masochist', and I would suggest that Lady Meanwell uses her private concerns to tailor a new punishment that exposes Sir William's weakness.[92] As examined above, her belief that she is a hero and God-favoured in Elysium allows her to remedy Sir William's faults. Ostensibly, her hyperbolic statement that she will 'seek some wretched cave' to 'languish out my youth', is not only an exaggerated reaction to the end of her fantasy but marks the beginnings of her new torture of destroying his socio-respectability by separating from him.

Both Sir William and Lady Meanwell's reactions to the end of their contracts are symbolic of the cyclical nature of the masochistic contract. When one concludes, a new fantasy and potentiality for a contract arises between masochist and torturer. Within the confines of the marriage contract, the expedited transposition of fantasies, such as the Meanwells', exemplifies Deleuze's theory that 'suffering is not the cause of pleasure itself but the necessary precondition for achieving it'.[93] Deleuze's theory is a sweeping generalisation for every masochistic relationship which has been discussed within this chapter, and I would suggest that within the reality and visibility of the marriage contract, suffering is an innate precondition for the continued appearance of virtuousness and respectability. It prompts competitiveness, submission and sexual desire which adapts to the state of the marriage. In echoes of the Brutes' marriage in

[92] Deleuze, p. 93.
[93] Deleuze, p. 89.

The Provok'd Wife, Sir William and Lady Meanwell must first suffer an unhappy marriage – where neither of their masochistic needs are met – before they create a new contract that attempts to provide pleasure and pain. Ultimately Sir William begs Lady Meanwell to not 'shame' him, to which she ominously retorts: 'I am your shame' (2.442).

Polwhele contrasts Lady Meanwell's attempt to gain sexual freedom with the marriage-hating protagonist, Clarabell. There has been critical praise for Clarabell's independent characterisation: Youmi Jung argues that Clarabell is 'remarkable' and a 'striking early example of a heroine with a libertine heart and wit' who manages to comedically dominate, deceive and outwit her overbearing father and rakes.[94] Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume's introduction to the play suggests that 'Clarabell belongs to the new breed of heroine – tough, emancipated, and vigorously independent' at a time when women were depicted in the theatre as mere sexual amusements ready for conquest.[95] Clarabell is, unusually, seen as unconstrained throughout the play, and rather than a stereotypical female protagonist's oscillation between waywardness and eventual submission, she remains unyielding to the socio-moralistic boundaries of respectability and patriarchal pressure. I would suggest that Polwhele's female rake could be seen, in part, as a precursor to such characters as the dominating Hellena in Behn's *The Rover*, or Charlotte's provocative challenges to patriarchal control in *She Ventures, and He Wins*.

Clarabell must become the typical Deleuzian masochistic torturer to become emancipated from Swallow and retain her sexual independence. As I proposed in chapter two, the transformation into a torturer, from the hetaeric or sadistic woman of 'the masochistic dream', is a reactionary phenomenon in response to outside forces,

[94] Jung, pp. 486-488.
[95] Milhous and Hume, p. 23.

such as patriarchal control and sexual desire.[96] Rather than seeking a masochistic contract, Clarabell ostensibly acts outside this formality and assumes the mantle of torturer with every man she associates with to preserve her liberty. In Act 1, we see Clarabell outwit her father, Swallow, into allowing her to avoid marriage – despite his comical desire to see her 'happy in the arms of a husband that may displease' her (1.214-215). Swallow's verbal sparring with Clarabell takes on the form of interrogation and negotiation in the hope that she may acquiesce and eventually he proposes

> Swallow: I'll compel you to nothing. But finding you indifferent to all I've mention'd yet, if I might advise you, you should take one that is old, wise, and rich – my Brother Joseph – shall I chop up a bargain between you?
>
> Clarabell: I confess he has wealth enough to spare a young wife to purchase a stately pair of horns of what gallant she pleases; wise enough to make an apology for wearing them; and old enough, of all conscience, to become them excellently.
>
> Swallow: Nay, now I perceive thou art a carrion; get you in, you slut
> [*Aside*] This wench is knavish; very full of knavery.
> [*To Clarabell*] Come again here, jewel. How dar'st thou thus palpably abuse thy [...] father?
>
> (1. 244-257)

Clarabell disavows her sensuality to verbally and mentally dominate Swallow – despite his offer to 'compel' her to 'nothing', she is indifferent to his suggestions.

[96] Deleuze, p. 51.

Swallow's idea that she should merely choose someone 'old, wise and rich' is mercenary, but belies a desperate attempt to sway Clarabell's dispassionate judgement of marriage. Clarabell retorts with an outrightly damning view of matrimony, and like Lady Meanwell's attitude, the fantasy of marriage will provide little pleasure for her. To be married would form a stereotypical, if not mundanely effortless masochistic contract which involves a prospective husband's submission to his 'young wife' and a banal acceptance of purchasing 'a stately pair of horns' that gives neither party gratification. Her reaction to marriage is as mercenary as Swallow's; nevertheless, his suggestion has served to entrench her severity towards men. Although Swallow has endeavoured to sway Clarabell away from appearing unemotional, he finally accepts that she is by nature cold and cruel – she is an empty 'carrion' who is 'knavish' to the point of torturing any man she meets – including her father.

This reaction is demonstrative of Clarabell's desire to shape her own fantasy: one that involves both making men the subject of her escapades, and her amusement by avoiding marriage. Jung proposes that Clarabell is an exceptional woman 'because her excellence in frolics serves no one else' but her own desires.[97] She can manipulate any contractual proposal into allowing her to give herself pleasure, irrespective of her victim's pain. Deleuze suggests that the masochist contract is the 'most rational and temporarily determinate act' that 'reaches towards the most mythical and most timeless realms, where the three mother-images dwell'.[98] Although Deleuze's theory relies on a distinct separation between masochist-torturer, I would suggest that Clarabell assumes these dual roles to create the determinate act of avoiding patriarchal submission: she can only do so by taking on all three roles of the women of Masoch –

[97] Jung, p. 488.
[98] Deleuze, p. 166.

the hetaeric, sadistic and masochistic – to 'create the heart' of her fantasy and mastery of men.[99]

Her domination of men is illustrated by her continued out-manoeuvring of the libertinistic gallant, Rightwit. A woman's refusal of libidinous advances is not an unusual trope in Restoration theatre, but Clarabell is more self-assured in her rebuffs, suggesting that she is 'not at my last prayer yet, to cry "come any, good Lord, any"' (2.18); however, rather than deter him, she inflames his masochistic desire and augments her pleasure. In Act 2, Clarabell meets Rightwit for the first time and they flirtatiously spar with each other – Clarabell's sexual desire under the guise of innocence, drives Rightwit to claim

Rightwit: Thy eyes tell me thou wilt stay a little longer I must needs kiss thee.

Clarabell: You will not offer it.

Rightwit: Then would you laugh at me? But I'll give you no cause.

(*Kisses her*)

Thy skin's pure, teeth white, lips soft, breath sweet, eyes sparking. Would we were in a wilderness together.

Clarabell: [*breaks away*]. You dare as well be hang'd as serve me so again, you saucy –

Rightwit: Oh, excellent. Dost thou dare me to it? Well, once more you shall see what I dare do, then.

(*Kisses her again. She shrieks.*)

Dost cry out for more?

[99] Deleuze, p. 166.

