GENDER, GENRE, AND THE EROTICIZATION OF VIOLENCE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

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DEDICATION

In memory of Patricia Grignon
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ABSTRACT

In an analysis of literary and historical documents from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, *Gender, Genre, and the Eroticization of Violence in Early Modern English Literature* examines depictions of love, beauty, and desire and identifies within these discourses a rhetoric of violence. It explores how eroticized violence can be deployed to privilege male speakers and silence female voices. It also reveals, by pairing female- and male-authored works that make specific claims to represent gendered experience that early modern writers both recognized the mechanisms of violent representation as literary conventions and realized they could be deployed, exploited, resisted, fashioned to new ends. By integrating feminist psychoanalytic, film and architectural theories with literary analysis, this study demonstrates how spatial topographies in literary works can function as stimuli that provoke desire to turn violent. *Gender, Genre, and the Eroticization of Violence* ultimately identifies how this body of literature constructs and maintains genders and points to violence as a structural principle, bound by the hydraulics of subjectivity and cultural anxieties about gender, class, and literary production. Finally, this study identifies the residue of early modern ideas about desire and violence in the materials of our modern culture.
INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I remember reading poems like “Leda and the Swan” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” in my British literature survey courses and feeling uncomfortable about what they depicted especially in light of my professors’ laudatory remarks about them. At the time, I didn’t do a lot of questioning. I was there to learn and to absorb. And these were GREAT works: polished and well-crafted. They clearly belonged in the literary canon, for they alluded to early texts and myths we had and would study. And, so it went, as we would move from one poem to the next, striving for coverage. For some reason it didn’t matter that the swan seemed to be “taking” Leda – against her will. Yeats was merely rewriting Greek myth. Nor did it matter that the maiden wrought upon the urn was running from rather than to the youth. As Keats said, this is “happy love! . . . happy, happy love!” (25).

In graduate school, my interests shifted from modern to early modern works, women writers and the social construction of literary history. I learned there was more to the story. The poems I’d studied so long ago by Yeats and Keats secure their elite and almost unquestionable place in the literary canon, partly because they are polished and exist in accordance with a literary standard we all recognize. They also represent one side of a conversation in a long-standing literary dialogue, for “Leda and the Swan” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” allude to and craft anew myths and poetic motifs central to western literary history. This exchange, largely the byproduct of male writers, is a consequence of a variety of cultural phenomena based on a gendered, racial, class-based system of privilege embedded in “tradition” itself. This Tradition, where taste is cultural and
absolute, not individual and variable, disenfranchises particular voices and genres and imparts a certain elitism and hierarchical status in the literary canon. The circumlocutious dialogue that results stems from a writer’s sense of the tradition in which he writes and his efforts to position himself successfully within that tradition. Harold Bloom labels this creative endeavor “literary paternity,” for it functions as a tribute to one’s literary forefathers and a competition between those fathers and their metaphoric sons. Bloom’s term was later adapted and elaborated by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who cite it to explain the exclusion of women from The Great Tradition. This system of authorship, they argue, produces a writerly genealogy of sorts that lends generative authority to male writers, while denying that creative capacity to female voices. One way it does so is through the production of negative images of women in literature. Although Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis focuses on the nineteenth century, this is by no means a nineteenth-century trend. As Wendy Wall explains in her analysis of gender and the economy of book publishing in early modern England, women who chose to write during the English Renaissance were forced to confront both their representation as tropes (7), as a member of that category “woman” in the popular, male-authored texts circulating in the period, and “the trickier task of finding alternative modes of expression and self-authorization” (282). Unlike Gilbert and Gubar, who explore extensively debilitating images of women, such as the monstrous, sick, or confined woman, or Wall, who addresses gendered stereotypes and inequities that develop as a result of book

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1 This issues remains a problem for modern readers. See, for example, Duyfhuizen on the problems of teaching Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” – and other stories “that are exclusively male plots in which women . . . do not fare well or are stereotyped in ways that let masculine culture dismiss their stories as insignificant” (412).
publication, I am interested in the conjunction of eroticism and violence and its gendered effect upon genre and the construction of literary history.

Although my field of study long ago shifted from nineteenth and twentieth century texts to early modern British literature, I recall Keats’ piece whenever I’m asked what the eroticization of violence is or how I first became interested in it.² I use this phrase to describe a literary discourse in which violence is conflated with desire. I am interested in texts that romanticize violent behavior or depict desire through violent images or language. Several literary devices coalesce to produce this effect: the particular generic mode the author chooses, the social and geographic spaces conventionally depicted within those genres, conventions of gender representation within those spaces, and, importantly, the voice and ocular perspective of the speaker who controls the narrative. Keats’ poem incorporates all of these characteristics, and his preoccupation with aesthetics suggests the politics of the canon itself: what is art and literature?; who speaks and who has agency?; who is represented and who objectified?; who decides what’s in the canon or out and according to what standard?

In “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” a man contemplates the transience of human life while gazing upon an antique, marble vase. This object, a container initially designed to hold the ashes of a spent life – is long-emptied of its contents and transformed into an objet d’art. Observing its pristine condition, the speaker attributes to the urn an imperviousness both to age and to time and entreats the still, bas-relief human figures that

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² It may seem odd to use a nineteenth-century poem as a model for an argument I want to make about early modern literature, but Keats’ poem incorporates the motifs I want to discuss and does so concisely. It also suggests the extent to which early verse influences that which follows and exemplifies literary paternity.
decorate its façade. He cries out, asking, “What men or gods are these? What maidens
wild ecstasy?” (8-10), as he takes in the verdant scene of revelry and sexual frolicking.
Importantly, the speaker reads this scene as the epitome of love. Only, it is not peopled
by willing, affectionate couples but by men and women striving against each other:
godlike men pursue, while fair maidens struggle and resist. This formulation pits one
gender against the other, and it produces an ideology of desire and social hierarchy based
upon physical domination. This pastoral setting recalls anything but the memory of
Sylvan Tempe or dales of Arcadia the speaker initially invokes (7). Instead, the scene that
he reads as “A flowery tale more sweetly [expressed] than the poem itself (3-4), is a place
of unbridled, “mad,” “wild” expression (9-10). Counter-intuitively, the speaker collapses
romance into violence.

Even more jarring, the speaker’s awe seems to be stimulated because of the
scene’s violent essence. Initially the human figures he gazes upon are still. He merely
questions, what men, gods, maids are these? As would anybody studying an antiquity, he
wonders who these people were and where they came from. But the attention he pays
intensifies once he describes (or imagines) the figures moving: resisting, pursuing,
struggling to escape (8-10). These supposed lovers, these signifiers of ecstasy, are not
embracing, nor do they kiss; rather, they engage in aggressive activity. They may well be
tracking, hunting, and attacking. Keats can imply this threat by exploiting the discursive
slip between the rhetoric of desire and that of colonization, a convention of pastoral love
poetry.
The cadence of the speaker’s voice also suggests the fervor and violence of this moment. The speaker’s steady iambic pentameter and short, clipped phrases cause us to punctuate each question as it’s read: “What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?” (8-10). It also causes us to read each question with increasing speed – that is, until we reach his final question: “what wild ecstasy?” At this point, the alliterative nature of the phrase forces us to slow down as we form the repeated “W” and long “I” sounds. Paused in speech, it is as though we are awe-struck too, staring at the figures and donning the speaker’s subjectivity; the steady increase in pace and resolution of that meter in the slower, staccatoed “ecs-tya,” is evocative of the music (the pipes and timbrels) the speaker hears and also of le petite mort, which suggests that danger itself is what titillates. So, does the poem celebrate love or eroticized violence? The second Arcadian scene (or what may be an elaboration of the first) answers this question.3 The speaker, romanticizing the youth pictured on the urn, observes that he will remain in a perpetual state of pursuit – not catching the fair maiden or at last “kiss[ing]” her, “though winning near the goal” (17-18). Love is not love if satisfied, he suggests, but ideal only in its near gratification – in the chase and in its inextricability from violence. Conflating romance with violence further, the speaker shifts his discussion abruptly from love and passion to ritual sacrifice.

Part of the aesthetic cachet and canonical economy that distinguishes this poem is its self-referential insistence on the generative faculties of the artist and the meaning of

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3 It is difficult to distinguish in this poem whether the speaker is identifying and elaborating upon one pastoral scene or if there are two distinct scenes.
art. Unlike a living poet whose song will fade, the youth on the urn can “not leave / [his] song.” He will remain a “happy melodist, unwearied, / For ever piping songs for ever new,” forever “warm[ed]” by his love, forever “panting,” and “for ever young” (23-24, 26-27). Likewise, the speaker insists, “When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou [the urn] shalt remain” (46-47). Sounding much like the speaker in Shakespeare’s sonnets who promises immortality to the subject of his lyrics, Keat’s speaker invokes art’s ability to fend off the anonymity and finite quality of human life: so long as the urn survives, the human figures wrought upon it will transcend death, living on through their graphic display on the urn and through their identification by those who behold it. The poet’s insistence on the urn’s power is not as disinterested as the speaker would have us believe, for the urn has long since disappeared and may have existed only in the poem. In the end, it is the poem that remains. Like the youth’s song which perseveres, the ode, rather than the urn, will give life to the human figures that ornament the vase. It will also give voice to the poet beyond the grave.  

Keats’s insistence upon (or his insecurity about the potency of) the poet’s godlike, generative power is duplicated in the poem’s construction as an aesthetic exemplar. In a rather tautological fashion, the poem is an aesthetic exemplar because of its underlying philosophy, and the philosophy it forwards valorizes aesthetic objects that speak

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4 See for example sonnet 15, 18, 60, 63, etc.

5 It is worth noting that this ode is designed much like an English sonnet: The first four stanzas introduce and develop the speaker’s observations about love and time and the final stanza ends in philosophic epiphany. This detail tells us something about Keats’ generic aspirations and the literary traditions which he engages: both poems are types of “songs” and both typically elaborate the joys or woes of love, from the speaker’s solitary perspective. Indeed, the first three stanzas of the poem are set in a pastoral world that appeals to the speaker’s idyllic assumptions about love: all remains youthful and green.
philosophy. In this instance, the urn that will outlast “this generation” also holds the key to life. Ironically, its fount of youth is not found in the fact of the urn’s longevity but in what it says. Although the urn is thrice equated with silence (1, 2, 44), it shall say to men in perpetuity, “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ that is all . . . ye need know” (49). There is no need to struggle or strive, for the answer is right here. Only this elliptical prophesy focuses our attention not on the urn but the poem – the source of the voice that speaks, that aesthetic creation culturally vested with the authority to reveal or epitomize truth and beauty. Accordingly, the message forces us to reread the ode, seek the expression of beauty it celebrates, interpret the truth that representation implies, and agree, “Yes, why, yes! The poem says it all.”

There are two problems, however, with this formulation. The beauty epitomized in the poem, eternal youth and romantic love, suggests its opposite. The truth the ode reveals about youth is that it is not immortal but frozen in time; the truth the ode reveals about love is that it is not a Sylvan refuge but characterized by violence and violence fuels its appeal. The aesthetic philosophy of the poem, which encourages us to reread it according to its own self-aggrandizing premise about aesthetics, reveals the real beauty (if we so wish to term it) the poem conceals: the writerly skill required to bury the discrepancy between two seemingly incongruous concepts like love and violence and ascribe them to truth and beauty. The opacity of such rhetorical strategies, in this instance convoluting the ideological conjunction of eroticized violence and writerly ambition, mean that we might fail to note such representations in the sort of literary survey course I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction. Because the poem is highly crafted and
canonized for its aesthetic and philosophical value, we might not reconsider the images that conflict with its prevailing argument. This is one reason why assessing literary history and the cultural construction of the literary canon matters. When we pay attention merely to aesthetics, those valuable, esoteric attributes or materials of culture, we may not see what we are looking at. As Griselda Pollock argues, we expect art to convey “truth and beauty” universally, but “what it is about matters,” for cultural practices shape its meanings and confer value, not arbitrarily. “We are products of this culture. Our intellects as much as our emotions have been trained within its imaginative and cognitive limits” (Genealogies xiv).

This study is designed to correct a similar cultural near-sightedness when it comes to early modern literature. In the early modern period, there is both an emerging sense of canonicity and of “English literature” as critical to national identity. We can watch men and women grapple openly with rhetorical conventions as they strive to establish an authorial voice. Those authors included in this study also negotiate the mechanisms of eroticized violence as they compete to be heard and recognized as credible and talented writers. In the pages that follow, then, I analyze discourses on desire, as well as love and beauty, and explore either how they come to be associated with violent behavior or how they come to be expressed in violent terms through particular literary devices and genres. I am interested less in physical, literal acts of aggression than in the violent resonances that surface within the literature. At times, these resonances are expressed discursively through metaphor, allusion, and dialogue. In others, they assume visual form, which means that I trace literary representations of the visual and visual representations within
the literary. Accordingly, this project is informed by the function of ocularity and theories of scopophilia. Since a visual plain also forms a spatial field, in the process of developing this project I became particularly interested in the roles of spaces in the equation of desire with violence: genre determines setting, desire is desire because of the gap between wanting and having, the area of a poem is framed by the space of a page that also conveys meaning. Reading a poem is much like reading a snapshot or an image captured in a film’s frame: it contains both the moment of the poem and the moments captured within the poem. In a study on desire and violence, “the body” must also be identified as a category of analysis, for it too is a surface inscribed in its representation on the page. As I hope to have suggested above, literature is not disinterested but ideological in nature, for it produces meaning through institutions of power, such as its assignment to or exclusion from the literary canon and its classification as an aesthetic or a common object. This means that those spaces surrounding, depicting, and described within literature reflect the politicized social and cultural practices of their origin. It also means, then, that they too can be read textually, for they are comprised of signs and symbols – a language of their own.

To explore these diverse spatial apparati, I employ film, architectural, art, and spatial theory. I find these theoretical lenses more directly relevant to my study than those of the psychoanalytic patriarchs, Sigmund Freud or Jacques Lacan. Their important work serves as both the springboard and the trap for feminist analyses because unwittingly it often (re)produces gender difference and simultaneously ignores, at crucial junctures, the role of gender altogether. The film theorists that I draw upon trouble and attempt to
retheorize Freud’s and Lacan’s formulation of man as both ocular and linguistic center of
the universe. For example, in her groundbreaking study thirty years ago Laura Mulvey
observed that narrative cinema, which operates like literature in the stories it tells,
perpetuates a gendered mode of looking that empowers male character and male viewer.
Film theorists such as Mary Anne Doane, Teresa de Lauretis, and Mulvey herself have
since attempted to account for an active female gaze. Their work, complementary yet
divergent, shares a concern, like mine, for the relationships between visual and spatial
technologies that stimulate desire and generate gender difference. Art historians and
architectural theorists encourage us to view such framing devices as “field[s] of meaning”
(Pollock *Genealogies* xv), ideologically-saturated areas that reveal interstices between the
spatial, visual, textual, and material. This range of analytic tools helps illuminate those
spaces and images that flash before us everyday – on big and small screens, cityscapes
and landscapes, on the stage and in our books – and realize their potential for meaning.
As a result, we can identify space as an active rather than static form, a field of
representation that is subject to change.