(2. 31-41)

Rightwit's claim that Clarabell's 'eyes tell me thou wilt stay longer' is reminiscent of the biblical quotation that 'the light of the body is the eye' that reveals the 'whole body [is] full of light'.[100] His adulteration of this passage suggests that rather than the eyes being a window to the godly soul, Clarabell's eyes contradict her appearance of virtuousness and betray her desire for him. Furthermore, Rightwit's demand that he 'must needs kiss' Clarabell highlights his certainty in her sexual attraction: by threatening to kiss her, Rightwit ensures the prospect of pleasure of oral eroticism.[101]

Although his threat can be seen as darkly non-consensual, his focus on Clarabell's eyes and her lips illuminates that the creation of the masochistic contract is not a purely mental disposition. As Deleuze posits, 'the masochist must use his body and his soul to write this story', and both Rightwit and Clarabell attempt to direct a fantasy that will bring them both pleasure, although Clarabell will leave Rightwit in a state of pain by not allowing him to kiss her.[102] Rightwit humorously appraises her looks as if she were an animal: listing her 'skin', 'teeth', 'lips', 'breath' and 'eyes' which recollects the previously discussed animalistic qualities of potential masochists who can be trained into submission.[103] Rightwit regrets that they are not in the privacy of the 'wilderness' so he can become her torturer and force her submission like an animal. Clarabell, despite this, retains her position as torturer by demanding Rightwit's

[100] *The Holy Bible Containing The Old Testament and The New: Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised by His Majesties Special Command*, Authorised King James Version (Printed by Charles Bill, and the Executrix of Thomas Newcomb deceas'd; Printers to the King and Queens most Excellent Majesties, 1692), Matthew 6.22.
[101] *Oxford Reference* defines "Oral Eroticism" as 'sensuous pleasure derived from stimulation of the mouth and lips by kissing' and 'focusing of libido on the mouth', 'Oral Erotism' in Oxford Reference [Online]. https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100252671 [Accessed 4 February 2025].
[102] Deleuze, p. 101.
[103] Rightwit's hyperbolic cataloguing of Clarabell's attributes is equally reminiscent of the blazon of Pertrachan tradition.

submission. In her act of breaking away from his embraces and telling him that he should be 'hang'd as serve me again', Clarabell confirms the form her painful torture will take – the creation of a Sisyphean attempt and eventual failure to become her masochistic torturer.

Throughout the play, Clarabell's frolics match, if not surpass, Rightwit's mischief; however, rather than his playful misbehaviour deriving from his attempts to woo her, Clarabell's manipulation of situations is purely pleasure for pleasure's sake. As I have mentioned above, Clarabell's coldness and cruelty are not limited to her domination of both Swallow and Rightwit to keep her independence; her dealings with other would-be suitors, such as the lawyer Mr Zany, creates a masochistic desire within her that is purely a pleasurable amusement. Her goal is to have their painful submission and, at the same time, feel no sexual desire or masochistic guilt. In Act two, Sir Gregory and Zany, a 'couple of country wooers' (2.72) have come to London to seek marriage and wish to speak 'of love' (2.73) with Clarabell. Yet she toys with them: pitting them against each other to gain her affections gives her a cruel pleasure. In a hyperbolically comedic scene, Sir Gregory and Zany attempt to outdo each other after Sir Gregory's obsequious chivalry riles Zany. Clarabell aggravates the situation by acting as a 'pretty rascal' (2.156) who will 'baffle' (2.157) Sir Gregory and belittle Zany to encourage their ridiculous fight. She is cognizant that she has sparked their masochistic desire by teasing them but has no wish to contract with them. Sir Gregory complains that 'if she had loved me, she would have scorned to have seen me so abused after so horrid a nature' (2.186-187), little knowing that this is what Clarabell, in her severity, always wished to do.

Clarabell's indifference and cruelly pleasurable antics are central to the play, her instigation of the japes that lead men into submission highlight her independence and defiance of patriarchal control. In Act three, her frolics lead her into cross dressing

and tricking Zany and Sir Gregory into dressing as women – only for her to steal their clothes,allowing them to be arrested as 'ladies of pleasure' (4.30) in Act four. These escapades are closely bound to her desire for Rightwit, as both his masochist and his torturer. In Act two, she admits that

> There's witchcraft in everything this fellow does. My soul is ready to run out at my eyes after him. I fear I shall be fool enough, and madwoman together, to fall in love with him. But I will resist it with an Amazonian courage. Love is but a swinish thing at best. I'll in, and study to forget him. If 'twill not be, I'll study how to get him.
>
> (2. 202-209)

She has come to understand that Rightwit has bewitched her into being a 'fool' and 'madwoman together' into thinking about subservience to man. In an echo of the Hobbesian theory of Amazons that was discussed in chapter three, particularly in relation to the Deleuzian nature of the sadistic woman and their evasion of womanly roles, here Clarabell invokes an 'Amazonian courage' to evade submission to Rightwit in the hope of continuing her libertinistic desire and dismissal of all men. Nevertheless, there is an unreliability to her thoughts and a change in her attitude towards Rightwit: she will both 'study to forget him' and 'study how to get him', purely on the basis that she recognises he is the only man who will allow her to be in the position of dominance and submission at the same time.

The realisation that there is a possibility for enjoying marriage with Rightwit – contractually as masochist and torturer – illuminates what Deleuze suggests is a

> personal act of will on the part of the masochist [...] through the contract, and the vicissitudes of the law that issues from it, [they are] led back into the impersonal realm of fate, which finds expression in [...] myth and rites.[104]

Clarabell's continual evasion of her own submission and her attempts to make Rightwit submit to her torture become her own act of will. Their outmanoeuvring of each other has become an implicit form of contract where neither can escape the other, the contract itself has become cyclical – when one is torturer, the other must be masochist and vice versa. In Act 4, after Rightwit has been bound hilariously with two of his bastard children on his back, she refuses to rescue him. His entrapment becomes her metaphorical expression of his submission to her, and when Rightwit demands that Clarabell 'unbind me once more, or get out of my sight' (4.194) she retorts that 'if I unbind thee, hang me. Nay, you may look an ass as well' (4.195) in a declaration that they are enslaved to each other, and their fates are bound together. Clarabell's use of 'thee' and 'you' highlights both her dominance and submission to Rightwit: anachronistically he is both a lower, submissive class and higher rank to her.

Rightwit and Clarabell's outwitting of each other becomes their form of masochistic rite that ultimately leads to their marriage. At the denouement of the play, we have viewed their masochistic relationship develop from the pleasure of each other's trickery, and their marriage in Act 5 is no different. Rightwit must trick Swallow into giving his blessing to the marriage and remaining incognito. Rightwit tells Swallow that

[104] Deleuze, p. 102.

Rightwit: There is betwixt a rich and wealthy heiress and myself some love. I fain would have her, though my fortune never can deserve her. And know, her friends will be so much against our match, that I by stealth must marry her. Now, I would know what danger may attend the theft, of stealing such a wife.

Swallow: There have been laws most rigorous against it. But if the lady loves you, slip her to some church at a convenient hour [...] and let your mistress lead you by the hand and the church enter first. So shall the law [...] conclude that she stole you, and not you her.

(5. 14-26)

Swallow unwittingly suggests how to circumvent the legality of marriage without permission, or 'stealing a wife', that satisfies the legal requirements to form a masochistic contract – something that is far more important to both Rightwit and Clarabell than the act of marriage itself. The nature of their marriage suggests that its perception of virtuousness and respectability is merely a nonsense sham. It is a pretence which is based on the continuation of libidinous desire, a masochistic pleasure-pain, and where women can 'lead' men into submission. Ultimately, their relationship proclaims that the marriage-masochistic rite is fantasy made real, and it is a legitimated unending battle of wills.

The chronological step back from the plays of the 1690s is perhaps unexpected, but by placing my investigation of E. Polwhele's work after Thomas D'Urfey's and John Vanbrugh's plays it has clarified how Polwhele foreshadowed and fashioned several of the comedic trends that would be carried on by her contemporaries and successors into the late 1690s. My analysis has shown how, alongside Behn, another woman –

irrespective of her obscurity or the doubtful production of her play on the London stage – created a dynamic piece of writing which actively alters the critical view that the genesis and thematic evolution of farcical sex comedies was dominated by the male theatrical sphere. Although Polwhele did not enjoy the longevity of Behn's career, her extant comedy illuminates her participation in the bold, if not determined, matriarchal view of resistance and sexual desire. However, as I have suggested, Polwhele predates Behn's evolutionary, if not ultimately restricted, challenges to patriarchal control by explicitly portraying female defiance that would forge an influential, irresistible, but fearful, attraction for male playwrights throughout the Restoration period. Polwhele's *The Frolicks* places her in the unique position as a pioneer in the depiction of enduring female sexual emancipation in a society that was contingent upon female virtuousness, respectability and submission.

D'Urfey, Vanbrugh and Polwhele's plays are a representative study of how playwrights attempted to reflect and challenge the changing shifts in societal beliefs in the 1670s and 1690s. Both periods were a time of intense socio-political and moralistic change, and the plays chart the movement from the theatrical celebration of the overly libidinous to moralistic didacticism. The condemnation of sex, vice and sin were a matter of contention that dominated theatrical trends in the 1690s as much as they were lauded in the 1670s. The need for reformation through the respectability of patriarchal marriage, whilst retaining sexual freedom for both men and women, changed the course of comedy yet D'Urfey and Vanbrugh resisted openly moralizing. For D'Urfey this meant his continued popularity with audiences, and it allowed Vanbrugh to implicitly question the socio-moralistic codes. Neither playwright offers a definitive solution to the correction of immorality, instead leaving the question of whether reformation was possible through marriage up to the audience. Although Polwhele was writing a generation earlier, she was significantly progressive in her

depiction of sexual revolution, and in doing so offered an answer to the problem of reformation: it is neither a possibility nor justifiable. As I have suggested, a female playwright was able to resolve what male playwrights could not, and Polwhele's view on the futility, or needless necessity of sexual reformation lays the foundations for this thematic question that D'Urfey and Vanbrugh would continue trying to answer in the final years of the seventeenth century.

It is this question of conformity, sexual reformation and frustration through the depiction of marriage in Restoration comedy that illuminates and challenges Deleuze's insubstantial theory that the masochistic fantasy is a sustainable desire. Deleuze offers little in the way of an explanation of how the masochistic contract ends – merely highlighting the stages and rites that the masochist and torturer must reach to arrive at the contract and its associated pleasure. Polwhele, D'Urfey and Vanbrugh's work adds a clarity and an exactness to Deleuze's theory through their depiction of the reformation of marriage, or the promise of marriage. This reality can be superimposed on Deleuze's ideology that masochistic torture creates a new man, one that has been trained into obedience and submission. This state of pleasure-pain is unsustainable, and the playwrights depict their male protagonists as being trapped within an unwanted contract with little sexual gratification.

The playwrights suggest that the masochistic fantasy is not finite, but the contract is a legally unbreakable, cyclical bond. The parties must remain in a contract despite the masochist's destruction of their own desire. They can remain unsatisfied or be ejected from the fantasy as easily as they can create it – the torturer will always be cold and cruel to maintain independence, the masochist perpetually punished into submission and slavery. My analysis of the plays has shown that the need to remain within a contract has an enthralling influence which forms a sustainable desire, rather than the masochistic fantasy itself. Rejection of the contractual terms is an

impossibility once they have been agreed. Sexual dissatisfaction, hostility and submission within an unwanted contract, or remaining within a failed marriage, ensures the continuation of the masochism – irrespective of the pleasure and pain that it can create. Ultimately, D'Urfey, Vanbrugh and Polwhele suggest that reality and conformity are the masters of masochistic fantasy and desire, but it is how they are manipulated that shapes pleasure and pain.

Conclusion

My study has applied Gilles Deleuze's theory of Masochean masochism to Restoration comedy. This thesis has centred on how Deleuze's theory of Masochean masochism can illuminate how both male and female playwrights' depictions of sex and marriage developed a sense of female agency which belies a philosophical consideration of control, repression and vulnerability. When seen from a Deleuzian perspective, Restoration comedy can be considered as offering a nuanced portrayal of the human condition. Humour is an expression of intellect that is both shaped by society and that critiques society. The representation of masochism in Restoration comedy allows the viewer to confront their vulnerabilities and desires to understand our personal and public limitations. For women, this would become a cause for autonomous empowerment – personally, psychologically and socially.

This philosophical engagement with Deleuze has extended traditional scholarly research on sex and gender by offering a psychological view on the sexual double standards, gender politics and female submission during the Restoration period. Applying Deleuze's construct of erotic fantasy and the pleasure of denial to this selection of plays between 1670–1700 has revealed the period's prevalent male anxieties around virility and a perceived female dominance which created a male sexual identity crisis. Female characters' insistence on preserving their virginity – whilst toying with men – allowed them an agency to render men emasculated and submissive. Their perceived unattainability challenged masculine libidinous sexual impulses and formed a new sexual experience that created both pleasure and pain. In each chapter, I have analysed these plays in consideration of various aspects of Deleuze's masochistic framework, and demonstrated how playwrights depicted the

masochistic state to mirror and counterpoint societal change. Masochism allowed them to deride the instability and hypocrisy of sexual morality. In the previous chapter, I reached the culmination of the Deleuzian Masochean masochistic framework – the end of masochistic desire and of the fantasy – which provides an appropriate denouement to this thesis.

This conclusion provides an opportunity to apply the entire masochistic framework to William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) to illuminate the cyclical nature of masochism is interwoven throughout the play. The following case study challenges Derek Hughes' assertion that Congreve exposes how 'the human essence has no presence or importance in the visible fabric of social order' within the play.[1] When seen from Deleuzian point of view humanity is central to Congreve's understanding of society. Indeed, Congreve's female characters' domination of their own sexual liberation, marriage and widowhood is used to explore and critique social dynamics, advocate for parity of the sexes. Congreve's comedy brings nuance to the complexity of human desire.

As I discussed in the introduction, Deleuze's concept of masochism is a twentieth-century philosophical construct based on a nineteenth-century novel; but for Deleuze masochism is about the relationship between dominance, sexual identity and a rejection of moral codes. In a Restoration comedy, the masochistic state is camouflaged under a façade of respectability. When unravelled from its moralistic constraints, masochism offers a redefinition of gender dynamics, self-empowerment and transgression of societal rules. Masochism, when seen through a cultural lens, is a means to understand society, its physical needs and psychological desires. It is for this reason that the thesis has considered why Deleuze's conceptualisation is

[1] Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p.10; Hughes, p. 418.

applicable to the study of Restoration comedies. From a Deleuzian standpoint, the depiction of a masochistic relationship allowed playwrights a space to experiment with paradoxical experiences, such as the pursuit of sex in a moralistic society, to create multifaceted views of sexual freedom, gender identity, power and desire. Whilst this thesis does not discuss staging, a Deleuzian reading of plays provides the opportunity to suggest that the depiction of masochism would become substantial through physicality**.** Humour reflected the period's sexual appetites, and charted fluctuations in morality. Masochism, as a thought experiment, can represent something larger than a sexual state – it gave Restoration playwrights a means of reflecting, diagnosing and critiquing a society in constant flux, and an opportunity to present their solutions within the playhouses.

The reassessment of these twelve comedies – from the farcical and dark to the proto-sentimental – shows how the application of the masochistic framework offers a new way of viewing how Restoration playwrights evolved their depictions of masochism from period to period. Each playwright used masculine sexual anxiety to develop a personal critique of libertinistic excess, gender inequality and socio-patriarchal hypocrisy. In chapter two, 'Fear and Loathing: Marriage, Cuckoldry, and Masochistic Desire', I ascertained how the role of anxiety surrounding libertinistic failure and the emasculation of cuckoldry linked with the creation of the masochistic fantasy. Throughout the studies of Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode*, Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds*, male playwrights have shown how sexual anxieties are intertwined within the narratives and male fears instigate masochistic desire. To allay their worries, the playwrights embodied themselves into their characters to create a fantasy for masochistic pleasure and pain – one that will ease their fears of becoming psychologically castrated by marriage, cuckolded and emasculated. In effect, their fantasy is dependent on women to soothe them, but to do

so, men must allow women an authority to control them. Male submission creates a sense of delayed gratification: the masochist's knowledge that he will eventually yield keeps his anxiety under control, creating a masochistic pain. However, he is cognisant of the intense pleasure he will experience when he does, eventually, surrender. This is the masochist's only form of psychological control: they must direct the fantasy, highlight their specific desires and must submit to the torturer to create his pleasure-pain.