If literary spaces are indeed vehicles for the operatives of ideology, one of those
operatives is the social organization of gender and the production of gender difference.
My analysis is indebted to Michel Foucault’s theory of the relationship between power,
knowledge, and discourse: the production of meaning is generated by discourses that
constitute a “multiplicity” of “force relations, which by virtue of their inequality,
constantly engender states of power” (*History* 93). In the context of this project, I identify
the eroticization of violence in early modern culture as a specific expression of power,
operating among the many that construct and maintain gender relations in the period: this social practice produces difference by sustaining systems of inequality, that is, supporting hierarchical gender and sexual relations based upon domination. A source of its power is its norming character. Violence plays such a pervasive role in early modern narratives of desire that it exists almost unnoticed: its repeated incorporation into articles of high culture, such as art and literature, neutralizes and aestheticizes its threat; moreover, because of its subtle expression, the eroticization of violence has been understudied and undertheorized.\(^6\) This research is important, I argue below, because it teaches us about our literary heritage and because the eroticization of violence persists, informing our own materials of culture.

Although work in the field is increasingly sophisticated, typically in the past scholarship on “gender” or “women writers” has addressed only women or focused on the debilitating effect of literary paternity on the woman writer without considering direct female reaction or resistance to this system of authorship. We should consider how the literature itself constructs gender difference, rather than take “men” and “women” as given categories.\(^7\) It is also rare that studies of desire in the period exceed a strictly heterosexual scope.\(^8\) This formulation is critically troubling since it privileges one type of voice and renders the sexes agentless figures, for their desires appear to be governed by

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\(^6\) Literary criticism on violence in the period tends to focus on the Renaissance and Jacobean stages and religious, rather than secular, literature.

\(^7\) See Scott “Evidence.”

\(^8\) See also Traub, who argues vis a vis Sedgwick, that critical work on sexuality that ignores homosexuality results in “a ‘minoritizing view’ [. . . that] obfuscates the intertwined historical process by which homosexuality and heterosexuality are constructed simultaneously” (“Perversion” 41).
the scripted narratives of literature and predicated upon their physical bodies, which are already marked by gender. Finally, while interesting work on Renaissance spaces is emerging – studies, for example, of the stage or the streets or domesticity or the city or the country, I do not know of other analyses in which the role of space in its multiple manifestations is related to the ideologies of desire that we encounter in literature of the period.

Accordingly, in the discussion that follows, I incorporate female- and male-authored texts in which particular speakers make specific claims to represent female or male experience. These figures demonstrate, in the way they define themselves and in opposition to others, how gender is constructed and maintained in a given moment and context. In each chapter, I pair texts that expose the violence of desire, deploy a generically specific spatialization of bodies and places, and employ like rhetorical tools of representation. In addition to heteronormative representations, I also analyze same-sex desire in the period and the variant, overlapping spatial tropes that influence the rhetoric of desire to turn violent. Positioning gendered voices in dialogue with each other is an important critical enterprise: men and women do not live in isolation, one from the other, and my research indicates that writers in the period employ (or attempt to destroy) similar learned, literary conventions and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. As Wendy Wall argues, writers in early modern England engaged in “reading, writing, and publishing by generating various representations of women,” but “the category of ‘woman’” need not exist “solely as a metaphor for the insecurities of patriarchal order” (7). We must read women writers in relation to their male contemporaries. Although
poststructuralism argues that gender is nothing more than a performance, a series of gestures that condition the way we see each other and operate in the world,\(^9\) gender is a viable category of analysis. In the early modern period, it simply did not mean the same thing to live as a man or a woman, nor does it now. Analyzing how those differences are articulated and maintained helps us see gender as dynamic rather than static, bound by politics:

> Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power . . . [It] provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction . . . [When we] look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs relationships we gain insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society and into the particular and contextually specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics. (Scott “Gender” 1067, 1070)

One example of such social imperatives in early modern England are the popular exemplars of behavior that advocate women’s silence and imbricate female voice with a wanton sexuality.\(^{10}\) This is an important gendered difference of experience, for it politicizes the production of meaning and inhibits women from participating in that philosophical arena because of embodiment. These arguments also draw attention to the

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\(^9\) See Butler *Gender*.

\(^{10}\) See Newman and Hull.
fact that women in England were beginning to engage in literary production in noticeable numbers at this very time. In addition to social biases about public voice and gender, both women and men who chose to write formally necessarily confronted the cultural proclivity in the period to describe particular products, topics, or outcomes of publishing in gendered terms. This is a complex issue, for the gendered language of literary production applied to both manuscript circulation in coterie venues and more fixed procedures like that of the printing press. These gendered tensions were further bound by issues of class, difference, and social mobility. We witness these cultural stress points play out in the texts included here, as authors struggle to determine and to control who has the right to write or speak. In the process, we listen to men and women who express an awareness of gendered tropes of violence and address either implicitly or explicitly a need to rework these conventions, and they identify the eroticization of violence as a silencing mechanism utilized in a gendered, literary competition. In reading paired voices, the old is made new – revealed, contested, resisted, exploited, and tempered. Together, they forge clever, insightful ideas on gender politics and formulate an implicit commentary on genre and literary voice.

Chapter one, “Violent Pursuits and Revolutionary Poetics: Milton’s *Comus* and Behn’s “The Disappointment,” explores the politicized social and cultural practices of

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11 See, for example, Wall and Ezell, who make competing claims about the fraught relationship of gender and class often while employing like literary evidence. Wall’s study represents the gendered and class-based aspects of publication and manuscript circulation in terms employed by early modern publishers and authors; Ezell critiques, through literary example and manuscript research, scholarly misrepresentation of relationships between gender, class, and publication. Together, however, they identify the following as gendered and class-based complexities of literary production in the period: the patronage system, modes of publication preferred by the aristocracy or the literate and socially mobile middling class, the identification of these modes with public and private realms, and the effeminized nature of the body, the text, or the poet engaged in these complex institutions.
pastoral. In it, Aphra Behn and John Milton engage in debates about gender, voice, and identity, and attempt to transcend pastoral conventions while writing within the tradition. They do so by exploring what it means to be a woman in a genre and environment that want to read her as inherently rapable. In chapter two, we move from the pastoral to architectural space. “Beauty and the Eye of the Beholder: Intimate Space and the Violence of Representation” examines Jonathan Swift’s and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s “Dressing Room” Satires. This discursive battle between the sexes features a complex arsenal of spatial motifs – mental, visual, or material terms – designed to restrict the representation of gender. This dialogue between literary and social arch rivals, which each published to antagonize and publicly humiliate the other, demonstrates how eroticized violence operates as a tool in a literary contest between men and women.

Chapter three, “Same Sex Desire: A Refuge From The Violent?” returns to the world of pastoral with which we began, but rather than exploring love between men and women, it attends to love between women. The Sapphic lyrics included, by John Donne, Katherine Philips, and Aphra Behn, make specific claims to eschew the violence associated with heterosexual representations of love, while Donne, Philips, and Behn draw upon the same poetic motifs that charge pastoral poetry with violence. Accordingly, I question whether violence is an inherent element of desire or, possibly, of subjectivity itself. I conclude by questioning the persistence of eroticized violence today. This study, which interrogates spaces of representation, I hope will function as a space of cultural intervention itself – one that exposes expressions of violence encoded in early modern ideas about love and possibly inform our own.
VIOLENT PURSUITS AND REVOLUTIONARY POETICS: JOHN MILTON’S *COMUS* AND APHRA BEHN’S “THE DISAPPOINTMENT”

It might seem odd to pair Aphra Behn’s “The Disappointment” (1680) with John Milton’s *Comus* (1634, rpt. 1645, 1673). Behn’s playful, witty poem, which celebrates female desire and sexual libertinism, contrasts sharply against Milton’s unusually verbose masque, which champions female chastity and “the sage and serious doctrine of Virginity” (786-87). This combination seems particularly jarring when one recalls, as Janet Todd observes, that the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1738) once depicted Behn as Milton’s antithesis (1-2). In a serialized column conveyed in dream vision, “The Apotheosis of Milton” follows a visitor, who, admiring Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey, falls sleep and imagines that an old man guarding the area carries him up to heaven (*à la* Milton’s Satan and Eve).¹ There, in a grand hall, all the great English poets convene to induct Milton into their exclusive society. Chaucer, “The Father of English Poesy” (233 emphasis added), presides over the assembly, and as they enter the hall, the members of the group are described in great detail – some revered, others satirized, and many a combination of both. The only female figure to join the festivities is Behn. But, unlike her male peers, whose foibles or peculiar mannerisms are dismissed as mere eccentricities, clearly, Behn does not belong: she arrives attired in “loose,” foreign dress – a *robe de chambre* with neck and breasts revealed, “Fire in her Eye” (469). Both a sexual and social spectacle, Behn exhibits neither the image nor decorum necessary to represent English poesy and, as “the President” himself reveals, her inability to do so is a matter of gender: Just as Behn attempts to seat herself at the banquet swathed in ancient

¹ *Paradise Lost* 5.1-93.
rugs, Chaucer intercedes and announces that “none of her sex has any right to a seat there” (469). An indignant Behn surveys the crowd, finding both devotees and detractors but none willing to defend her work. Her identity as an author negated, she “flings out of the assembly” (469), personifying the very stereotypes of early modern woman – oversexed, irrational, disorderly – that prefigure her exclusion. It is no wonder that the old guide dismisses her as a subject who matters and as a matter of temperament: to his disciple he explains, “her Character does not deserve so much notice, as to divert you from remarking the Member who now walks up to his seat,” and thus redirects the reader’s and his conductee’s attention, who admits, so, “I turned my eyes” (emphasis added 469). With that our lone female writer vanishes from page, sight, and mind.

Although it is one of many possible sources I could cite that attest to the deep socio-political anxieties concerning gender and authorship in early modern England, I paraphrase this feature at length because of its interesting placement in a gendered magazine and its representation in fictional form of contemporary theoretical arguments about fiction and gender. It also demonstrates how that culture attempts to salve those concerns by constructing a national literary history that is patriarchal in nature and by asserting the authority of authorship as explicitly male. Behn’s status as an exception in

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2 Although in its very title the Gentleman’s Magazine forwards gendered (and class-based) inequities associated with publication and the literati, the Magazine’s treatment of Behn is somewhat ironic, since it satirizes and derides a number of male literary figures (vol. 8 232-34, 469, 521-, vol. 9 20-21, 73-75) and since the “discriminating” literary editors of this first and highly influential English magazine published many first-time female poets, who came to be well-respected writers (Lonsdale xxvi-xxviii).

3 The Gentlemen’s Magazine is just one of many cultural documents that could be cited to support an argument about the masculinization of English authorship and the literary canon; since “The Apotheosis of Milton” is published at least half a century after Behn’s and Milton’s deaths, 1689 and 1674, respectively, it is important to note, as Margaret Ezell reminds us, that the construction of literary history often depends upon how the past is remembered and the canon’s organization into a linear narrative that may befit modern
the narrative suggests the marginality of women in the English literary tradition; her ultimate erasure eschews woman’s contribution to English literary history, that locus of collective memory that shapes British national identity as particularly literary and as the arbiter of high culture. As we shall see, the politicized social and cultural practices of pastoral, the mode in which both “The Disappointment” and *Comus* are written, further exacerbate these issues. Nonetheless, despite social prejudices and literary precedence, Behn and Milton engage in debates about gender, voice, and identity, and, I would argue, practice a revolutionary poetics by attempting to transcend pastoral conventions while writing within the tradition.

As Harry Berger observes in his seminal article on authorship and the pastoral love poem in Renaissance England, pastoral verse is configured as a dialogue between classical and early modern poets and a range of their peers. To read pastoral, then, is to survey a hierarchical genealogy of great male writers. Proposing a theory similar to Harold Bloom’s formulation of literary paternity, which he forwards in *The Anxiety of Influence* and which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar adapt to female authorship in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (not to mention a genealogy suggested by the *Gentleman’s Magazine*), methods of categorization and ideologies of publication more than those of the past. See also Spencer, who makes a very interesting case for Behn’s centrality in the formation of an English canon that is inherently male as well as the creation of a separate female canon and literary history.

4 See, for example, Schwyzer, who demonstrates the foundational role of literature, as a repository of cultural memory, in the construction of Britishness and British nationhood in the period. Dobson links this phenomenon directly to the representation of Shakespeare, from the eighteenth century onward, as England’s national poet and therefore icon of Englishness. England thus comes to see itself (and is often represented in the modern media) as locus of propriety and high culture, for as Lanier argues, “Shakespeare is the icon of high or ‘proper’ culture” (3 emphasis in text). See also Greenfield and Helgerson, who explore even more broadly than Dobson the relationship between literature and written historical record and English nationhood.
Berger notes the patriarchal legacy of pastoral: the young poet-swain must contend with, while attempting to master and make new, the songs of his literary forefathers.

Articulated in terms of the family, pace Bloom, Berger’s theory can be understood psychoanalytically: the Oedipal son / poet struggles against a powerful father figure in an effort to distinguish himself from dear old dad and develop his own writerly identity. All the while, he conforms to norms of masculinity or, in this instance, a poetic tradition he reveres and a mythos of the poet to which he aspires. Theoretically, the son’s gendered and heterosexual identities depend upon his desire for a mother figure, his perception of father as his potential rival for his mother’s affection, and ultimately, if he overcomes this conflict, his recognition of his mother’s sexual difference and social and political otherness and inadequacy. According to Jacques Lacan, if the child succeeds, he enters into the symbolic order, internalizing and assuming the power of “the law of the father,” that which constitutes language and law and does so in gendered terms.

We can read the structuring principles of the Oedipal Complex in the conventions of pastoral narrative and the economy of its production: the triangulated relationship established between competing poets and the women about whom they write mirrors the plot of sexual conquest in those narratives. At the center of the shepherd’s song is a female object of idol worship, but her voice and subjectivity are displaced by those of the poet-shepherd, who details only his desire and his subsequent anguish or success in sexual conquest. Because of the formulaic nature of the genre, and the love lyric in general, the writer’s tasks are readily recognizable. By emulating and embellishing the Georgic plaints of his poetic progenitors, the swain demonstrates his poetic virtuosity and
vies for recognition as legitimate heir and progeny. The female body absorbs the violence of this competition as well as the homoerotic threat to fraternity that the poem itself evidences. (It is after all a space upon which fathers, sons, and brothers bond through contest.) Indeed, the shepherd-poet may be in love more with his carefully honed lyrics and the male audience he strives to impress than the female beloved about whom he writes or makes claims to woo (Berger 47). As in the Oedipal Complex, the violence is a structural principle: the signifying space of pastoral depends upon woman’s presence but demands her linguistic inferiority, as a character and as a potential author-rival, for expression. Noting this paradox, Virginia Woolf once puzzled, in a period in which woman “pervades poetry from cover to cover” and seems “of utmost importance,” where are her words, her thoughts, her histories (46-47)?