The masochist's surrender is dependent on finding a woman who can be directed and shaped into becoming their torturer. In chapter two, 'The Masochist's Ideal: Independence, Disguise and Desire', I investigated how the female, and female-presenting, playwrights Aphra Behn and Ariadne depicted the three natures of Masochean women who can become torturers. The three types of nature – hetaeric, sadistic, and cold – are crucial to the Deleuzian narrative framework, each reflecting an aspect of masochistic desire and are evolutionary stages towards becoming the ideal torturer. The female characters – daughters, wives, mistresses – in *The Feign'd Curtizans*, *She Ventures, and He Wins* and *The Rover* play a role in the masochistic fantasy, and as has been seen above, are crucial to the interplay between power, desire and submission. As a result of my analysis of Behn's and Ariadne's plays, I challenged Deleuze's reductive interpretation of women as merely being torturers, and established how women can equally create masochistic fantasies. The female masochist, like the male masochist, takes control of her fantasy to direct how her torture should be enacted, but they do so to highlight their gender equality in being able to become a masochist. These findings, when combined with Deleuze's theory, shed new light on Behn's and Ariadne's argument for greater female agency and create a new frame of reference for the shift in the depictions of sex and gender dynamics throughout the Restoration period. This thesis has shown that Behn and Ariadne

developed female empowerment through their female characters' dual natures of torturer and masochist, and their psychological control of the sexual desires of men. In consequence, it offers a nuanced means of examining how playwrights' characterisation implicitly champions women's agency: the masochistic female nature does not limit us to wily, independent and misbehaving women.

The Deleuzian framework is a complex and nuanced dynamic: the masochist must find his torturer and form a relationship that is based on the law of forming a contract. This sets out the terms for consent and power, pleasure and pain; both parties must submit willingly and obey the law of the contract. Chapter four, 'Law, Disorder, and the French Connection 1676–1681', built upon the identities of the masochist and torturer in the two previous chapters, in order to understand how the relationship is formed and how the contract brings a formality to their sexual desires. The Deleuzian reassessment of the narratives of *The Plain-Dealer*, *Sir Patient Fancy* and *The Princess of Cleve* as adaptations, and the wider contemporaneous historicity offers a new way of viewing how playwrights critiqued social conventions. Masochistic humour is intrinsic to the contract – whether ironic, farcical or dark – comedy is a self-deprecating way of challenging socio-normality. The contract, and its permission to enjoy illicit pleasure, becomes humorous as it allows us to laugh at the absurdity of the pain. Therefore, humour subverts expected behaviour, and as this thesis has shown, it implicitly proffers women an agency to strategically place men in a psycho-sexual state of pleasure-pain. The contract and the relationship between masochist and torturer becomes a vehicle to facilitate a discussion about patriarchal hypocrisy, and the roles that libertines, husbands, and fathers play in the continuation of female submission. Furthermore, this thesis has shown how an application of Deleuze's theory allows for a reassessment of the contrast between original and adaptation. The act of translating or modifying plays – in this thesis from the French – allows for the inclusion of a new

authorial intent, separate from the original author. In particular, playwrights often heightened the emotional complexity of light-hearted comedies by introducing elements such as a masochistic contract into the adapted narrative. Although not novel, the playwrights consciously create a paradox: humour hides serious undertones, but the inclusion of masochism allows a psychological depth to a playwright's views on society's faults, it is a catharsis, and challenges expected responses to those who know the original works.

Nevertheless, Masochean masochistic desire is ephemeral: this thesis has described how it is both psycho-sexual state and a wider symbolic critique of society. Masochism is a transient thought experiment. Throughout the wider Restoration comedy canon, plays appear to end with a return to moralism, marriage and gender restrictions; However, my analysis in chapter five, 'Beyond Masochism: The Reality of Conformity', has offered an original view that the masochistic relationship and its ending has consequences that linger beyond the denouement of the play. There are limitations to the masochistic state, but this doctoral study has illuminated how, when the masochistic contract concludes or is broken, there is a reversion to reality. The contract is a fantasy, enacted in a constructed space where power and desire can push the boundaries of society. The reversion is not detrimental, the vacuum left behind continues to highlight a desire for change in society. In this chapter, Thomas D'Urfey, John Vanbrugh and E. Polwhele depict the end of the masochistic fantasy to critique the reality of socio-behavioural hypocrisy, women's rights and oppression.

Masochism in William Congreve's *The Way of the World*

In this case study, I will apply the entire Deleuzian masochistic framework to William Congreve's characterisations of the protagonists Millamant and Mirabell in *The Way of the World* (1700). As previously mentioned in chapter five, comedy during the late seventeenth century was evolving from the ribald towards reformative and sentimental but, like John Vanbrugh, William Congreve was to suggest that moralistic reformation was a tenuous impossibility. To do so, Congreve created a masochistic narrative between the lovers Millamant and Mirabell that continued to question gender dynamics, female empowerment and the subjugation of women in marriage. The play's plot, in brief, continues the romance and intrigue comedy genre that had dominated the Restoration period: the main plot follows the loving relationship between the independent ingenue Millamant and the libertinistic Mirabell and their desire to marry. Mirabell and Millamant discuss frankly the terms under which they would do so – particularly how Millamant would only do so if she retains her independence. Millamant must obtain permission to marry from her aunt, Lady Wishfort, who dislikes Mirabell and wants Millamant to marry Sir Wilfull. To win over Lady Wishfort, Millamant devises a plan for Mirabell to woo Lady Wishfort to gain her trust – Lady Wishfort is deceived by Mirabell's pretence until the denouement, when she is tricked into allowing the lovers to marry. At the end, Millamant marries Mirabell for love, leaving her with a limited independence.

Ostensibly, Mirabell is a stock Restoration rake: witty, a womaniser and obsessed with money. However, Congreve adds a nuance to Mirabell's characterisation, perhaps in reflection of the growing rake reformation trope discussed in this thesis: Mirabell is in love with Millamant and willing to marry her. When seen

through a Deleuzian lens, Mirabell's masochistic fantasy is his desire to form a monogamous relationship with Millamant. From the outset of the play, it is a relationship that displays his desire for power and submission to her – monogamy both becomes his mastery and his submission to the socio-morality of marriage which will ultimately become his suffering. First and foremost, he views Millamant as his potential masochistic torturer, one that will make his pleasure-pain fantasy a reality. In Act 1, scene 2, Mirabell describes how Millamant's 'Insolence' (1.1.p.6) drove him to 'Revenge' (1.1.p.6);[2] he has taken her to

> […] pieces; sifted her, and separated her Failings; I study'd 'em and got 'em by rote. The Catalogue was so large, that I was not without hopes, one Day or other to hate her heartily: To which end I us'd my self to think of 'em, that at length, contrary to my Design and Expectation, they gave me every Hour less and less disturbance; 'till in a few Days it became habitual to me, to remember 'em without being displeas'd. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own Frailties; and in all probability, in a little time longer, I shall like 'em as well.
>
> (1.1.p.6)

Mirabell's fantasy has become consumed by Millamant, from wanting to 'hate her heartily', he viewed her as unable to perform in his fantasy – going against his 'Design and Expectation'. In his view, Millamant, along with his feelings for her, has evolved to become his prospective torturer, she now gives him 'less disturbance', and his desire is no longer 'displeas'd'. His words illuminate his position in the Deleuzian framework: his speech belies his sexual anxieties, his 'own Frailties' that have driven

[2] William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (Jacob Tonson, 1700).

him to seek his masochistic contract. Millamant's 'failings' will ultimately cure him. There is a method to his thinking, there is a clear evolution to his fantasy, it is ordered and reflects the control of how his punishment should be meted by Millamant. Marriage to her will bring him a humiliation by reining in his libidinous desires but equally will bring him pleasure.

Millamant represents the evolutionary nature of the Three Women of Masoch throughout the play. She reflects the growth from the hetaeric woman, to the sadistic, and finally becomes Mirabell's cold and cruel torturer. As Mirabell's partner, she is self-controlled, and in similarity to the characterisation of Clarabell from *The Frolicks* she is determined to retain her independence which forms part of Mirabell's masochistic fantasy. She assumes the mantle of the rake from the beginning of the play: playful, flirtatious and flippant, she is the unconventional hetaeric woman who uses her sexuality to achieve her goals. In Act 1, scene 1 she controls her male entourage Witwoud and Mincing through her beauty, but it is in her interactions with Mirabell that we see her hetaeric personality. In Act 4, scene 1, she dogmatically suggests that she will 'have you [Mirabell] – I won't be kiss'd, nor I won't be thank'd – here, kiss my hand tho' – so hold your tongue now, don't say a word' (4.1.p. 60) in a refusal to become subjugated and is active in her dictating her terms, if she becomes his torturer.