While the literary tradition or space of representation is male-dominated, by the Young Man’s Pastoral Association or YMPA as Berger terms it (47), the space within pastoral itself – the landscape in the poet’s garden of verses – venerates male domination. Pastoral pursuit narratives often script heterosexual desire as violent by pitting a young shepherdess alone in the field against the untamed and uncontrollable passion of a lusting shepherd. The shepherdess’s association with the passive, natural world functions as an emblem of her sexual vulnerability and availability, and readers familiar with the genre anticipate a pursuit that will end, inevitably, in her seduction or rape.5 Couched within

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5 See, for example, Merchant and Ortner (“Is Female”). Although Ortner has been criticized for essentializing and perpetuating the binaries she seeks to interrogate, early modern British literature often does associate woman with nature and man with culture. In the blazon, a common feature of the Petrarchan love lyric, the female body functions as a metonym for mother earth, harboring fruits and flowers ripe for the picking and precious gems and metals available for mining; similarly, querelle des femmes tracts debate woman’s worth in the context of Eve’s decisions in the Garden of Eden, while scientific and
poetic convention, such representations naturalize male sexual aggression and cultivate inequitable ideologies of gender in the Western world. Accordingly, the semiotics of pastoral produce meaning ideologically both through hierarchical gendered relations, and textually, through the relations of visual and literary signs. When the poet depicts woman and nature as divided from man and culture, he reinforces the physical violence and sexual conflict inherent in the pursuit narrative: man metamorphoses into Adam, who by divine decree plows, tames, and cultivates mother nature; the poet affirms his linguistic mastery and links it to gender through the production of cultural images that reimagine and legitimize his social and political hegemony; the female body expresses these needs in its passivity. Bound entirely to representation, that body is mediated by language and, in the words of Michel Foucault, “totally imprinted by history” (Language 148), marked by and indicative of sex and gender differences specific to its cultural moment. Analysis of such representations matter not simply for the meanings they produce but because the dialectical relationship between human beings and the materials of culture “help to form the very subjectivities and identities [of those] consuming these meanings” (Pollock xiv).

The abundance of early modern pastoral lyrics that eroticize violence attests to their cultural significance, and perhaps none reveal more clearly how sexual violence comes to be associated with male creativity than Richard Crashaw’s “Music’s Duel.” In a figurative contest between man and woman, art and nature, a lute-playing shepherd

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medical documents read woman as nature itself because of her reproductive faculties; and conduct books describe proper, feminine behavior as “natural,” blurring the distinction between bodies and gender roles. For critiques of Ortner, see Rosaldo and Tsing. See also Ortner’s response and retheorization of her original argument in (“So, Is Female”).

See de Beauvoir on the plow trope and its pervasive force on Western Literature (74-91, 157-223).
challenges a nightingale to a singing contest, after hearing her echo his songs. This premise foreshadows what the poem has to say about art and gender, for even here, the nightingale appears as Echo or Syrinx, an instrument playing the poet’s song.

Importantly, the language of martial “skirmish” or “charge” with which the poem begins blurs quickly into that of sexual conquest: the lutenist’s and nightingale’s “pulsing” (120) “swelling strains” (95) rise and fall repeatedly (95, 155, 167), and melt into ecstasies (102, 136, 148). Indeed, the nightingale’s source of expressive power resides in her sexual otherness, the vaginal, “sleek passage of her open” and “lubric throat” (38, 64).

Although nature’s plain, imperfect ditties fail to match the lute-master’s baroque harmonies (36, 37, 134, 150), the nightingale’s inability to compete arouses her opponent, who “bath[es] in streams of liquid melody” and “proudly rises / heaves on the surges of swollen rhapsodies” (68, 135-36). The contest does not prove as fulfilling for the nightingale, who is “ravished” by the effects of competition and like a victim of assault, sports the “double stain” of “shame . . . and anger” (102, 105, 158-59). Physically spent, she plummets from her tree only to die – both literally and as an embodiment of the word’s double entendre – upon the shepherd’s lute. The phallic nature of the shepherd’s instrument coupled with Crashaw’s polished poetics assert as in the Philomel myth, which associates rape with phallogocentrism, that culture wins over nature, sexually and textually.\(^7\)

\(^7\) Although in Crashaw’s poem it is only the female who dies, it is important when discussing eroticized violence in early modern lyrics that the pun on dying pertains to both males and females. Indeed, critics have noted the anxiety of male speakers that the “death” of the erection after ejaculation is the salient morbidity.
If pastoral celebrates male linguistic authority and asserts that authority through representational tactics that celebrate domination, aggression, and desire as apparati that generate gender difference, how can Behn, who the *Gentleman’s Magazine* argues has no right to write in the tradition, and Milton, icon of literary paternity *par excellence*, be read dialogically? In “The Disappointment” and in *Comus*, Behn and Milton expose the sexual threat the natural world poses for woman; yet, each also struggles to discover whether or how woman can act as an autonomous subject, freely roam and assert herself in pastoral space, rife as it is with sexual danger, despite cultural injunctions that urge woman’s subordination through chastity, silence, and obedience. Although they arrive at very different conclusions, Behn and Milton employ like textual strategies to explore what it means to be a woman in pastoral and whether she can transcend the danger inherent in a genre that wants to read her as always already raped or rapable.  

Initially, Milton and Behn represent woman and the natural world conventionally: In both *Comus* and “The Disappointment,” a young woman wanders alone in pastoral space, pursued by a male figure, whose lust for instant sexual gratification nature facilitates by darkening the sky. From the beginning, we know the Lady in Milton’s masque is in trouble. Lost in an ominous wood overseen by Comus – a descendent of sorceress Circe and the god of wine and orgies, Bacchus – she too may fall prey to his...

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8 Informed by Suzanne Hull’s findings, critical work on early modern women in the 1980-90’s argued fairly univocally that the model of the chaste, silent, obedient woman applied to all women, but such readings may not attend adequately to social class. If one reads popular broadsides and ballads, one finds primarily not sexually, intellectually, linguistically, or morally passive women, but appealing and outspoken female characters, often from the lower and middling classes, who outwit the men they encounter and overcome complications that develop in daily life. See also Davis, who identifies a similar class- and gender-based phenomenon in the practice of carnival in early modern France. The temporary inversion carnival permits may ultimately reaffirm the status quo, but it also allows women and those of the lower social echelon an opportunity to imagine and to occupy positions of privilege.
magical charms, which transform unwitting travelers into wild beasts overrun by appetite. This rout of intemperate pleasure seekers practices their drunken, licentious rites at night, for “onely day-light . . . makes sin / Which these dun shades will ne’re report” (61-77, 125-27). The Lady recognizes this danger and criticizes “envious darkness” and “thievish night” for “clos[ing] up the stars” to “som[e] felonious end” (194-96). And she has reason to fear, for the instant Comus hears her, his thoughts turn to sex. He eroticizes her voice, which to him ravishes and incites rapture (257-47), and vows to snare the virgin and make her his queen. He thus disguises himself as a shepherd and conducts the “unguarded lady” to his “low / But loyal cottage, where [she] may be safe / Till further quest” – a con the Lady believes (265, 283, 319-20).

Similarly, in “The Disappointment,” we find Cloris alone in a wood and apparently “surprised” by the "amorous Lysander." He succumbs to “impatient passion” just as “the gilded planet of the day, / In his gay chariot drawn by fire . . . [is] descending to the sea” (1-8), and we expect that as in Comus, nature “conspires” with Lysander, for it leaves “no light to guide the world / But what from Cloris’ brighter eyes was hurled.” As a result, she can “defend herself no longer” (4, 5, 9-10). The conventionality of Behn’s word-choice suggests that Lysander can rally nature to support his quest, which implies the might and the violence of his desire: like assault, it “surprises” and incites the need for “defense.” Likewise, the Petrarchan conceit that celebrates Cloris’s eyes as sun-like reifies the specter of rape and identifies a relationship between ocularity and sexual aggression: the cloak of darkness obscures Cloris’s vision and conceals any dark deeds that may occur in the pasture. Lysander acts as sadistic voyeur, spying upon and stalking
Cloris and enjoying the panicked fear he witnesses in her eyes. What is threatening about Comus’s and Lysander’s behavior is their disregard for social mores and social order: the “uncivilized” space they trample is reflective of the women they pursue and identify with the landscape. It is worth noting, however, that as is typical of her, Behn obscures the source of power and locus of fear even in these few short lines. The “descending” sun may also anticipate Lysander’s later descent; the “light” of Cloris’s eyes may prevail over rather than succumb to that of Appollo, if “hurled” is read as “cast down” rather than “thrown.” In this light, it is Cloris, who surprises and deploys aggressively the literary mechanisms of assault.

Although Comus and “The Disappointment” begin conventionally enough, Milton and Behn trouble the script that wants to read woman as victim by emphasizing her subjectivity. They do so by testing the limits between a woman’s virtue and her body. What makes Comus’s intrigue exciting is not his assured seduction of the Lady, gullible though she may be initially, but her insistence (and the debate that develops on this topic) that her strength of mind can protect her against physical assault. Although frightened, when we first meet her, she argues:

These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The vertuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion conscience.
O welcome . . . thou unblemish’t form of Chastity,
I see ye visibly . . . (210-16)
Guided by the light of virtue, she reasons, she can resist all threat (and temptation) in the dark. Ostensibly, the Lady is like Milton’s inward man in *A Treatise Of Civil Power*, whose “actions are all spiritual and to outside force not liable” (1127), and her reasoning reflects early modern beliefs that chastity is “an ideologically informed state of mind; a ‘chaste’ woman is one who chooses to live by its principles, preserving her virginity or remaining faithful to her husband” (Catty 15). However, Milton uses the words “chastity” and “virginity” interchangeably and refuses a complete separation of mind and body. Contemporary theories abound on Milton’s word choice, but scholarship focusing on the historical context of *Comus* suggests that the masque may respond to either a real charge of rape in the family of Milton’s patron (and thus attempts to restore that family’s reputation) or to a rape trail over which his patron was presiding. Since the initial staging of *Comus* was an elaborate public event, perhaps Milton both attempted to promote social justice and reaffirm his patron’s family dignity by educating his audience and encouraging public acknowledgement that when it comes to sexual assault, discerning agency and morality is a complex problem. Philosophically it could be argued that a raped woman was still a chaste woman, if morally she resisted the assault. But “the forcefulness of arguments for an opposition between mind or soul and body following rape . . . would seem to confirm that the basic definition of chastity is as a physical state.

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9 I quote Catty here since her working definition of chastity correlates with Milton’s protestant ideology, which identifies the performance of chastity with premarital virginity or marital fidelity; however, Catty’s claim is slightly misleading. The popularity of the Jewish Juan Louis Vives’ *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* suggests a cultural sensitivity to the Catholic tradition, which associates chastity with celibacy. For an analysis of this subtext in *The Instruction*, see Mikesell’s explication of the text’s cultural context in the Beauchamp, Hageman, and Mikesell edition xl-lxvi.
Rape, after all, tends to be seen as a *pollution* of the female body, regardless of the victim’s volition” (Catty 15, emphasis in text).

Milton explores this paradox through the brothers, who debate whether their sister’s virtue resides in her body or soul. While searching for her, the younger brother worries that the “hapless virgin” might be in danger “of Savage hunger, or of Savage heat” (350, 358). Although the elder brother sees beyond the body and insists his sister is safe because she is principled “in virtues book” and protected by “the constant mood of her calm thoughts” (367, 371), the younger brother fears that like a “Fair Hesperian Tree” (393), she must be guarded “to save her blossoms and defend her fruit” (396). The younger brother again reads the Lady’s virtue as manifest in her sexed body, and his observation is telling: it alludes to the patriarchal anxiety that rape is a criminal act of theft or possession that assaults, by adulterating, family lines; it also suggests rape’s threat to that social economy, which by tarnishing the golden apples of the family tree

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10 Although the Masque was designed to celebrate John Egerton’s appointment as Lord President of the Council in the Marches, as literary critics have noted, it may also revive, in order to assuage, well-known sexual scandals associated with the Egerton family. Barbara Breasted has argued that *Comus* alludes to the Castlehaven scandal, during which Egerton’s brother-in-law was indicted for raping his wife and allowing the repeated rape of his daughter-in-law. As such, Breasted reasons that *Comus* may “have been intended to help repair the reputation of the entire Egerton family by making the last unmarried Egerton daughter [who played the role of the Lady] act out her resistance to dangerous sexual temptation” (202). More recently, Leah Marcus has argued that *Comus* alludes to the highly-politicized case of Margery Evans, “an illiterate fourteen-year-old servingmaid, who . . . was accosted by the roadside in Herefordshire near the Welsh border on Midsummer Eve, 1631, . . . raped, robbed, and left at the edge of a village with the warning that she would be killed if she told anyone what had happened” (293). Evans did tell and was thrown in jail, but she appealed to King Charles I, who charged Egerton to investigate (293). Marcus concludes that the Evans case “would have formed part of a political background” of *Comus*, which was performed in the presence of at least four of the judges of the Council of Wales (294-5) and that “Milton’s immediate goal on the occasion of the masque was to make better judges by making the judges better men” (294, 323).

11 Interestingly, the Lady’s virginity is a particularly male preoccupation. Of the fourteen times her virginity or virgin status is referenced, all but one of these, the Lady’s comment on “the sage / And serious doctrine of Virginity” (786-7), which was added to the 1637 version of *Comus*, three years after it was originally presented at Ludlow, are spoken by male characters.
tarnishes a woman’s value as an object of exchange between men.\textsuperscript{12} Surely, the younger brother’s inability or unwillingness to separate the metaphysical from the physical could be attributed to his age and the cultural status of such ideas, but his concern also suggests a possible fissure in the Lady’s moral armor. If the Lady’s reproductive function might be co-opted and her “blossoms” turn to “fruit” as a result, then she may have complied with her would-be seducer.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, the elder brother strives to deflect attention away from the Lady’s body and further argues that her “hidden strength . . . chastity . . . is clad in compleat steel” and therefore not subject to physical force of “savage fierce, Bandite, or mountaineer” or metaphysical trickery of “goblin, or swart faery,” for none of these “Hath hurtfull power o’re tru virginity” (422, 426-27, 436-37). However, the physical violence to which he alludes suggests that, like his brother and like Comus, he ultimately realizes “the unexempt condition / By which all mortal fraility must subsist” (685-86).