Later in Act 2, scene 5, Millamant progresses from the hetaeric to become the sadistic woman, telling Mirabell that 'One's Cruelty is one's Power, and when one parts with one's Cruelty, one parts with one's Power; and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's Old and Ugly' (2.1.p.27). In similarity to Mirabell's control of his fantasy, Millamant is overly controlling of her torturous power – for fear of being seen 'as Old and Ugly', she must become the cruel torturer – forcing Millamant into an incomplete fantasy. Her words belie the psychological cruelty that has metamorphosed from the hetaeric woman: Millamant's threat to take away her 'power' which will leave her old

can be seen as psychological 'Cruelty'. The threat of old age is a mastery of mental pain that manipulates the aesthete Mirabell into questioning his own masculine identity and virility. Millamant inverts the traditional gender dynamics, becoming dominant and controlling through her femininity and youth.

Millamant becomes the cold and cruel torturer in the proviso scene in Act 4, scene 1. Mirabell and Millamant verbally spar about the conditions under which they would marry. Throughout the scene, Millamant is intellectually superior and devoid of emotion – cold and cruel – in her demands before she agrees to marry him. Millamant makes Mirabell's fantasy real by telling him what marriage to her would be like, arguing that 'I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure' (4.1.p.56). This highlights Millamant's stipulation that she must remain in control of her autonomy and will not be dominated by Mirabell. Instead, her desire is to dominate him by taking 'Lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases: And then, if one pleases, one makes more' (2.1.p.27). Her calculated threat of cuckoldry becomes a basis of his torture: it will both create his pain, confirming his fears of emasculation, but the delayed gratification of its promise will become his pleasure. Millamant shows herself to be Mirabell's ideal torturer: she will dominate, she will arrange the terms of their marriage which will torment him into humiliation, degradation and submission.

When seen from a Deleuzian standpoint, Mirabell's question whether he should 'kiss your [Millamant's] hand upon the Contract? and here comes one to be a witness to the Sealing of the Deed' (4.1.p.59) highlights the sealing of their masochistic contract. In Act 4, scene 5 we can see its careful construction of what Millamant calls 'Odious proviso's' (4.1.p.59), but it is a negotiated framework that will validate Mirabell's pleasure-pain. He sets out the contractual terms, arguing that he will not be a

> […] Father to a Crooked-billet. […] to the Dominion of the *Tea-Table*, I submit. – But with *proviso*, that you exceed not in your province; but restrain your self to Native and Simple *Tea-Table* drinks, as *Tea*, *Chocolate*, and *Coffee*. As likewise to Genuine and, Authoriz'd *Tea-Table* talk,– such as mending of Fashions, spoiling Reputations, railing at absent Friends, and so forth. […] But for *Cowslip-Wine*, *Poppy-Water*, and all *Dormitives*, those I allow, – these *proviso's* admitted, in other things I may prove a tractable and complying Husband.
>
> (4.1.p.59)

Mirabell is placing himself both within the torture of monogamy and controlling how Millamant should behave towards him – reflecting the connection between pleasure and pain. Their prospective marriage becomes their formal contract, he will be a 'tractable and complying Husband'. He has regulated what and how his pain will be created, but they will be complicit in the carrying out of the contractual obligations: marriage will bring control over his desires, or submission to 'the Dominion of the *Tea-Table*'. There is a subversive masochistic humour to his provisos that highlight implicitly his desire and become a means for negotiating the terms of the contract. Mirabell's mocking tone underscores his strategic need for his desires to be satisfied, from Millamant's 'authorised *Tea-Table* drinks', 'mending of Fashions' and 'so forth', it becomes his description for how he expects his torture to be made real. Their contract is governed by negotiation and law; there are limits on both of their actions as Mirabell can feel in control of his desires by laying out the terms, but his torture and submission will be in the jurisdiction of Millamant.

Their marriage would complete the contract, but it reveals the reality of sexual hypocrisy, women's rights and oppression. Millamant conversely contrasts her re-

submission and the limited freedom that she will enjoy. In Act 5, scene 1 Mirabell effectively demands that the gender dynamics between them will always remain in Millamant's favour – Mirabell tells her that whilst he will have her 'over and over again' (5.1.p.88) he fears that he loves her 'not too well' (5.1.p.88). As a married woman, Millamant will only enjoy a limited independence, but for her love to continue, Mirabell must always submit to her. Under the security of appearing virtuous and respectable Mirabell will assuage his sexual anxieties and receive his pleasure-pain. Although their relationship is perhaps outwardly performative, masochism fundamentally alters the gender imbalance: Millamant controls Mirabell's desire.

In reflection of their unseen marriage at the end of the play's narrative, the masochistic relationship continues to extend past the stage – altering, redefining and repressing the societal power sources that should control desire. The application of the entirety of Deleuze's framework on *The Way of the World* offers us a new psychological understanding of how the contemporaneous world was viewed and challenged by Congreve. His depiction of a masochistic fantasy, domination and humiliation for both Millamant and Mirabell allows us to see that they, as characters, have a presence to change social order. The dynamics in their relationship allows us to view the paradox of how power is negotiated through surrender, how desire is self-destructive and how, ultimately, how pain is created by adhering to societal normality.

The choice of these plays in this study has reflected the differing and evolving genres of comedy throughout the era. This balance has presented differing perspectives and usage of Masochean masochism, depending on the tone of the comedy, gender of the playwrights, and contemporaneous socio-behavioural attitudes. This cross-section of plays reveals the extensive depictions of the masochistic framework but necessarily must omit many comedies out of the scope of this thesis.

Nevertheless, this does provide an exciting opportunity to further research the depiction of masochism, its interrelation with depictions of failing patriarchal superiority, libertinistic freedom and moralistic freedom within popular and little-known comedies as well as other genres during the Restoration and later-Stuart period. Indeed, these investigations would afford the possibility to contemplate how playwrights addressed and depicted the masochistic framework within Restoration tragedies**.** This would provide a view of how a Deleuzian reading of tragedy and its themes could highlight the destructive forces of a repressed society. Equally, staging of Restoration drama should be considered from a Deleuzian standpoint. A visual representation of masochism would perhaps offer an understanding of how discernible the masochistic relationship is to an audience, and how this can be interpreted to give a fuller picture of how effective the representation of masochism is when depicted on the stage.

Throughout this doctoral study, the implicit portrayals of desire, power and submission defy the expectation of light-hearted Restoration comedies. The representation of the Masochean masochistic relationship has shown that men freely create the opportunity for female empowerment: it is an erotic fantasy that exposes masculine sexual failings and anxieties that can only be alleviated through submission. Masochism brings a novel view to the inequality of the sexuality dynamic – it gender swaps the aphorism that no one is angrier than a woman rejected in love. Instead women become cold, their virtue and unattainability disguise a sexual liberation that respectability should prevent. Ultimately, the masochistic framework is a means to explain how comedy critiqued society; playwrights were the diagnosticians of sex and sin, they diagnosed sexual hypocrisy and cured through pleasure-pain.

If I might return to my study's origins and hypothesis in the introduction, masochism and its pleasure of denial adds a psychological nuance to the quest for

sexual freedom, innuendo and pursuit of pleasure in Restoration comedy. Plays become more than a light-hearted comedic romp filled with rakes and wilful ingenues that titillate an expectant audience. Humour becomes a serious tool for exploration of gender, desire and self-discovery; it illuminates how power is gained from humiliation, repression and enslavement. Masochism changes the way we understand how plays, and playwrights produced a creative expression of self-reflexivity that explores what is, and what could be.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Anon., *A Letter To A Member of Parliament With Two Discourses Enclosed In It. I. The One shewing the Reason why a Law Should Pass to Punish Adultery With Death* ([n.pub.], 1675)

–– *The Princess of Cleve. The Most Famed Romance. Written in French by the Greatest Wits of France, Rendered in English by a Person of Quality, at the Request of some Friends* (R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1679)

–– (Attributed to Mary Astell) *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest. By a Lover of Her SEX* (R. Wilkin, 1694)

–– *She Ventures and He Wins. A Comedy. Writen by a Young Lady* (Hen. Rhodes, J. Harris, and Sam. Briscoe, 1696)

Behn, Aphra, *The Feign'd Curtizans, or, A Nights Intrigue. A Comedy* (Jacob Tonson, 1679)

–– *Sir Patient Fancy: A Comedy* (Richard Tonson and Jacob Tonson, 1678)

–– *The Rover: or, The Banished Cavaliers* (John Amery, 1677)

Blackmore, Richard, *Prince Arthur. An Heroick Poem* (Awnsham and John Churchil, 1695)