Indeed, although the Lady insists when bound physically by Comus, “Thou canst not touch the freedom of my minde / with all thy charms, although this corporeale rinde / thou haste immanacl’d” (664-66), she is eventually paralyzed by him, perhaps also psychologically (and therefore morally), since we never hear her speak again even after she is released from the chair. As the male figures in the text suggest, a woman’s sexual

\textsuperscript{12} On the traffic in women, see Rubin, especially her reading of Levi Strauss’s *Elementary Structuring of Kinship*, which analogues the exchange of women to the exchange of words; for additional textual references to the Lady’s socio-economic value, note also the younger brother’s description of the Lady as “our unowned sister” (405-6), the elder brother’s fear that they have “lost” their sister and his subsequent desire to “force [Comus] to restore his purchase back” (510, 607), and the Attendant Spirit’s concession that “at worst” she may be subject to “Som roaving Robber” (485).

\textsuperscript{13} Early modern medical and advice books argue that conception requires or is facilitated by a woman’s sexual pleasure; likewise, legal tracts contend that if a woman experiences sexual pleasure in assault, it negates the fact of rape. For legal references, see TE 396, 400 and Mendelson and Crawford 47-48; for medical references see Culpeper 22 and Sharp 43-44.
status is not at all simple; contrary to traditional seduction narratives, she is a human being impacted physically, morally, and mentally by such threats. She, thus, ought to be treated justly by those who desire her or by those who judge her choices when she is threatened physically. To fail to do so is to behave like Comus, whom we are encouraged to regard as animalistic, corrupt, a danger to community. This representation, as we shall see, however, is problematic, since the Lady’s encounter with Comus ultimately fortifies rather than threatens patriarchal order.14

Like Milton, Behn troubles our generic expectations by playing virtue against the body and, characteristically, by reifying subject positions: is Cloris chaste and a victim; or is she chased and responsive?15 Stanzas two and three describe Lysander’s “force,” explain that Cloris “strove” by placing her hands against his chest in what might be self-defense, and argue that “Resistance ‘tis in vain to show” (14, 16, 19). In fact, Cloris may be unable to speak: “She wants the power to say, ‘Ah! What d’ye do?’” (20). But we learn also that she draws on Lysander and “he lay trembling at her feet” (18). These claims obscure who resists whom and assert parallels between the scripted behavior of romance and of rape: one requires woman’s affected modesty, the other her submission, and both generically depend upon man as active agent of desire. Similarly, Cloris’s eyes

14 Kerrigan argues that we can avoid distinguishing between body and soul by reading the body as a sign for virtue (35). Theoretically, this is a complex move. Such an argument also reveres Milton for the ethical or moral lesson of his verse without fully attending to his writing: it requires that the reader ignore the multiple moments in the masque when male characters see not the sign the body invokes but the physical threat against the body or the tempting delights the material body offers. See, for example, the elder brother’s sordid description of sex (463-69), as well as the Attendant Spirit’s multiple allusions to the Lady as prey and a “helpless” “virgin” (506, 534, 574, 581-82). Readings that valorize the poet, miss the important way Milton complicates the masque generically, as well as his allusions to the real, social consequences of sexual assault for a Lady.

15 Excellent articles on Behn’s habit of generating multiple subject positions for her characters include Pollak “Incest”, Ballaster, and Munns “Double.”
appear “sweet” and full of “love,” yet “severe” and “shame[ful]” (21-22), suggesting her innocence, vulnerability to attack, or her own desire. And Cloris may be overcome physically, for she “breath[es] faintly in [Lysander’s] ear” and cries, “‘Cease, cease your vain desire, / Or I’ll call out – what would you do?’” (24-26). In this moment, Behn alludes to cultural and civil thought informed by religious law, which identifies location and voice as essential to discerning sexual offense: if a man takes a woman in the city, scripture considers the act consensual; if he does so in the country, a woman may not be culpable, for she may have cried for help but no one heard or could save her (Deut. 22:23-28).

In critical ways, the Biblical narrative informs that of pastoral: like pastoral trope, the Biblical text depicts a natural space that bespeaks woman’s silence (even if she yells) and produces a visual image of a woman like Philomel suffering in her silent cry; there is also a distinct literary quality to the law: it too depends upon discursive signs for evidence, and inversely, participates in the construction of rape as a scripted narrative or performative act; it directs specific vocal cues within a particular setting and ascribes, according to gender, active and passive roles. As scholars note, early modern literature represents assault as performative and dialogic also by “split[ting] gender into extremes of active masculinity and passive femininity” (Marsden 187) and “manifest[ing rape] itself in a competition between the ‘male’ art of persuasion and the ‘female’ art of dissuasion” (Catty 3; emphasis in text). Similarly, feminist theorists, working with Foucauldian

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16 This law pertains only to married or betrothed women. A single woman or one for whom a bride-wealth has not been paid may be taken by a man at his will, regardless of his marital status and regardless of location. In this case, the two must marry. See also Wolfthal, who demonstrates how medieval religious art and Biblical illuminations depicting sexual assault come to inform civil rape law (99-198).
models of discourse, argue that rape persists as “a linguistic fact” and that “the violence of rape is enabled by narratives” that men and women internalize and then enact (Sharon Marcus 388-89). As a result, rape engenders gender: “a rapist chooses his target because he recognizes her to be a woman, but a rapist also strives to imprint the gender identity of ‘feminine victim’ on his target. A rape act thus imposes as well as presupposes misogynist inequalities; rape is not only scripted – it also scripts” (391).

Perceiving the aggressive, sexual impulse of the pastoral script and its inability to account fully for woman’s erotic desire, Behn de-scripts or deconstructs it by flaunting gender-coded sexual behavior. For example, Cloris’s question above, “what would you do?” if I shout, might not reveal threat but tease, as might her declaration that,

My dear honor even to you
I cannot, must not give – retire,
Or take this life, whose chiefest part
I gave you with the conquest of my heart. (27-30)

In this passage, Arlene Stiebel, who reads “The Disappointment” as a classic male rape fantasy, insists, “Cloris is definite. She says leave me alone or kill me. For her, defloration is a fate worse than death, and she will not endure dishonor even for one she loves. [Lysander] continues to force her ‘without respect’ until she lies ‘half dead’ and shows ‘no signs of life’ but breathing” (160). However, Cloris may well be encouraging Lysander to take her, since standards of female virtue require that she at least affect modesty. The poem does indeed claim that “Resistance ‘tis in vain to show” (19 emphasis

17 This may explain why scholarship on the poem does not agree: “The Disappointment” may be about impotence (Quaintance), or a male rape fantasy (Stiebel), or female sexual frustration (Munns “Touch”).
added). “To show” is nicely double in this instance, for it signals a pivotal, potential shift in our reading of Cloris’s intent. Likewise, since this poem turns so much on seeing and being seen, if it at least looks like Lysander takes her in “conquest,” then, Cloris may be suggesting, she will match his desire and freely offer her “heart,” a pun on female sexual anatomy, which may then indeed cause her “life” to expire in une petite mort. By multiplying the subject positions Cloris embodies, Behn exposes the simplicity of sex and gender roles pastoral narrative usually (re)produces and then demonstrates how the discursive boundaries of representation might be redrawn to express resistance, agency, disappointment, or pleasure – from another’s perspective. The result is that Cloris, who appears simultaneously resistant and desiring, rather than fixing the field of meaning, sets it in play. Importantly, this jouissance is activated by her voice, which the narrator literally quotes in the text.

The primacy of Cloris’s voice signals a disappointment in the poem’s representation of sexed bodies and gender hierarchy. In early modern England, theological, philosophical, legal, and medical tracts converged, took the sexed body as essentially male or female and ascribed to it gendered behaviors in accordance with.

18 Stiebel’s argument also includes lines 55-60; however, I think these lines allude to Cloris’s sexual experiences once again: The passage begins with an impassioned Cloris “half dead and breathless” (55), who experiences a fireworks of sorts, “falling stars, whose fires decay” (58), after which she shows “no signs of life” but for her “short-breathed sighs” (59-60). Behn references the early modern pun on orgasm as death again in her description of Lysander’s sexual tragedy (81-83).

19 See Foucault on discourse and power: “where there is power, there is resistance . . . discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart” (Sexuality 95, 101).

20 In a significant departure from the “Imperfect Enjoyment” genre, Behn edits out Lysander’s voice completely and the extended scene in which man chastises his penis for its faulty performance. For critical accounts of Behn’s sources and her alteration to the genre, see Quaintance and Fabricant. For contemporary contexts, see Rochester and Zeitz and Thoms.
humoral theory: men are active, hot and dry; women passive, cold and wet; he perfect form; she imperfect matter; he dominant and she subordinate, a natural hierarchy sanctioned by the fatal facts of the fall in the great garden. Behn challenges this hegemony first by asserting Lysander’s affinity with the typology of pastoral and, by implication, his likeness to woman; she further emasculates him according to socioeconomic ideologies of masculinity circulating in seventeenth-century England. Initially, all appears well in the “lone thicket made for love” (11). Lysander pursues, Cloris surrenders, but just as he is about to take her, his sexual “power” is “snatch[ed],” physically and prematurely: “the insensible fell weeping in his hand” (80, 90). Phallus collapsed, he begins to assume female signification. Lysander’s body, like the wilderness, is completely out of control. It can neither be “command[ed]” to perform nor will manual stimulation revive his “fleeting vigor” (81, 83, 96, 90). When Cloris attempts to lend a hand, her search for “that fabulous Priapus” is also construed as a search for fruitful, reproductive nature: a “young shepherdess” gathering her harvest, she forages for Lysander’s phallus by separating the “ferny” hairs, the “verdant leaves” from the “plain” of his body (106-07). In an allusion to Eden, what she finds “beneath the verdant leaves”

21 Arguments about early modern perceptions of the sexed body continue to rage: Lacqueur, who is perhaps most influential on this topic, concludes that bodies were perceived according to a “one-sex model” in which woman functioned merely as a lesser version of man; as Park and Nye demonstrate, because Lacqueur attends to medical documents only, he fails to account for “metaphysical” explanations of sex and gender difference propounded in theological and philosophical arguments. McKeon, who largely agrees with and augments Lacqueur, reasons that sexual differentiation follows the shift from patriarchal and feudal society to modern patriarchy and the labor and class systems that result from capitalism; ironically, however, the study pays little heed to gender. I tend to agree with Elaine Hobby, who, while preparing her edition of Jane Sharp’s The Midwives Book, realized that Lacqueur’s theory of the body did not reconcile with the impression Sharp leaves “of what it might have felt like to a woman to be living in one [a body].” She criticizes such accounts as “too monologic” and too eager to describe the past according to modern “ideas concerning subjectivity.” She argues rightly that the “founding fathers (Foucault, Lacan)” of such models “wrote in ignorance of the existence of the kinds of materials that are now being recovered” (14, 22n.6).
resembles a “snake” (110). This creature instills fear not because of its bite, phallic threat, or religious symbolism, which connote death, but because in its “cold,” limp state. It looks dead and offers no hope that it might inspire life sexually for Cloris or reproductively in offspring (114). Lysander, equated with nature and perceived simultaneously as monstrously unnatural, embodies the paradoxical essence of early modern woman and bears the sign of her lack. Accordingly, like so many tropes on femininity, Lysander’s psychological state corroborates his physiology: a victim of emotional “excess,” he “rage[s],” vainly essays to resuscitate the “insensible,” “weeping” phallus, and feels “betrayed” by “his love” (85, 88, 90, 97). The phallus, “insensible” in that it is resistant to pleasure and to physical sensation and indicative of mental weakness, responds emotionally, with tears. It is not just that Lysander performs woman’s natural role in pastoral but that in surrendering to passion and failing to engage in reproductive sex, he behaves contrary to masculine norms. “In the Renaissance, [for a man to give into] lust involved a lack of control that – far from establishing male dominance and power – was in itself effeminizing” (Woodbridge xxi); likewise, as a result of the civil wars, which overturn political authority and aristocratic ideologies of masculinity, the displaced cavalier-turned-libertine poet deploys the impotent phallus and its opposite – the phallus engaged in excess expenditure – to signify his refusal of the mechanisms of bourgeois capitalism, which equate masculine virility with (re)productive labor (Munns

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22 Early modern ideologies of gender demonstrate that “the physical characteristics of woman . . . have psychological implications,” one of which is emotional excess (Maclean 3.8.1, 3.8.2, 3.9.2).

23 “Sense, n.”: “The faculties of corporeal sensation considered as channels for gratifying the desire for pleasure and the lusts of the flesh”; “Capability of feeling as a quality of the body and its parts”; “Applied to faculties of the mind or soul compared or contrasted with the bodily senses”; “The mental faculties in their normal condition of sanity” (OED).
“Touch” 179-81). The libertine poet, then, exploits his emasculation with the very symbol that typically asserts male social power by fragmenting it from the body and reducing it to its sexual function. As Luce Irigaray explains, “when the penis itself becomes simply a means of pleasure among men, the phallus loses its power” (108).

Although modern critics celebrate “The Disappointment” for its radical treatment of female desire and describe it as a poem about male impotence, if, as Behn argues, Lysander’s “excess of love his love betrayed” (88) – if his effeminate, unproductive expenditure reveals something about his sexual desire – then the poem may also interpret Lysander’s sexuality just as radically as Cloris’s. We know that Lysander is the type of man who associates sexual desire with the “spoils” and “trophies” of war (40). A good soldier, he “seeks the object of his vows” “without respect or fear,” and “advance[es]” confidently “by swift degrees” (41, 42, 44). Perceiving the female body as both an object subject to violence and a site where violence is practiced, in an act of “daring[-do],” he “seize[s]” the “altar” – “that paradise / where rage is calmed, and anger pleased” (45, 47-48). In this instance, Lysander recalls the medieval hero of the courtly love tradition, whose martial prowess signifies his masculinity. But, as Linda Woodbridge reminds us, the medieval hero could engage in acts of violence without compromising his romantic relationships with women. It seems that on some level for Behn Lysander represents both the troped male figure of pastoral and the poet himself. Indeed, he corresponds readily to the essence of masculinity that evolves in Renaissance England. Once socio-economic forces encourage aristocratic men to protect class boundaries by laying down their lances and demonstrating their virility through competitive poetics, masculinity comes to be
defined in violent “opposition to femininity” (Woodbridge xii-xv). In literary works, this shift comes to “[link] sexual intercourse with aggression and violence against women, rather than with pleasure and love” (Kahn qtd. in Woodbridge xii).24

If so, then the expression of Cloris’s possible desire presents a problem for Lysander: he cannot define in opposition to her a virulent aggressive masculinity – that gendered identity that the heterosexual model suggests predicts sexual identity. In fact, we are told twice, once in the last line of stanza seven and again in the last line of stanza eight, that Lysander is “unable to perform” (70, 80). Both instances are preceded by ocular evidence that Cloris returns his desire: “Abandoned by her pride and shame,” “He saw how at her length she lay; / He saw her rising bosom bare” (62-63) and, after he removes her robes, “heaven all opened to his view” (76). Without resistance, the signification of masculinity through sexual aggression becomes completely inexpressible. Valerie Traub argues that all too often early modernist literary critics conflate gender with sexual identification, and she warns that one does not determine the other.25 I would argue that this requires a particularly conscious mode of reading, since documents from the period use the word “sex” to describe both gendered attributes and the material body, which itself is often described in gendered terms. Nonetheless, Behn rather radically may suggest the same as Traub: while Lysander may identify with masculine roles, his self image as the great pursuer may be more sexually arousing to him than Cloris is. Playing this role, not intercourse with Cloris, inspires his climax, and physically his sexual desire

24 See Kahn 86-88.

25 See Traub Desire, esp. 94-116.
turns inward, toward autoeroticism. As Munns notes, Lysander’s “sexual tragedy” takes place on the space of his own body and away from women’s, contrary to generic convention (“Touch” 182), and we watch as he tries to recall “his fleeting vigor” not through physical contact with Cloris but by his own hand. Critiquing the erotic economy of pastoral, Behn links the pastoral poet’s self-absorbed, narcissistic performance to Lysander and reveals the genre’s solipsistic autoerotic potential. By separating gendered identity from sexual objectification and alienating sexual activity, Behn may gesture toward the rational, anti-humanistic individual of the Enlightenment – that socio-cultural revolution that questioned political, religious, and, ultimately gendered, systems of oppression.