Catullus, *The Complete Poems*, ed. and trans. by Guy Lee (Oxford World's Classics, 1990)

Cibber, Colley, *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber* (George Faulkner, 1740)

Collier, Jeremy, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (S. Keble, R. Sare, and J. Hindmarsh, 1698)

Congreve, William, *The Way of the World* (Jacob Tonson, 1700)

'The Diary of John Evelyn' (1690–1706) [diary] 1692 Sept, pp. 115-116 in *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online* https://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/display/10.1093/actrade/9780198187523.book.1/actrade-9780198187523-div2-3?r-1=1.000&wm-1=1&t-1=contents-tab&p1-1=1&w1-1=1.000&p2-1=1&w2-1=0.400 [Accessed 15 January 2025]

Dryden, John, *Marriage A- la-Mode. A Comedy* (Henry Herringman, 1673)

D'Urfey, Thomas, *The Marriage-Hater Match'd: A Comedy* (R. Bentley, R. Parker, and Sam. Briscoe, 1693)

Herbert, Right Reverend Bishop of Hereford, *A Sermon Preached before the King at White-Hal, April the 12th 1674* (Charles Harper, 1676)

Hesiod, 'Works and Days', in *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia,* ed. by and trans. by Glenn Most (Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 86-153

Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed. by Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Clarendon Press, 2012), II

Howell, James, *Parthenopoeia* (Humphrey Moseley, 1654)

The Holy Bible Containing The Old Testament and The New: Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised by His Majesties Special Command, Authorised King James Version (Printed by Charles Bill, and the Executrix of Thomas Newcomb deceas'd; Printers to the King and Queens most Excellent Majesties, 1692)

Langbaine, Gerard, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (George West and Henry Clements, 1691)

Lee, Nathaniel, *The Princess of Cleve* ([n.pub.], 1689)

–– *The Princess of Cleve* (Abel Roper, 1689)

–– 'The Princess of Cleve', in *Four Restoration Marriage Plays*, ed. by Michael Cordner and Ronald Clayton (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 89-174

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* (Peter Parker, Robert Boulter, and Matthias Walker, 1667)

Molière, *Le Misanthrope,* ed. by Jaques Chupeau. (Gallimard, 2013)

Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* trans. by David Raeburn (Penguin Classics, 2004)

–– *Ovid's Epistles, Translated by Several Hands* (Jacob Tonson, 1680)

Polwhele, Elizabeth, *The Frolicks or The Lawyer Cheated*, ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (Cornell University Press, 1977)

Ravenscroft, Edward, *The London Cuckolds. A Comedy* (Jos. Hindmarsh, 1683)

Shakespeare, William, 'Venus and Adonis', in *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen (Bloomsbury Press, 2022), pp. 131-229

Vanbrugh, John, *The Provok'd Wife: A Comedy* (R. Wellington, and Sam. Briscoe 1697)

–– *A Short Vindication of The Relapse and The Provoked Wife, From Immorality and Prophaneness*, (H. Walwyn, 1698)

Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, ed. by Frédéric Deloffre (Gallimard, 1986)

William III, *His Majesties letter to the Lord Bishop of London to be communicated to the two provinces of Canterbury and York* (Printed by Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb, Printers to the King and Queens most Excellent Majesties, 1689)

Wright, James, *Country Conversations* (Henry Bonwicke, 1694)

Wycherley, William, *The Country Wife, A Comedy* (Thomas Dring, 1675)

–– *The Plain-Dealer. A Comedy* (R. Bently and M. Magnes, 1677)

Manuscripts

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl, poet. 195

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS fonds français R1453

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS fonds français RF 3586

Washington DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, V.b.220

Secondary Sources

Airey, Jennifer, '"For fear of learning new Language": Antitheatricalism and the Female Spectator in "*The Country Wife*" and "*The Plain Dealer*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 31 (2007), 1-19

Bachofen, Jakob, *Das Mutterrecht* (Benno Schwabe, 1897)

–– *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* (Princeton University Press, 1967)

Backsheider, Paula, '"Endless Aversion Rooted in the Soul": Divorce in the 1690-1730 Theater"', *The Eighteenth Century*, 37 (1996), 99-135

Bacon, Jon Lance, 'Wives, Widows, and Writings in Restoration Comedy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31 (1991), 427-443

Ballaster, Ros, 'The first female dramatists', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500*-1700, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Barry, Helen, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late Stuart England* (Routledge, 2003)

Baugh, Bruce, 'How Deleuze can help us make literature work', in *Deleuze and Literature*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and John Marks (Edinburgh University Press, 2000)

Beauchamp, Gorman, 'The Amorous Machiavellism of "*The Country Wife*"', *Comparative Drama,* 11 (1977-78), 316-330

Beckman, Frida, *Between Desire and Pleasure* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013)

Bentley, Eric, *The Life of the Drama* (Applause Books, 1996)

Berman, Ronald, 'Wycherley's Unheroic Society', *ELH*, 51 (1984), 465-478

Bernard, Michel, *Sacher-Masoch* (Editions Robert Laffont, 1989)

Bevis, Richard, *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1789* (Pearson Education, 1988)

Boden-Tebbutt, Dominic, 'Masochean Masochism in Restoration Comedy', (unpublished master's dissertation, Queen Mary University of London, 2020)

Bogue, Ronald, *Deleuze and Guattari* (Routledge, 1989)

–– *Deleuze on Literature* (Routledge, 2003)

Bowditch, Claire, 'Textual Materiality and Contemporary Literary Borrowings in the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis Comedies of Aphra Behn, 1678-1681' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Loughborough University, 2015) in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global < https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2322015066/B90638F02F674E43PQ/2?accountid=8630&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses> [Accessed 4 February 2025]

––, Elaine Hobby, 'Aphra Behn's Adaptations: Paper and Stage Sources for *The Rover* (1677) and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678)', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 85 (2022), 131-150

Brilliant, Richard, *Portraiture* (Harvard University Press, 1991)

Brittan, Owen, 'The print depiction of King William III's masculinity', *The Seventeenth Century,* 33 (2017), 219-239

Brookner Bender, Ashley, 'Moving Miniatures and Circulating Bodies in Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 31 (2007), 27-46

Brown, Laura, *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760: An Essay in Generic History* (Yale University Press, 1981).

Budin, Stephanie, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Burke, Helen, 'The Cavalier Myth in *The Rover*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 118-134

–– '"Law-suits," "Love-suits," and the Family Property in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*', in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, ed. by Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne (The University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 89-113

–– 'Wycherley's "Tendentious Joke": The discourse of alterity in "*The Country Wife*"', *The Eighteenth Century*, 29 (1988), 227-241

Burton, Robert, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, 3 vols (Oxford University Press, 1989), I

Bush-Bailey, Gilli, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage* (University of Manchester, 2006)

Calder, Andrew, *Molière, The Theory and Practice of Comedy* (The Atholone Press, 1993)

Canfield, Douglas, *Tricksters and Estates* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1997)

Challinor, Jennie, 'Introduction', in *Playing Politics: Restoration Drama and Innovation, 1670–71* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming)

Chernaik, Warren, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Collington, Tara and Philip Collington, 'Adulteration or Adaptation? Nathaniel Lee's "Princess of Cleve" and his Sources', *Modern Philology*, 100 (2002), 196-226

Corcoran, Kellye, '"Cuckoldry as Performance"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (2012), 543-559

Cormon, Brian, 'Comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration* Theatre, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk, pp. 52-69

Corse, Taylor, 'Seventeenth-Century Naples and Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 29 (2005), 41-51

Cottegnies, Line, 'Aphra Behn's French Translations', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 221-234

Davis, Stevie, and William Hunter, 'Milton's Urania: "The meaning, not the name I call"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 28 (1988), 95-111

Dennis, John, 'Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatic Poetry and of the Degeneracy of the Public Taste, 1725', in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), II

Deleuze, Gilles, 'De Sacher Masoch au masochisme', *Arguments*, 21 (1961), 40-46

–– 'Desire and Pleasure', in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith, ed. by Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 264-274

–– *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel Smith and Michael Greco (Verso, 1998)

–– 'From Sacher Masoch to Masochism', trans. by Christian Kerslake, *Angelaki*, 9 (2004), 125-132

–– *Logic of Sense*, trans. by Constantin Boundas, Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012)

–– *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991)

–– *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch, Avec le texte integral de La Vénus à la fourrure*, trans. by Aude Willm (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967)

––, Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seam and Helen R. Lane (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)

Diamond, Elin, 'Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*', in Aphra Behn, Contemporary Critical Essays, ed. by Janet Todd (Macmillan Press, 1999)

Donaldson, Ian, '"Tables Turned": *The Plain Dealer', Essays in Criticism*, 17 (1967), 304-321

Earle, Peter, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (University of California Press, 1989)

A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology, ed. by William Smith, 3 vols (John Murray, 1872), III

Ezell, Margaret, *Writing Women's Literary History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

Figueroa Dorrego, Jorge, 'Ariadne's adaptation of Alexander Oldys's *The Fair Extravagant* in *She Ventures, and He Wins*', *SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*, 19 (2009), 177-188

Finke, Laurie, 'Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 17-43

Fishman, Jenn, 'Performing Identities: Female Cross-Dressing in "*She Ventures, and He Wins*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 20 (1996), 36-51

Fitzmaurice, James, 'The Language of Gender and a Textual Problem in Aphra Behn's "*The Rover*"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 3 (1995), 283-293

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (Penguin Random House, 2020)

Freud, Sigmund, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 132-195

–– *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. by David McLintock (Penguin Books, 2002)

–– 'Fetishism', in *The Unconscious*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 95-100

–– 'Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety', *Standard Edition 22* (Hogarth Press), pp. 77-178

–– *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (Penguin Books, 2002)

Gallagher, Catherine, 'Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 65-85

Gelineau, David, '*The Country Wife*: Dance of the Cuckolds', *Comparative Drama,* 48 (2014), 277-305

–– 'Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 41 (2017), 29-5

Gibson, Kate, *Illegitimacy, Family, and Stigma in England, 1660-1834* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

Gómez, Carlos, 'Courtship, Marriage Vows, and Political Metaphor in Vanbrugh's "*The Relapse*" and "*The Provoked Wife*"', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 1 (2001), 93-123

Gómez-Lara, Manuel J., María José Mora, Paula de Pando, Rafael Portillo, Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, and Rafael Vêlez Núñez, eds, *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1670: A Catalogue* (Teneo Press, 2014)

––, Gómez-Lara, Manuel J., María José Mora and Paula de Pando, 'Introduction', in Thomas Durfey, *The Marriage Hater-Matched,* ed. by Manuel J. Gómez-Lara, José Mora and Paula de Pando (Universitat de Barcelona, 2014), pp. 15-43

Hardin, Richard, 'Ovid in Seventeenth-Century England', *Comparative Literature*, 24 (1972), 44-62

Harrington Smith, John, 'Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy', *Modern Philology*, 46 (1948), 22-33

Harris, Joseph, *Misanthropy in the Age of Reason: Hating Humanity from Shakespeare to Schiller* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

Harwood, John, *Critics, Values, and Restoration Comedy* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1982)

Hawcroft, Michael, *Molière: Reasoning with Fools* (Oxford University Press, 1998)

Hayden, Judy, 'Of Privileges and Masculine Parts: The Learned Lady in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 42 (2006), 317-331

Holland, Norman, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Oxford University Press, 1959)

–– *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Holland, Peter, 'Farce', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 107-126

Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by E.V. Rieu and D.C.H. Rieu (Penguin Books, 1991)

Howard, Jean, 'Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1988), 418-440

Howe, Elizabeth, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1996)

–– '*The Plain-Dealer*, A Reappraisal', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 43 (1982), 315-336

–– *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001)

–– 'The Unity of Dryden's *Marriage A-La-Mode*', *Philological Quarterly*, 61 (1982), 125-142

Hughes, John, 'Deleuze, Style and Literature', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 21 (2010), 269-284

Hume, Robert D., 'The Date of Dryden's Marriage A-la-Mode', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 21 (1973), 53-58

–– *The Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1976)

–– 'Marital Discord in English Comedy from Dryden to Fielding', *Modern Philology*, 74 (1977), 248-272

—— 'The Satiric Design of Nat Lee's "The Princess of Cleve"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 73 (1976), 117-138

Hutner, Heidi, 'Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 102-120

Johnson, William, 'Spenser's Hermetic Tricksters in *The Fairie Queene* III and IV', *English Studies* 83 (2002), 338-355

Jones, Suzanne, 'Early Modern English Translations of Molière', in *Molière in Context,* ed. by Jan Clarke (Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 265-272

—— 'French Imports: English Translations of Molière, 1663-1732', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2016) in Oxford University Research Archive < https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8d86ee12-54ab-48b3-9c47-e946e1c7851f> [Accessed 4 February 2025]

—— 'Printing Stage: Relationships between performance, print, and translation in early English editions of Molière', *Early Modern French Studies*, 40 (2018), 146-165

Jung, Youmi, 'Creating the New Breed of Comic Heroine in Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671)', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 36 (2023), 486-494

Karzarin, Edward P., 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', *SubStance*, 39 (2010), 91-106

Kaufman, Antony, 'Idealization, Disillusion, and Narcissistic Rage in Wycherley's "*The Plain Dealer*"', *Criticism*, 21 (1979), 119-133

Kewes, Paulina, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England 1660-1710* (Clarendon Press, 1998)

Knafo, Danielle, 'Desiring Castration: A reformulation of Castration Theory Illustrated with a Transgender Case', *Psychoanalytical Inquiry,* 38 (2018), 34-50

Knapp, Peggy, 'The "Plyant" Discourse of Wycherley's "The Country Wife"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 40 (2000), 451-472

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Columbia University Press, 2015)

Kraft-Ebbing, Richard von, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (William Heinemann Medical Books, 1939)

Kreis-Schnick, Annette, *Women, Writing, and the Theater in the Early Modern Period* (Associated University Press, 2001)

Kroll, Richard, 'Instituting Empiricism: Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode'*, in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, ed. by Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne (The University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 39-66

Lauwaert, Lode and William Britt, 'Gilles Deleuze on Sacher-Masoch and Sade: A Bergsonian Criticism of Freudian Psychoanalysis', *Deleuze Studies*, 9 (2015), 153-184

Lennep, William Van, *The London Stage 1660–1700* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1965)

Loftis, John and David Stuart Rodes, 'Commentary: Marriage A-la-Mode', in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by John Loftis and David Stuart Rodes, 20 vols (University of California Press, 1978), XI, pp. 460-505

The London Stage Database, 1660-1800, Entry '*Le Misanthrope*', n.d. <https://www.eighteenthcenturydrama.amdigital.co.uk/LondonStage/Database> [Accessed 15 January 2025]

Lynch, Kathleen, 'Thomas D'Urfey's Contribution To Sentimental Comedy', *Philological Quarterly*, 9 (1930), 249-259

Margoliouth, H.M., Pierre Legouis and Elsie Elizabeth Duncan-Jones eds., *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, 2 vols (Clarendon Press, 1971), II

Markley, Robert, 'Behn and the unstable traditions of social comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 98-117

Marsden, Jean I., 'Commanding Eyes: Female Spectators and the Restoration Theatrical Repertoire', *Études Épistémè*, 42 (2022) < https://journals.openedition.org/episteme/15472> [Accessed 4 February 2025]

–– *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660–1720* (Cornell University Press, 2006)

Matthews-Grieco, Sara, 'Introduction', in *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe (15th–17th century)*, ed. by Sara Matthews-Grieco (Ashgate Publishing, 2014), pp. 1-10

McVeagh, John, *Thomas Durfey and Restoration Drama* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000)

Milhouse, Judith, 'Two Plays by Elizabeth Polwhele: "*The Faithfull Virgins*" and "*The Frolicks*"', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 71 (1977), 1-9

––, Robert D. Hume, 'Introduction', in *The Frolicks, or The Lawyer Cheated* ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 13-49

–– *The Publication of Plays in London 1660–1800* (The British Library, 2015)

Miller, John, *The Stuarts* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006)

Miyoshi, Riki, 'A Tale of Two Theatres', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660–1700*, 40 (2016), 25-44

Mora, Maria José and Manuel Gómez-Lara, 'Revolution and the Moral Reform of the Stage: The Case of Durfey's *The Marriage-Hater Matched* (1692)', in *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England, 1660–1737, From Leviathan to Licensing Act*, ed. by Catie Gill (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), pp. 145-156