In *Comus*, we also find that female voice signals a shift in gendered representation and sexual expression. Early modern religious, literary, and instructional documents gender speech by advocating women’s silence, especially in public or in the presence of men; or they encourage women to adopt a sweet and gentle temper, if they speak at all. Such injunctions strive to maintain gendered order and quell before they develop suspicions about a woman’s virtue – a point to which we will return.26 As Comus intensifies his attempted seduction, the Lady blocks his advances in what might seem an unladylike verbal offense. At the same time, they both resort to gendering language as a means to gain the upper hand in their verbal sparring. For example, the Lady recognizes that Comus has been manipulating words to try her virtue, but, she argues, his foil does

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26 See for example, Castiglione, who urges aristocratic women to adopt a gentleness and mildness in their speech (215-217). King Lear, who recalls as Cordelia dies, “her voice was ever soft, / Gentle and low – an excellent thing in a woman” (*Lear* 5.3.273-74). Vives who advocates woman’s silence in nearly every situation (61-64). New Testament sources 1 Cor. 14.34-35 and 1 Tim. 11, and any number of oral narratives or visual materials of popular culture warning against scolds, shrews, and gossips.
not fool her: “Enjoy your deer Wit, and gay Rhetorick / that hath so well been taught her dazzling fence” (790-91). She acknowledges that rhetoric can amaze when deployed skillfully and, thus, pose as significant a threat to the body or to one’s bodily integrity as a material weapon. But Comus’s speech is “deer,” “gay,” and “dazzling,” ornamental rather than substantive, and the Lady punctuates this observation with a feminizing pronoun. When considered in this light, Comus appears much like the courtier, who, as a result of his humanist education, is encouraged to dissimulate his social aims in ornate poetics and fashion a fantastic self discursively.27 But the courtier is also ever feminized in relation to his sovereign, and in Comus’s case this emasculation is exposed in the Lady’s ability to see through his rhetorical appeals. Asserting her own linguistic fortitude and capitalizing on this role reversal, the Lady refigures herself as another Orpheus and insists that if she argued her “pure cause” (794), “the brute Earth would lend her nerves and shake, / till all [Comus’s] magik structures rear’d so high, / were shatter’d into heaps o’re [his] false head” (797-99). And Comus acknowledges her potency, claiming,

I feel that I do fear

Her words set off by som superior power;

And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew

Dips me all o’re, as when the wrath of Jove

Speaks thunder . . . (800-804)

Comus and the Lady reveal that powerful language in the masque is gendered masculine, but it can be appropriated and deployed by anyone. Discursively cross-dressed, the Lady

27 See Greenblatt, esp. 157-92.
speaks, evincing the power of Orpheus and Jove, and meets Comus’s assaults measure for measure. This linguistic gender play so frustrates Comus that he resorts to force. He vows to “try her yet more strongly” and simultaneously “try” his own masculinity (860). To tame the source of his fencing foe’s strength, then, he attempts to fix the Lady’s gender by arguing that her powerful rhetoric is not indicative of her authority but a result of her body’s feminine weakness: Her discourse is a matter of hysteria, “meer moral babble” (807), resulting from “‘the lees / And settlings of a melancholy blood” (809-10). Comus’s response to the Lady corroborates early modern attitudes about speech which not only gender the act but associate the way a woman speaks with her bodily functions and often cite a woman’s voice as evidence of her own sexual desire. Accordingly, instructional manuals encouraged women to guard their virtue by guarding their speech. However, if a silent woman is a chaste woman and a garrulous woman always suspect sexually, then the Lady’s vociferous defense of her chastity may

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28 Because the tongue was often described as “a little member” or penis, a speaking woman could be derided as acting manly and transgressing gendered order. Carla Mazzio explains that medical texts problematize essentialist claims that gender “the tongue (or speech itself) as ‘phallic.’” Nonetheless, her findings, which blur gendered categories, support my argument about the Lady’s gender play. She argues that the tongue may be personified as either feminine or masculine and equated with woman’s sexual anatomy, too: “the gendering of the tongue is in some sense virile (meaning both manly and hard), it is also often imagined as its opposite, mulier (meaning both womanly and soft) . . . one of the first early modern medical descriptions of the clitoris not only imagined it ‘as part of woman’s shameful member’ (member honteux)’ but as ‘a little tongue’ (languette)” (60).

29 Referring to B. J. Sokol, Flannagan notes that revisions to this passage suggest “that Milton was about to have Comus accuse the Lady of having a disruption of her bodily humors caused by menstruation” (159). It seems to me that Milton accomplishes this task by associating the Lady’s language with her “melancholy blood.” Early modern theories on hysteria suggested that the condition derived from a woman’s menstrual cycle and sex drive and was expressed in her garrulity and imagination. See Nicholas Fontanus, The Woman’s Doctor [1652], qtd in Aughterson 63-64, as well as Maclean 3.7.4, 3.7.5, and 3.8.2, and Jardine 109-10.
undermine her virtue. 30 Certainly, this is how Comus reads the Lady. Although he is first drawn to her because he senses her “chast footing” (146), he immediately transfers that sensuality from body to voice, which so enthralls him he declares she shall become his queen and, therefore, legal sexual property. Moreover, as the Lady resists his advances, her voice incites Comus’s desire. As Juan Louis Vives warns in his highly influential text, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, this is the very predicament a virtuous woman should avoid: not only might a woman’s responsiveness to a man’s speech suggest her sexual attraction to him but speech between men and women, he cautions, leads to sexual arousal (60-61). 31

Indeed, the more the Lady talks, the more carnal and lewd Comus’s comments become. Chastising the Lady for her “lean and sallow Abstinence” (709), he argues:

> Wherefore did Nature powre her bounties forth,  
> With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,  
> Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,  
> Thronging the Seas with spawn innumerabile,  
> But all to please, and sate the curious taste?  
> And set to work millions of spinning Worms,  
> That in their green shops weave the smooth-hair’d silk  
> To deck her Sons, and that no corner might  
> Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loyns  
> She hutch’t th’ all-worshipt ore, and precious gems  
> To store her children with; if all the world  
> Should in a pet of temperance feed on Pulse,  
> Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but Freize,  
> Th’ all-giver would be unthank’t, would be unprais’d,  
> Not half his riches known, and yet despis’d,

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30 See note 25 below, as well as Harvey, who argues that in the period “woman’s voice or tongue . . . is seen to be imbricated with female sexuality” (4), and Newman, who asserts that everywhere at this time, a woman with an open mouth is “equated with a voracious sexuality,” with the “whore” or the woman on display (134).

31 By the end of the sixteenth century, Vives’s text, first published in 1523, existed in more than forty editions and nine languages, and in England alone was published at least nine times (xv).
And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth,
And live like Natures bastards, not her sons,
Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,
And strangl'd with her waste fertility;
Th' earth cumber'd, and the wing'd air dark't with plumes,
The herds would over-multitude their Lords,
The Sea o'refraught would swell, and th' unsought diamonds
Would so emblaze the forehead of the Deep,
And so bestudd with Stars, that they below
Would grow inur'd to light, and com at last
To gaze upon the Sun with shameless brows. (705-36)

Comus may engage in bawdy innuendo for the first part of the masque but he is explicit here. What begins as an oratory on the naturalness of reproduction quickly turns nasty. He assaults her resolve by pummeling her psychologically with a series of sexual images gone monstrous. If the phallic, spinning worms don’t take the virgin, she may end up like nature, he suggests, who turns on herself, self-impregnates and erupts in over-reproduction, if unsatisfied. Even so, Comus argues that to live temperately is to live unnaturally, for it strangles the life out of fertility and begrudges the life God grants us. Calling out all stops, he bolsters his claims by invoking the violent eroticized appeals of love lyrics, the *carpe diem* complaint and the blazon:

List Lady be not coy, and be not cosen’d
With that same vaunted name Virginity,
Beauty is natures coyn, must not be hoorded,
But must be currant, and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partak'n bliss,
Unsavoury in th' injoyment of it self
If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languish't head.
Beauty is natures brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities
Where most may wonder at the workmanship;
It is for homely features to keep home,
They had their name thence; course complexions
And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
The sampler, and to teize the huswifes wooll.
What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the Morn?
There was another meaning in these gifts,
Think what, and be advis’d, you are but young yet. (737-55)

On some level, the Lady must recognize the sexual appeal of her speech, for she immediately checks her voice, “I had not thought to have unlockt my lips / In this unhallow’d air” (756-57), and eventually refuses to speak to Comus, denying him, who needs it most, the privilege of learning “the sage and serious doctrine of Virginity” (786-87). But the damage has been done. As William Kerrigan notes, it is “as if speech this intimate would be equivalent to the sexuality her virtue forbids” (30). But the issue here is more complex: certainly, the Lady’s speech, designed to ward off sexual assault, titillates, but her speech acts also demonstrate her refusal of gendered subordination and sexual objectification and reveal dangerously that she conducts herself as an autonomous sexual agent. Articulating and modeling the ideals of Puritan self-regulation and self-control, the Lady appears to defer to patriarchal authority but her assertion of agency reveals also the possibility that she may indeed act sexually of her own free will. The paradoxical nature of the Lady’s character also troubles that of her player, Lady Alice Egerton: although aristocratic women performed regularly in masques, a woman on the stage was considered, by many accounts, commensurate with a whore, and, undoubtedly, there would have been some in that audience who deemed it inappropriate for a fifteen-year-old girl to engage in such frank, public, sexual debate.  

32 See Graham, who argues that “the Lady’s ‘extradomestic’ situation resembles [Elizabeth Cary’s] Mariam’s in that she converses with a male character who lacks legitimate authority over her sexuality, and
player together may assert “the sage and serious doctrine of Virginity” (786-87), yet in
doing so eroticize the voice that defends virtue.

_Comus_ has been described as unique among masques “in the prominence it gives
to the literary aspect of the form” over aesthetic spectacle (Miller 89); however, its
discursive emphasis, which turns on a plot of sexual pursuit, makes a spectacle of the
Lady’s body repeatedly through literary and theatrical display. When he first encounters
the Lady, Comus addresses her as a “forren wonder” (265), which establishes a
relationship between subject and object, spectator and “exotica,” as Roy Flanagan notes,
“a Petrarchan lover facing the disdain of a proud lady” (135). A significant feature of this
Petrarchan “conceit” – a word that means concept or image – is the spectacle it makes of
the female body and its consequent reliance upon what film critic Laura Mulvey has
termed “the male gaze.” In his song about her, the poet bemoans his beloved’s cruelty for
eschewing his advances and attempts to woo her in a _blazon_. In it, he celebrates her
precious parts by associating them with natural, precious objects and anatomizing her
body: he describes lips like roses, hair like gold, teeth like pearls, and breasts like snow
(“Blazon” 96). While the poet’s language fragments his beloved’s body, his eye, like the
camera’s lens, frames those parts while concealing the ideological mechanism of that
violent production. As feminist critic Nancy Vickers argues, this representational practice

in that the audience might indeed perceive as transgressive any willing disclosure of her thoughts under the
circumstances . . . As a topic for female discourse, chastity might be perceived as particularly unsuitable
even as a contradiction in terms” (3).

33 Spectacle in _Comus_ is not limited to the Lady. For instance, Comus is frightening because a spectacle is
made of his otherness. Like Caliban in Shakespeare’s _The Tempest_, Comus is a racialized, male predator
out to colonize the colonialist’s daughter. His imperialist desires are suggested by his squatting on the
Father’s land, and the threat he poses is underscored by his undiscriminating sexual appetite: the text
suggests he might like men and / or women, beasts and / or humans, participating and / or watching.
allows the poet to control, possess, and manipulate woman as object-image to his own ends, and extends to the reader or spectator a voyeuristic pleasure in seeing what he sees or imagines (“Blazon” 96). Comus’s predictable Petrarchan posturing achieves a similar effect: he demeans the Lady’s verbal protest and argues that she should abandon her cold affectation, for only women with “course complexions / and cheeks of sorry grain” should remain locked up and unused. Emphasizing her sexual object status further, he transfixes her with the power of his gaze and imparts to her a “vermeil-tinctur’d lip,” “love-darting eyes,” and “tresses like the morn” (749, 752-53). But Comus and the Lady are more than literary characters; they are played by real people on the stage, and that staged production alludes to one, if not two, highly politicized, spectacular legal sexual assault cases involving Lady Alice’s family. This context intensifies Lady Alice’s erotic object status, while her physical representation compounds Vickers’ observation about the symbiotic relationship between poet and spectator. As Comus attempts to seduce the Lady, the audience gazes upon Lady Alice and compares her features to the Lady Comus describes. This double-vision eroticizes the staged display of Lady Alice’s body, as rape trials did and so often continue to do.

Ironically, the staging implicit in Comus actively implicates the audience in exploiting the Lady (and Lady Alice) as spectacle. The scene in which Comus seizes the Lady and manacles her to a chair demands their voyeuristic complicity: surrounded by concentric circles of leering spectators, the Lady would have sat physically in the center of Comus’s palace, faced by Comus, surrounded by Comus’s rout, and then encircled by the audience. As the circles proliferated, each subsequent ring of onlookers would have
baited the next to extend their gazing and to see what the others were looking at. Perhaps in this moment Milton sought to demonstrate that the Lady could indeed “sit i’th center, and enjoy bright day,” even in the most dire situation (382). However, this reasoning asserts both appropriately the Lady’s moral strength and inappropriately that she enjoys being the center of such attention; it then activates the cultural suspicion that victims of sexual assault harbor secret masochistic desires. As image and discourse clash, the Lady and Lady Alice would have embodied the irreconcilable gap between chastity and virginity. Accordingly, the display must have incited a sort of cognitive dissonance for the audience, who would have known better than to stare but must not have been able to tear their eyes from Lady Alice’s marvelous performance. As René Girard argues, “there is something infectious about the spectacle of violence” (Violence 30).