Mueschke, Paul and Jeanette Fleisher, 'A Re-Evaluation of Vanbrugh', *Modern Language Association*, 49 (1934), 848-889

Norman, Larry F., *The Public Mirror: Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1999)

Ogden Birdsall, Virginia, *Wild Civility* (Indiana University Press, 1970)

Oliver, Kathleen, '"I will write Whore with this Penknife in your Face": Female Amatory Letters, the Body, and Violence in Wycherley's 'The Country Wife"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 1 (2014), 41-60

Owen, Susan, 'Drama and political crisis', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 158-173

–– '"Suspect my loyalty when I lose my virtue": Sexual Politics and Party in Aphra Behn's Plays of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678–83', in *Aphra Behn, Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Janet Todd (Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 57-72

Oxford English Dictionary, Entry 'Baggage', n.d. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/baggage_n?tab=meaning_and_use [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry 'Breeding', n.d. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/breed_v2?tab=meaning_and_use#1470044350 [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry 'Debauch', n.d. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/debauch_v?tab=meaning_and_use#7291307 [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry 'Chapmen', n.d. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30593?redirectedFrom=Chapmen#eid> [Accessed 15 January 2025}

–– Entry 'Cloy', n.d. <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/cloy_v1?tab=meaning_and_use#9187926> [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry ‘Hetaera’, n.d. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86408?redirectedFrom=hetaera#eid [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry ‘Hypochondria’,n.d. <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/hypochondria_n?tab=meaning_and_use> [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry ‘Loins’, n.d. < https://www.oed.com/dictionary/loin_n?tab=meaning_and_use> [Accessed 15 May 2025]

–– Entry ‘Low’, n.d. <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=low> [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry, ‘Nightcap’, n.d. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/nightcap_n?tab=meaning_and_use#34856200 https://www.oed.com [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry ‘Passepartout’, n.d. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=PAssepartout [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry, ‘Pickle’, n.d. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=pickle [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry, ‘Quack’, n.d. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=quack [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry ‘Succubus’, n.d. <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/succubus_n?tab=meaning_and_use> [Accessed 15 January 2025]

–– Entry ‘Supersensual’, n.d. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=supersensual [Accessed 15 January 2025]

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Entry ‘E.Polewheele’ (2004), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-45820> [Accessed 4 February 2025]

Oxford Reference, Entry ‘Oral Eroticism’, n.d. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100252671> [Accessed 4 February 2025]

Pacheco, Anita, ‘Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn’s “*The Rover*”’, *ELH*, 65 (1998), 323-345

Pearson, Jaqueline, *The Prostituted Muse* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988)

Pérez Vides, Auxiliadora, 'Gender, Disguise and the Politics of Marriage in Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins*', *SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*, 11 (2000), 271-276

Perot, Sandra, 'Theatre Women and Cultural Diplomacy in the Transatlantic Anglophone World 1752-1807' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Massachusetts)

Prieto-Pablo, Juan, Zenón Luís Martínez, Pilar Cuder Domínguez, eds, *The Female Wits: Women and Gender in Restoration Literature and Culture* (Universidad de Huelva, 2021)

The Provoked Wife, Royal Shakespeare Company (2019), <https://www.rsc.org.uk/restoration-plays/the-provoked-wife> [Accessed 15 January 2025]

Quinsey, Katherine M., ed, *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama* (University of Kentucky, 1996)

Renier, Gustaff Johannes, *William of Orange* (Peter Davis Limited, 1932)

Rey, Alain, ed., *Le Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, 3 vols (Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1992), II

Righter, Anne, 'Chatterton Lecture on an English Poet, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 53 (1967), 47-69

Roberts, David, 'Caesar's Gift: Playing the Park in the Late Seventeenth Century', *ELH*, 71 (2004) 115-139

–– *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama 1660–1700* (Clarendon Press, 1989)

–– '"Ranked Among the Best": Translation and Cultural Agency in Restoration Translations of French Drama', *The Modern Language Review*, 108 (2013), 396-415

Rogers, K.M., 'Fatal Inconsistency: Wycherley and *The Plain Dealer*', *ELH*, 28 (1961), 148-162

Roland Pennock, James, 'Hobbes's Confusing "Clarity" – The Case of "Liberty"', *The American Political Science Review*, 54 (1960), 428-436

Rose, Margaret, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Rosenthal, Laura, '"All injury's forgot": Restoration Sex Comedy and National Amnesia', *Comparative Drama*, 42 (2008), 7-28

Rothstein, Eric and Frances Kavenik, *The Designs of Carolean Comedy* (Southern Illinois University, 1988)

Rubik, Margaret, *Early Modern Dramatists 1500-1800* (Macmillan Press, 1998)

Sacher-Masoch, Leopold von, *Venus in Furs*, trans. by Jean McNeil, in Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil (Zone Books, 1991), pp. 143-293

Scouten, Arthur and Robert D. Hume, '"Restoration Comedy" and Its Audiences, 1660-1776', *The Year Book of English Studies*, 10 (1980), 45-69

Sharpe, Kevin, *Rebranding Rule: The Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660–1714* (Yale University Press, 2013)

Sherman, Sandra, 'Manly, Manliness, and Friendship in "*The Plain Dealer*"', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 20 (1996), 18-30

Skinner, Quentin, 'Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty: The Prothero Lecture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 40 (1990), 121-151

Smith, Daniel, 'Introduction', in Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel Smith and Michael Greco (Verso, 1998), pp. xi-liii

Sofer, Andrew, *Dark Matter, Invisibility in Drama, Theater and Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2013)

Solomon, Diana, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater: Gender And Comedy*, *Performance And Print* (University of Delaware Press, 2015)

Spencer, Jane, '"Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comic Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesans*', in *Rereading Aphra Behn*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 86-101

Spurr, John, *England in the 1670s* (Blackwell Publishers, 2000)

Staves, Susan, *Players' Sceptres: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (University of Nebraska, 1979)

–– 'Behn, Women, and Society', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 12-28

Stone, Lawrence, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England, 1660–1857* (Oxford University Press, 1993)

–– *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Penguin Books, 1979)

–– *Road to Divorce: England 1530–1987* (Oxford University Press, 1990)

Stroup, Thomas B., '*The Princess of Cleve* and Sentimental Comedy', *The Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935), 200-203

Styan, J.L., *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Taylor, James Grantham, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Thanem, Torkild and Louise Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud and Deluze: toward a queer theory of masochism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 2 (2010), 1-10 < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/figure/10.3402/jac.v2i0.4642?scroll=top&needAccess=true> [Accessed 10 May 2025]

Thompson, Peggy, 'Closure and Subversion in Behn's Comedies', in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (University of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 71-88

Thornbury, Walter, *Old and New London: Volume 3* (Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878)

Todd, Janet, *Aphra Behn, A Secret Life* (Fentum Press, 2017)

Troost, Wouter, *William III the Stadholder King* (Routledge, 2005)

Turner, David, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England 1660–1740* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Velissariou, Aspasia, 'Patriarchal Tactics of Control and Female Desire in Wycherley's The Gentleman Dancing-Master and The Country Wife', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 37 (1995), 115-126

Watt, Daniel, 'Performing, Strolling, Thinking: From Minor Literature to Theatre of the Future', in *Deleuze and Performance*, ed. by Laura Cull (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 96-97

Webster, Jeremy, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

Wiehe, Jarred, 'Propping up and Stripping Down: Stage Properties as Technologies of Gender in Edward Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* and *The London Cuckolds*', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 40 (2016), 5-22

Wilcox, Helen, 'Chronology', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. xv-xx

Wilcox, John, *The Relation of Molière to Restoration Comedy* (Columbia University Press, 1938)

Williams, Gordon, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols (The Athlone Press, 1994)

Woodcock, George, *Aphra Behn: The English Sappho* (Black Rose Books, 1989)

Wolff, Larry, 'Introduction', in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs* (Penguin Books, 2000), pp. vii-xxviii

Young, Douglas, *The Feminist Voices in Restoration Comedy* (University Press of America Inc, 1997)

Zimbardo, Rose, 'The Satiric Design in *The Plain Dealer*', *Studies in English Literature, 1600-1900*, 1 (1963), 1-18