This visible and audible disjunction reaches its pinnacle of expression when the Lady’s brothers and the Attendant Spirit rush onto the scene to save her. She seemed like Eve – “sufficient to have stood” (PL, III, 99) and “In discourse . . . sweet” and “eloquent” enough to have charmed Comus’s soul if he had one (PL, II, 554-5) – but this disturbance denies the Lady the opportunity to prove herself: At once, Comus disappears and the Lady appears the ultimate spectacle, frozen on a “marble venom’d seat / smear’d with gumms of glutinous heat” (917-18). Critics note that the ambiguous and suggestive nature of these lines may indicate that Comus touched the Lady with the phallic wand with which he had been threatening her before his escape. The glutinous gums, then, would evidence either Comus’s or the Lady’s sexual responsiveness to this attack.

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34 See Lewalski “Milton,” who also notes this connection.
(Flannagan 164). As Christopher Kendrick points out, although we cannot conclude exactly what happened, it is clear that something happened (54) – the first evidence of which is the Lady’s silence. It is important to note that in this instance we also witness the trafficking of the Lady from male figure to male figures, and this exchange obfuscates the meaning of the Lady’s response because it reinstates appropriate patriarchal control over the Lady specifically as a sexual asset: it silences her sensual voice and immobilizes her desirable body – the sources of her sexual agency. As a result, the scene betrays the homosocial bond between men in the masque: the boys and the Attendant Spirit seem, like Comus, determined to reestablish “the canon laws of our foundation” (Milton 808). This corrective is foreshadowed in multiple allusions to women who were punished, often through physical violation, for authorizing original speech: the Lady is likened to Philomel, whose tongue was ripped out for attempting to cry for help or accuse her rapist, and Echo (230-35), who was “deprived of speech and original thought” for her talkativeness (Biedermann 235). She is also compared to Medusa, that emblem of male horror specifically linked to rhetoric in the Renaissance (Milton 447-49, Vickers “Blazon” 100-11; Harvey 74). And as the ever-doubting younger brother suggests, his sister may serve a similar function as Syrinx, for he craves the “solace” of the “sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops” while missing his sister (Milton 345, 347). Unfortunately, Syrinx’s body and voice are appropriated to signify the poet’s song – his desire, power, and creative force.

35 See Girard, “Triangular Desire,” on this sort of male bonding that develops via rivalry for a female figure (Deceit 1-4), and Sedgwick, who extends Girard’s theory and demonstrates how it constructs and maintains gender and the structures that convey patriarchal power (Between 19-27).

36 For elaboration on this point, see Cixous.
The subtext of containment and control in this scene and its reliance on eroticized visual display suggest the Lady’s symbolic and perhaps literal rape. The Lady embodies Laura Mulvey’s formulation of spectacle: “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact . . . Yet [woman’s] visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (“Visual” 589). Indeed, as we all gaze upon the frozen Lady, our gazes freeze, and the narrative freezes as well, figuratively, at least, as all on stage contemplate her immobility and debate what to do. Moreover, we are shocked by the Lady’s silence, for her voice has largely shaped the moral structure of the masque. Although a woman’s silence is a normative feature of her objectification, as Nancy Vickers has demonstrated, in literary tradition it is also indicative of her powerlessness and renders her susceptible to rape (“Blazon”). On a theoretical level, then, this scene suggests the Lady’s metaphoric assault. It also creates a paradox for the audience: the Lady herself declared that her chastity was dependent upon her strength of mind and not subject to physical coercion, but she is frozen; and the audience, which is stymied by the visual, physical, and moral implications of that sensual puddle to which she is glued, can only try the Lady’s chastity or judge her virgin innocence according to her words.

Denied the physical and verbal ability to defend body or virtue, the Lady appears not only vulnerable to rape but as if she has been raped. Modern analyses of rape record that it often inspires in its victims the sensation “of ‘freezing’ – involuntary immobility
and silence” (Sharon Marcus 394). And immobility and silence seem to be the operating evidence of rape in the Masque. While Comus’s phallic wand may have affected the Lady in this manner, the Attendant Spirit attributes the same characteristics to the Lady’s ravishing voice: He recalls awakening to the Lady’s song, which “Rose like a steam of rich distill’d Perfumes, / And stole upon the Air, that even Silence / Was took e’re she was ware” (556-58). The Lady’s melody seizes Silence, freezing her vocally and physically in a surprise abduction. This allusion to the threat of theft inherent in rape is suggestive of the Lady’s predicament. Although stolen property, she was returned to her family, but the event robbed her of her voice and subjectivity. This response corroborates theories about the physical effect of rape on the psyche: “the theft metaphor makes rape mirror a simplified model of castration: a single sexual organ identifies the self, that organ is conceived of as an object that can be taken or lost, and such a loss dissolves the self” (Sharon Marcus 398). This model complements Mulvey’s assertion that phallocentrism depends upon woman’s signification as the castrated other:

The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. It is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence . . .

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signer for the male other,

37 See also Leah Marcus, who argues that the Lady is powerless but not “a victim of rape,” although “her predicament is morally identical” (15), and Lewalski, who makes a stronger case for the Lady’s vulnerability: stuck to the chair, the Lady is “subject, despite her virtue, to unruly sensuality and unable to attain salvation by her own merits” (“Politics” 314).

38 Ironically, the text refers to the Lady’s ability to ravish those who hear her song no less than three times. This subtext suggests her likeness to Comus, as might her comparisons to Diana and to Circe and the sirens, who lure and enchant men with their songs (253). The Lady’s affiliation with the sirens is intriguing: she is virginal and embroiled in this sexual contest and the sirens, also virgins, are known for their lust and “whorish” witchcraft (Miller 161).
bound by a symbolic order to which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (“Visual” 585-86)

Indeed, the Lady’s symbolic assault signals a shift in the masque from female subjectivity to male authorial agency. It robs the Lady of her status as a maker of meaning, expressing and demonstrating the “Sun-clad power of Chastity” (781), and argues that she is merely emblematic of this virtue and ultimately expresses her father’s power. It seems no coincidence, then, that in a society which views the family as a little commonwealth and on an evening dedicated to John Egerton’s political advancement, the masque is framed by the voice of Jove and the presentation of the children to Egerton, who is written directly into the narrative. As John Demaray imagines in his analysis of the staging of *Comus*, “The Earl of Bridgewater, representing the state, is now clearly the center of a perfect masquing world; at the foot of the Earl’s raised dais dance the three children in gorgeous attire; around him on three sides are his courtiers, ranked and ranging in rows; before him in true perspective is a scene depicting his seat of power, Ludlow Castle” (120). Spectacle shifts from Lady to Father: the father’s physical positioning, surrounded as he is by courtiers and the audience, mirrors that of the Lady when she was surrounded by Comus and his rout, only now spectacle signifies power. He may “sit i’th center, and enjoy bright day” (Milton 382). That the Lady can be simply replaced by the father calls attention to the fact that she was designed to signify his power and authority all along. This may explain why, once she is rescued, all references to the
Lady’s sexuality move from rape to reproduction, celebrating the propagation of the
Egerton estate.

In “The Disappointment” Behn also employs spectacle and associates it with
assault. But she reverses its traditional gendered representation. The first half of the poem
courages us to perceive Lysander as a sexual agent, a valiant soldier of love
gallivanting across the pastoral plain in hot pursuit of “the object of his vows” (41). He is
fully committed to and embodies his role until some “envying god” “snatch[es] his
power” (79-80). We don’t see immediately what this means for Lysander. Rather, the
narrator conveys the tragedy in five separate observations. Each emphasizes, with
increasing acuity, not Lysander’s subjectivity but his objectification and physiological
fragmentation: 1) “Nature’s support (without whose aid / She can no human being give) /
Itself now wants the art to live” 2) “Faintness its slackened nerves invade” 3) “In vain
th’enraged youth assayed / To call its fleeting vigor back” 4) “No motion ‘twill from
motion take” 5) “In vain he toils, in vain commands” 6) “The insensible fell weeping in
his hands” (81-90). The eye of the text in this passage functions like a camera lens, but
unlike the mechanism discussed in Comus (the blazon which frames a fragmented female
body we never see as a corporeal whole), in this instance we watch as that lens zooms in
from an unspecified space (the generality of observation one) and then corporeal unity to
something we identify as “it,” a person we recognize, an object that person manipulates
and struggles to revive aggressively through verbal and physical command, that is, until
we see writ large the spectacle of observation six, Lysander with the insensible collapsed
in his hand. With each new observation, the angle of vision shifts: sometimes we simply
hear about what the speaker sees, sometimes we see what the speaker sees, sometimes we watch Lysander watching himself, and sometimes we see clearly what Lysander sees. Each of these visual perspectives intensifies Lysander’s object status, as does Behn’s repeated pronoun of choice in this stanza – “itself,” “its,” “its” “‘t” (83, 84, 86, 87). The technology of objectification “it” effects draws our attention again and again to Lysander’s penis. It also encourages us to see “it” as independent of his body and, because of its referential ambiguity, to regard “it” as less than human. To a certain extent, this depiction benefits Lysander: in observation three, Lysander perceives his body as if it is literally fragmented, “In vain th’enraged youth assayed / To call its fleeting vigor back” (86). If the unruly member appears to have a mind of its own, then Lysander can salve his ego. He is not to blame for his sexual dysfunction. Ideologically speaking, however, he also loses the phallus as a locus of power. Wrested away by the poet, Behn now possesses that authority.

Behn ends this stanza in an ultimate close-up, displaying fully Lysander’s collapsed, weeping penis. Because *it falls* at the end of the stanza, *it* compels both reader and narrator to pause and contemplate that image before proceeding. The effect is much like that of Milton’s Lady, frozen in a state of arrested sexual shock. And like the Lady, Lysander never recovers. We never perceive him again as a competent sexual subject; rather, the narrator tells us, the event “damned him to the hell of impotence” (140). But Behn also plays with the same model of assault and rape to which Milton alludes. On a basic level, Lysander is frozen in our minds and on the page as the object of our gaze, and silenced: although “th’enraged youth assayed / to call its fleeting vigor back” and “in vain
commands” it to perform (87-89), as with most objectified bodies, we never hear what he is saying. He, like the Lady, bears the evidence of her desire in his frozen, immobile, silent state. This observation is not too surprising since Behn reverses the gendered roles associated with the gaze: man not woman is the object of visual consumption here and Cloris as well as a (possible) female narrator serve as spectators, watching and relaying events as they unfold. This role reversal reveals the constructed, unnatural essence of the scripts delineated to men and women in lyrics of seduction, but it does not disarm the mechanism of scopophilia: Lysander is still humiliated in his normalized female position as spectacle, which suggests that in this scene the violence is a matter of structure rather than gender.

However, the gender trouble Behn provokes optically achieves its deconstructive potential in the rape narrative imbedded in this pastoral work. The rape subtext begins when Lysander surprises Cloris in the dark wood and escalates in the militaristic language that describes the progress of his conquest. Once Lysander becomes a sexual spectacle, however impotent that image may be, the rape narrative changes targets. Rather than depicting Cloris as the stereotypical victim of Lysander’s pursuit and rather than reversing these roles simplistically as Behn does with spectacle, she re-scripts the rape struggle to depict a confrontation between the rapist and his own resisting body. The violent assault to which Lysander might have subjected Cloris, had she been disinterested, he suffers on his own disinterested body. Rape, theorists argue, is more about exerting power than expressing sexual desire. This seems true in Lysander ‘s case:

in a fit of “rage,” he “toils” and molests himself but “no motion ‘twill from motion take” (85-87, 89). The target of this aggression retracts, falls limply and cries. His victim’s response “increases” Lysander’s “rage and shame”: he appears both attacker, who shamefully wants to control, and casualty, angered by and ashamed of his violation (97). The sexual assault he perpetrates and resists (or the identity crisis that results from this fractured role) pushes the “o’er-ravished shepherd” over the edge and engenders near suicidal “despair” and derangement: Lysander “renounc[es] his reason with his life” (69, 93-94). As he reels, Cloris flees. She wants him to play the sexual aggressor as much as she “wants the power” to play the reluctant virgin (20), but she “leav[es] him fainting on the gloomy bed” (119-20), suffering from his own self-inflicted attack. Lysander, a casualty of the phallic power he struggles to exert, houses both rapist and victim on his own solitary, male body. Through this hybrid figure, Behn undermines the gendered narrative of rape and reveals its structural origin. As a result, she also deconstructs pastoral’s literary counterpart, the seduction poem.

In Comus and “The Disappointment,” Milton and Behn practice a revolutionary poetics. Each writes within pastoral tradition and seems to want to transcend the genre’s gendered and sexual conventions. They both cast strong, articulate, smart, young women in roles typically reserved to convey female objectification and victimization. By refusing to reduce woman to her mere bodily presence, they imagine her as a human subject who matters. They confront in the rape script heated debates about woman’s sexuality, agency, and voice and demonstrate that identity can exceed social constructs and constraints. But do they succeed?
Milton is entangled in the semiotics of pastoral in a way he cannot transcend completely (and perhaps does not want to), as a ramification of his authorial identity – his sense of poetic destiny and conviction that he is England’s next great national epic poet. The sort of literary fireworks that distinguish *Comus* generically demonstrate his ability to dialogue with his literary forefathers and compete in the Young Man’s Pastoral Association and perhaps exceed his rivals in this fraternal order: while infusing the masque with the time-honored images and allusions of classical epic, he makes the genre anew. However, these images affect the Lady, and I would argue bolster the theoretical mechanisms in the masque that suggest her violation. In the lyric that initially moves Comus, the Lady sings:

> Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph that liv’st unseen  
> Within thy airy shell  
> By Slow Meander’s margent green,  
> And in the violet-imroider’d vale  
> Where the love-lorn Nightingale  
> Nightly to thee her sad Song mourneth well. (230-235)

In this early moment in the masque, the Lady sings sadly in the night, echoing the nightingale’s song to Echo. She at once acts like Philomel, who was raped by her brother-in-law, and Echo, who was ripped to pieces when she refused Pan’s advances. The Lady’s performance, enacted under the watchful eye of a sexual predator, suggests that

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40 Some histories of Echo claim that when she was unable to declare her love for Narcissus she died of a broken heart, disintegrated in a cave, and all that remained was her echo; other accounts link her death to Pan, who when he could not secure her affection had shepherds tear her to pieces and scatter her remains. See Bonnefoy and Doniger and Guirand.
an assault is inevitable, for she mimics the behavior Philomel and Echo adopt following their attack. The Attendant Spirit, who watches agrees and recalls, “Amaz’d I stood, harrow’d with grief and fear, / And O poor hapless Nightingale thought I” (565-66). To him, she already is Comus’s victim. Likewise, as the brothers search for their sister, they summon the “star of Arcady, / Or Tyrian Cynosure” (341-2). In so doing, they associate the Lady with Callisto, who was also a victim of rape. They make a similar mistake when in their debate the Elder Brother argues that the Lady’s moral armor is charged with the defensive might of Minerva’s shield, which depicts the face of Medusa and can turn any assailant to stone. This argument is discomforting since Medusa was endowed with her power only after she too was raped. The allusions to sexual violence build tension. They also titillate subversively by encouraging the audience to imagine assault enacted upon the Lady again and again. Such poetics “allow the woman to escape [physical rape] without denying the reader the satisfaction” (Catty 37).

Through such violent mythical references, Milton gestures towards those issues he resists so well and so often in his characterization of the Lady: authorship, gender, sexuality, and paternity, in short, phallocentrism. We witness these competing interests in the fraught sisterly alliance effected between Sabrina and the Lady. In an allusion to Britomart’s rescue of Amoret in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, the brothers and the Attendant Spirit summon Sabrina, the only being with restorative power enough to free the Lady. In a strange baptismal rite performed on the Lady’s erogenous zones, Sabrina thwarts the corrupt sexual spectacle Comus has made of the Lady and refigures spectacle itself to express chastity (and re-signify Lady Alice’s marriagability). Drawing our
attention to the body, Sabrina sprinkles water onto the Lady’s chest and repeats this ritual by applying droplets three additional times to the Lady’s fingers and lips. She thus purifies those parts that might have contacted or addressed a lover. She then places her palms on the seat to which the Lady is glued. Her touch, femininely “moist and cold,” tempers the heat and binding power of Comus’s spell (908-21). The laying of hands and religious cleansing restore the order the father’s ensigns so desire and these release the Lady. That Sabrina is the one who affects this change suggests the absolute relationship between incorporeality and virtue. Conceived by rape, Sabrina committed suicide when she was sexually assaulted, and thus reclaimed her body by circumscribing it to the spiritual realm. Her transmutation into a physical being again at the behest of the Attendant Spirit reveals her own estrangement as an agent of patriarchy, and it highlights the symbiosis of a poetic narrative and a social system founded upon male dominance and expressed through acts of sexual violence.

Comus also alludes to this conflation when he secures the Lady in his palace. He threatens that if she moves, he will touch her with that phallic wand and transform her into the “Root-bound” Daphne (659-662). Although Daphne fled Apollo and resisted assault by converting into a laurel tree, Comus warns that immobility would compromise the Lady’s virginity. This is a frightening prospect since she is manacled and eventually frozen. Moreover, the reference to Daphne also reminds us that the narrative of rape and assault, so squarely based in pastoral space, underlies the very image that signifies poetic acclaim: Apollo severs a branch from the laurel tree (Daphne’s body), fashions it into a crown, and poets from Petrarch in his songs to Laura to our own modern poet laureates,
don or designate this symbol to reflect literary genius. The multiple allusions to myth interlink *Comus* with other canonical texts and support Milton’s desire for recognition as the legitimate progeny of the literary patriarchs; they also indicate that Milton, like Apollo, benefits from the eroticized violence he asks us to imagine the Lady suffering and, thus, as a result of his literary ambition, must reproduce whether or not he desires Lady Alice’s character to transcend that threat.

We can see the visual and literary effect of such cultural poetics on Lady Alice, for unlike literature confined to the page, *Comus* manifests itself in real bodies. And these real bodies circulate between stage and page, expressing the politicized power *Comus* is meant to display. Once the Lady / Lady Alice are presented to her father, in one fell swoop, she / they are subsumed into the music of the masque and interpolated into the social structure of the father’s house. As the Lady and her player sing and join in the closing dances, she / they represent iconically early modern woman: chaste, well-kept under the clear purview of the father; silent, in that we never hear her / their solitary voice again; and obedient, conforming graciously to this ideal. In this instant, she / they recall Philomel, Echo, and Syrinx – singing, repeating, and playing the poet’s music, unable to cast off their symbolic violation. For a production that celebrates a young woman’s struggle with and victory over a sexual assailant, her refeminization as sexual property is unsettling: Comus was not caught and there may be future assailants, and, disturbingly, the Lady is disarmed, unable to defend herself physically or verbally with the authority she expressed initially. Milton, caught between the competing demands of patronage, patriarchy, and poetics, ultimately writes out female autonomy. Consequently, even
though he seems initially to endeavor to demonstrate Lady Alice’s ability to withstand assault, he reveals her very real vulnerability to it. In the end, Milton reminds us that the Lady is fully invested in her own disenfranchisement as a purveyor of patriarchy. Milton’s exposing this connection as debilitating is what is subversive about this text. Order is restored, and the Lady is surely flattened as a result, but that order is predicated on violence and mayhem, which makes it impossible to go home again with any serenity.

In contrast to the scholarly debate about sexuality and meaning that *Comus* provokes, feminist critics celebrate almost monolithically the sexual and textual revolution Behn effects in “The Disappointment.” Surely, in the poem, Behn plays on – and with – Genesis 2-3, that founding myth of “the creation,” which confers linguistic authority to man, and “the fall of man” – two legends that shape critically the social practices of pastoral poetics. The literature often associates woman with the natural world, the site of her transgression and that space which Adam is commanded to cultivate. It thus authorizes the male writer to shape femininity and the female voice to his liking. This natural intellectual and creative hierarchy between men and women is a result of the innate intellectual and moral inferiority of woman which was demonstrated in the garden and which generated the fall. The story differs in the original Hebrew and most translations of the Bible: in the Hebrew text, Eve is in the garden *with* her husband;41 Most translations, however, depict Eve alone in the garden with the serpent. In both instances, she is convinced that eating forbidden fruit will bring her wisdom, eats,

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41 See Genesis (*Bereshit*) in the Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh* 3:6: *Vateirah ha’ishah ki tov ha’ets l’ma’achal v’chi ta’ava-hu l’einayim v’nechmad ha’ets l’haskil vatikach mipir’yo vatochal vatiten gam l’Ishah imah vayochal.* When the woman saw that the tree was good to eat and desirable to the eyes, and the tree was pleasant to the intellect, she took from its fruit and ate and she also gave it to her man with her and he ate.
and also gives fruit to Adam. Their eyes open. Behn follows the Hebrew. In her version, woman and man are present in the garden together and man’s complicity in the fall is made explicit, for Lysander’s body is the garden that harbors the serpent. He is not only tempter; he, rather than woman, is responsible for the sexual disaster that ensues.

Moreover, Behn suggests, as does Lucille Clifton in her “Tree of Life” poem sequence, woman’s superior, prelapsarian intelligence and sexual understanding; Cloris flees before tasting forbidden fruit, knowing it cannot satisfy her appetite or desire.42

Behn pokes fun at the cultural authority the myth produces through visual and discursive technologies. “The fall of man” is an apt description of Lysander’s fallen body part – and a role he embodies fully when he falls “fainting on the gloomy bed” while Cloris hies the scene of the crime (120). On a more serious and theoretical level, Behn reconfigures this legend so that it asks important questions of the phallocentrism it engenders: specifically, she challenges the gendered poetics of domination it enables and the authorial authority it confers as a gendered right and creative territory. Inverting traditional symbolic structures in which man rather than woman functions as spectacle, Behn provokes such questions. By then configuring that spectacle not to espouse desire but specifically to represent man as de-eroticized and sexually defunct, Behn enacts Lysander’s symbolic castration. The phallus fails to signify symbolic order and cultural truth or authority; Lysander instead serves as bearer of meaning rather than maker of meaning in the poem. This linguistic subjection is emphasized both by his silence and by the authorial persona, who enters the poem and expresses in that powerful first person

42 Clifton’s “Tree of Life” poems are included in her collection entitled, Quilting: Poems 1987-1990.
voice her empathy for Cloris: “The nymph’s resentments none but I / Can well imagine
or condole” (131-32). Disappointed by Lysander’s lack, the narrator disappoints the
convention that naturalizes male sexual and linguistic dominance. Having mocked the
male body and the corpus of pastoral verse, which presumes a masculine position and
poetic potency, Behn rapes or steals the voice of pastoral poetry. \^ In so doing, she
demonstrates that subjectivity, not gender, is the source of violence, and thus neuters the
gendered code of pastoral.

Despite the good deconstructive work Behn produces in “The Disappointment,”
like Comus, what the poem has to say about violence and representation is troubling. As
is typical of Behn, her writing is never as simple as it might first read. Although she
depicts Lysander as both rapist and victim, she also describes Cloris as a victim. As soon
as she realizes that Lysander cannot hold up his end of the deal, she returns immediately
“from the trance / which love and soft desire had bred” (101-02). Her first reactions,
“Blushing,” “disdain and shame,” and her flight (115-17), intimate that she too was
assaulted; however, she reacts in this manner not because she was attacked but she’s

\[^3\] I am not arguing here that Behn achieves this feat because she is a woman. As Danielle Clarke insists,
“the sex of the author is neither a reliable nor an authentic indication of the speaker’s gender” and “women
writers too produce culturally determined representations of their own speech, rather than acting (or
speaking) purely as autonomous agents in their own right” (2 emphasis in text). Clarke’s observation
applies also to the authorial “I” in Behn’s poem. In fact, for some time “The Disappointment” was
considered the work of John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester because it first appeared in his Poems on
Several Occasions (1680), alongside his “Imperfect Enjoyment.” It was only later attributed to Behn when
she published it in a revised form in her Poems on Several Occasions (1684). Rather, Behn reworks
representations of man and woman and their relationship to language, which have long been inscribed by a
literary tradition created, ventriloquized as Elizabeth Harvey would argue, by male writers. Accordingly, it
is impossible to discern a “real” male or female voice in a literary text that exists independent of
representation. It seems to me that this is exactly Behn’s point and one she sees operating far beyond the
frame of the page: gender itself is nothing but representation and therefore cannot denote social, political,
or authorial privilege. Perhaps, then, Behn anticipates the theory of gender and performance Judith Butler
forwards in Gender Trouble.
ashamed of Lysander performance. She may flee from Lysander as if she were “Daphne” and he Apollo, but unlike Daphne, who was unwilling to sacrifice her chaste honor, Cloris flees because in both senses she is not chased / [chaste]. The effect of these lines, along with those ambiguous passages that convey Cloris’s teasing desire and her fear of assault, is that they argue that what a woman really wants is to be taken violently. ‘No’ really may mean ‘Yes.’ Likewise, while “The Disappointment” achieves a certain social justice by rewriting the script that wants to read woman as always already raped, it is an uneasy justice. The poem may swap man for woman as rape’s target but, like traditional texts, it asks us to take pleasure in that inversion and through scopophiliac mechanisms delight in another’s violation and suffering. It may also suggest that violation and suffering are inevitable; that is, to be a subject, one requires an object.

“The Disappointment” and *Comus* testify to a script gone wrong – a pastoral narrative that eroticizes violence and equates romance with violation. What Behn and Milton do with gender, subjectivity, and desire may appear at first revolutionary, but both participate in purveying forms of violence and suggest the inevitability of violence as a structural principle. Nonetheless, each also brings the mechanics of eroticized violence to our attention in ways that de-naturalize and critique them. As such, their work may influence the ideological practices that produce the future materials of culture and the way those artifacts inscribe and shape our expectations and behaviors. In Behn’s *Lycidus, or the Lover in Fashion, being an Account from Lycidas to Lysander of his Voyage from*

44 See Finke, who observes that this is a standard device of Behn’s dramatic comedies: “Behn has her female characters engage in sexual conquests and keep their lovers’ desire alive by linking sexuality and wit”; citing Gallagher, she further explains, “‘The woman’s play of wit is the opposite of foreplay; it is a kind of afterplay specifically designed to prolong pleasure, resuscitate desire and keep a woman who has given herself sexually from being traded in for another woman’” (28).
"the Island of Love, Together with a Miscellany of New Poems by sevral hands," a young woman, Cleone, addresses Behn in a poem that serves as one of the collection’s dedications to her. In Cleone’s verse, “To Mrs. B. from a Lady who had a desire to see her, and who complains on the ingratitude of her fugitive Lover,” she confesses that she bought into the narrative of pastoral romance and fell in love with a swain, not for his “Beauty,” “goodly herd,” or “fortunes” but for “passion” (13-15, 18-19). Despite her renunciation of worldly goods and her allegiance to the rustic life, the “ingrate,” “purjur’d Shepherd” left her (24-25). She writes to Behn, who too understands the scripted fairytale of romance, hoping that in doing so her heart “No more will be to Treasons subject as before / To be betray’d by a fair tale no more / As large as once, as uncontroll’d and free” (55-57). As Cleone’s poem makes clear, reading works like “The Disappointment” (and perhaps like Comus) reveals the incompatibility of pastoral promises with the realities of life lived, and there’s some solace to be found there.

What do we see, when we see you
madly determined to see us so,
but the child who makes a monster appear
and then goes trembling in fear.
– Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Having examined the sexual threat inherent in pastoral, we have explored the gendered implications on voice for characters and authors. Pastoral can serve as a powerful silencing mechanism for the female character, the female author, and the author who strives to rewrite female agency. This is a result of the genre’s equation of woman’s body with the landscape and a desire predicated on violence. We now move indoors, from the poet’s construction of the natural environment to the built environment. In our earlier exploration, the physical body and an implied gaze worked with generic motifs in to facilitate eroticized desire. When we move inside, an overt gaze and a metaphoric body serve the same purpose. Accordingly, this chapter draws upon film and architectural theory to explore how mechanisms of ocularity and material space can be crafted to represent desire, domination, and violence. Since woman is often subjugated in artistic renderings of this will to power, we now ask, what would we see if a woman did the looking?

In her groundbreaking study thirty years ago Laura Mulvey observed that film perpetuates a gendered mode of looking – one in which woman functions as passive image or spectacle and man as active bearer of the look. Film theorists such as Mary Anne Doane, Theresa de Lauretis, and Mulvey herself have since attempted to account for an active female gaze. Their work, like mine, shares a concern for the fusion of visual
and spatial technologies to stimulate desire and generate gender difference. Feminist anthropologists and geographers as well as critics of literature, art, and architecture also identify a powerful relationship between gender and space. They argue that space is both productive of and produced by gender relations: kinship networks and capitalism effect social boundaries and allocate different areas of inhabitation and activity to men and women; representations of space and spatial metaphors in cultural artifacts – language, image, and the built environment – reinscribe this social divide by evoking sexed bodies and positioning them in inequitable relation to economic and political power and the production of meaning. Such signifying practices map, regulate, and reinforce sexual hierarchies informed by masculinist ontologies. But what happens to the visual and spatial when those formally the object of the gaze secure the means of representation?

Jonathan Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732) and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s response to Swift, “The Reasons that Induced Dr. S to write a Poem called The Lady’s Dressing room” (1734), provide a provocative case in point. In Swift’s verse, Strephon “steals” into Celia’s dressing room and finds her unkempt mess so grotesque that he becomes repulsed by all women. “Link[ing] each dame he sees with all [Celia’s] stinks” (121-2), he assumes a life “impiously blasph[ing]” woman’s monstrosity to the world (137) – an act duplicated and seemingly sanctioned by the poet. But Montagu sees the same event differently: Offended by Swift’s possible misogyny, she substitutes the poet for Strephon and asserts that Swift’s own hapless social climbing and sexual inadequacies are the true source of his “disappointed” (85), caustic rebuke against all
ladies. However satirical, Montagu’s attack is personal and with good cause. “The Reasons,” printed within two years of “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” followed Swift’s joint publication with Alexander Pope of their Miscellanies, which viciously and sexually lampooned Montagu (as well as some of her friends). It also fell in the midst of her most strenuous authorial volleying with Pope, a one-time admirer turned social and literary nemesis, and the “semi-pornographic” pamphlet wars their animosity incited (Grundy 346). Despite this remarkable, volatile context and critical interest in women’s writing and feminist literary history, Swift’s poem alone, rather than Montagu’s individually or both together, has received substantial scholarly attention. This oversight is puzzling, since Montagu’s “The Reasons” is one of the few poems published in her lifetime, and she in so many works critiqued the disparity between idyllic representations of heterosexual desire and the lived realities of gender relations.

Remarkably, when read dialogically, “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “The Reasons” anticipate modern concerns about the gendering of space and the spatializing practices that assert gender difference. In this discursive battle between the sexes, Swift and Montagu deploy a complex arsenal of spatial motifs – in mental, visual, or material terms – to restrict the representation of gender. As a result, they demonstrate how such

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1 On Swift’s misogyny, Pollak notes that even modern critics of his verse often foreground Swift’s feelings toward women and his “psychosexual conflicts” rather than “his literary representations of them” (Poetics 15). As Nussbaum explains, however, a reader’s privileging the personal over the literary may be owing to the genre of satire itself: “there may be within satire an atemporal motive to cope with the satirist’s deepest fears through attacking his victim with wordplay. The satirist may be attempting to expel, or at least to project, that portion of himself which he finds most reprehensible . . . in seventeenth century satires, women come to embody the very absence of patriarchal order and hierarchy that men most fear [and] . . . society easily accepts a satire against the things it most fears, especially if those things are created by the object of the satirist’s attack” (19).

2 See, for example, “Epitaph,” “Song: ‘Fond Wishes you persue in vain,’ “Epistle from Mrs. Y[ounge] to her Husband,” and “Written ex tempore on the Death of Mrs. Bowes.”
cultural practices effect identity and agency. Structurally, Swift’s piece moves from the inside out – from Strephon’s venture into private space to his eruption into public speech; Montagu’s turns from the outside in – from a critique of man’s public dissimulation to more intimate matters, his sexual ineptitude. As we shall see, Montagu burlesques Swift’s poetics carefully, indicating that she both perceived and attempted to raze his conflation of the material with the specular as gendered mechanisms of power. Surely, in Swift’s text, an explicitly masculinized, voyeuristic eye invades and constructs female space, linking man to the public realm of production (literary and architectural) and depicting woman as object of visual consumption. Montagu, deploying the female as spectator, deconstructs Swift’s verse by re-envisioning social and material spaces and troubling their relation to gender.

In their dressing room satires, Swift and Montagu interrogate the relationships between gender, space, and spectatorship that Laura Mulvey observes in narrative cinema. According to Mulvey, the genre stimulates a scopophiliac response in the male spectator, who pleasures himself by objectifying and desiring the woman he sees on the screen (“Visual” 587). He also identifies narcissistically with the lead male character, who eroticizes woman with his own controlling look and extends to the spectator a sense of dominance over her. However, woman’s presence constantly threatens to undermine man’s position of omnipotence, for she always threatens to evoke the anxiety of castration her sexual difference signifies (590-91). According to Mulvey (and Sigmund Freud), man then has two choices: He can control his fears and reassert his superiority by voyeuristically investigating and demystifying woman’s mystery (and subsequently
devaluing or punishing her); or, he can perceive woman as fetish, transforming that
which was dangerous into an image of aesthetic perfection. Mulvey’s theory proves a
particularly powerful optic for reading Strephon’s ocular adventure into “The Lady’s
Dressing Room,” for he anxiously vacillates between both scopophiliac responses.

As in narrative cinema, from the very beginning “The Lady’s Dressing Room” is
marked by masculine spectatorship, and woman’s role as fetish is made implicit:

Five Hours (and who can do it less in?)

By haughty Celia spent in Dressing;
The Goddess from her Chamber issues,
Array’d in Lace, Brocades, and Tissues (1-4)

Through Strephon’s eyes we catch a fleeting glimpse of Celia, who appears spectacularly
“Arrayed in lace, brocades, and tissues,” issuing from her chamber (3-4). Strephon
interprets Celia as the Petrarchan ideal, an unattainable, “haughty,” “goddess” (2-3), and
as the eighteenth century “Lady of Fashion,” whose social class is articulated by the
pricey items she flaunts in her willing self-display. As readers familiar with this
convention, we expect Strephon to celebrate Celia’s loveliness in a blazon, a discursive
peepshow featuring her many eroticized parts.

On the contrary, this brief sighting inspires Strephon not to fetishize Celia’s
aesthetic perfection but to investigate and demystify her private space. No sooner has
Celia emerged from her chamber when “Strephon, who found the Room was void, / And
Betty [her maid] otherwise employ’d; / Stole in, and took a strict Survey” (5-7).

Strephon’s crossing the threshold from waiting to dressing room titillates, for it promises
to reveal some private truth about Celia: It renders her private space sign and substitute for her private parts, while Strephon’s chance entry lends credibility to this eye-witness account. The swiftness of his movement masks the power of his gaze, for his point of view fills our spatial imagination as we visualize the narrative ourselves. Theories of scopophilia suggest that Strephon’s impulse to enter the chamber and to view the unknown is a defense mechanism designed to quell the anxiety Celia’s sexual difference provokes. Such a response often expresses “itself in the compulsive curiosity . . . the craving to penetrate the flimsy appearances to the essence beneath.”

Indeed, struck by Celia’s appearance, Strephon is driven to look beyond the flimsy garb of female artifice, “lace, brocades, and tissues,” and discover her essence.

Armed by the law of the father to police and investigate woman, Strephon will take “a strict Survey / Of all the Litter as it lay” and “make the Matter clear” (7-9). The pun on “Matter,” as that which “litters” the room and that which Strephon will enumerate and clarify, emphasizes his gendered difference of perception and the power of his disciplining gaze. As such, the array of objects he attempts to order serves as a metonym for the fetishized body parts the Petrarchan poet typically desires: instead of eyes, lips, or arms, we see “combs” and “brushes,” “Night-gloves” and “petticoats,” “stockings,” “tweezers,” and assorted tools, “paints,” and “slops” (20, 21, 24, 27, 29, 33, 35, 48, 49, 51). Through Strephon’s eyes, Celia appears less a woman than a sum of these symbolic objects that reify and embellish, yet ultimately render her body ersatz. But this visual rhetoric also suggests Celia’s desire to be desired and the self-fashioning agency she

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3 Samuel Weber as quoted in Doane, “Woman’s Film,” 73.
exerts. More critically, it also intimates her own self-objectification. When Strephon peers into her looking glass and imagines Celia appraising herself, he insists upon her complicity in the reduction of her self to body-object (58-68). This shaming gesture depicts Celia as fully vested in the subordination of her self to man; it also diverts attention away from Strephon, who is the very type of man that desires a woman because of the way she looks, because she sends signals that she may in fact agree with the heterosexual contract that requires her submission. To protect his own identity, then, it is imperative that he insist upon Celia’s complicity with, rather than the possibility that she may be co-opting, the tools of patriarchy. He must also obfuscate the roles of heterosexual desire and capitalism in the commodification of women’s bodies and in the production of commodities that express gender difference.

This scene insists that Celia’s mind is just as fragmented from her body as that body is fragmented: in Foucauldian terms, Celia’s efforts to evoke desire evince both “the power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting” (45). As she makes an erotic spectacle of herself, Celia renders herself vulnerable to the annihilating will of those who would dominate and invade her body, but she also appears to usurp the patriarchal right to control the circulation and exchange of women. As Frances Dolan argues in her discussion of early modern face-painting, “by provoking desire, women evade and undermine the male subject-spectators; by asserting themselves as creators and subjects, they disrupt the social and cosmic order as well as gender hierarchy” (225). It may not seem so materially. Rather, her self-fashioning might appear a pyrrhic victory,
but Strephon responds as if she *has* won. He is threatened by evidence of Celia’s sexual appetite, her morphological alterity, and perhaps the growing suspicion that she may not desire him at all (after all, Celia must be receiving somebody else while Strephon inspects her room). Fantastically jilted, he eroticizes not Celia’s sensual, aesthetic perfection but her degradation: all in the dressing room is defiled by “dirt,” “wax,” and “sweat,” “snuff and snot,” and foul “scrapings,” “nasty compound[s],” and unsavory smells (24, 40, 41, 42, 44, 46, 50). Strephon reveals that a woman’s desirability depends upon both being seen and how one is seen. Since she fails to produce the body-image, even in her absence, of ideal femininity, he defames and punishes Celia: he exposes her public persona as farce, as anything but “sweet and clean” (18), and turns her, through the powers of his “imagination” (121), into the abject.4

Strephon’s look disciplines more than Celia’s body; it also produces the epistemology of spatialities within the text. Significantly, the dramatic tension of the poem is dependent upon gender-differentiated areas: Strephon’s association with public life is emphasized by his characterization as a guest in Celia’s house and a stranger in her chamber; Celia’s association with the private sphere is underscored by our view of her in

4 See Wolf, who explains, in modern consumer culture the way to “instill social values . . . is to eroticize them. Images that turn women into objects or eroticize the degradation of women have arisen to counterbalance women’s recent self-assertion” (142). Although Wolf’s argument addresses the twentieth century, it seems particularly relevant for the burgeoning consumer culture of the eighteenth century and for Swift, who clearly attempts to temper the bind on social power his class position effects by relying upon his authority as a male figure to condemn a lady of quality on account of her consumerism. On abjection, see Kristeva and Butler. According to Kristeva, the abject is anything that “disturbs identity, system, order” (4). It is an ambiguous entity, both desirable and horrifying, against which the subject defines himself and strives constantly expel or reject. But the abject also constitutes the subject, and therefore threatens to dissolve the borders, both physical and psychic, necessary to identity formation. Since abjection finds expression in excrement, corporeal fluids, and filth, Kristeva associates it with the leaky female body. Butler, in ways helpful to my argument, expresses the abject in spatial terms, proposing that it also constitutes “zones of uninhabitability which a subject fantasizes as threatening its own integrity with the prospect of a psychotic dissolution (‘I would rather die than do or be that!’)” (*Bodies* 243n).
the hall and her connectedness with the items and enclosed spaces within the home. These symbolic configurations naturalize relationships between genders and spaces but also actively construct and regulate gender roles. Although we are told that “no object Strephon’s eye escapes” (47), he eyes selective objects to identify and link to Celia, which produces a cohesive illusion of space. This angle of vision frames the dressing room, much like the poet’s linear narrative, which is fully contained and determined by a distinct beginning and end, and reinforces the signification of bodies and spaces Strephon imagines. Helen Hills argues that one way to radically re-think static, gendered dichotomies of the public and private is to “think of architecture as a metaphor for the bodies it houses” (73). If so, Strephon’s physical, ocular, and linguistic colonization of Celia’s space reads as an attempt to master Celia by mastering the psychosexual anxiety the chamber evokes. Such a violent feat “presumes, establishes and maintains an arrogant will to power” (Pile 163). Spatial appropriation enacts a politics of domination and erects a phallic area in its place – one “which acts to reproduce the value systems of the powerful” (163).

5 See Massey, who asserts that “the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity . . . Spatial control, whether enforced through the power of convention or symbolism, or through the straightforward threat of violence, can be a fundamental element in the constitution of gender in its (highly varied) forms” (179-80). See also Hills, who argues, “Space does not merely provide the locus for social relations; it is primary to the construction of gendered social identity” (73), and Moore, who similarly argues, “spatial representations help to produce and reproduce the distinctions on which the cultural constructions of gender are based. In other words, spatial representations help to support gender ideologies” (188).

6 My reading is indebted to Doane, who argues that the house can “become the analogue of the human body, its parts fetishized by textual operations, its erogenous zones metamorphosed by a morbid anxiety attached to sexuality. It is the male character who fetishizes the house as a whole, attempting to unify and homogenize it through an insistent process of naming” (“Woman’s Film” 72-3).
Celia’s private property marked by an aggressive male dominance and a forced female passivity, is founded upon an ideology of assault. The Goddess “Vengeance,” who punishes Strephon “for his peeping” (Swift 120), and the narrator, who wishes “Strephon blind” for transgressing spatial boundaries and looking too closely “behind the scene” (129, 133), point to the role of visuality in constructing such a space: the chaotic otherness of the chamber, which harbors the unknowable and unseeable beyond its borders, recalls Celia’s figure cloaked in social dress, and Strephon’s trespass emphasizes the feminine fragility of the boundaries demarcating her space. The metonymic relationship between bodies and architecture reminds us that a “passage [that] occurs from outside to inside [an architectural structure] is both a material transition from exterior to interior, from known public territory to unknown private territory, but also a metaphor of sexual penetration” (Rendell 144). But Strephon does more than simply pass from exterior to interior. He moves from the waiting room to the dressing room to the chamber pot within it, penetrating increasingly intimate female space and fetishizing each new discovery by imbuing it with a greater sense of erotic mystery than the last. As Nancy Vickers explains, this type of description and display can be read as symbolic assault as well (“Blazon”). If so, this means that we witness the violence of Strephon’s gaze and physical intrusion play out again and again with each new revelation.

The allusion to assault and its relation to ocularity becomes increasingly literal and less metaphorical once Strephon spies the chamber pot. Left “standing full in Sight,” Strephon ventures “to look in” and “resolv[es]” physically to go in deeper still, “thro’ thick and thin” (73, 79-80 emphasis added):
He lifts the Lid, there needs no more,

He smelt it all the Time before.

As from within Pandora’s Box,

When Epimetheus op’d the Locks,

A sudden universal Crew

Of humane Evils upwards flew;

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But Strephon cautious never meant

The Bottom of the Pan to grope,

And foul his Hands in Search of Hope.

O never may such vile Machine

Be once in Celia’s Chamber seen!

O may she better learn to keep

Those “Secrets of the hoary Deep!” (81-86, 92-98)

In this exploration of “secret,” female space, the vulvic opening of the chamber pot evokes the female genitals – a dark, hellish site of chaos and horror. Swift prompts this association through his auditory pun on “hoary” and “whorey” and allusion to Paradise Lost. The moment in John Milton’s text to which he refers depicts Sin (a victim of incestuous rape, who is damned to reproduce the monstrous eternally) along with her father, Satan, gaping out the mouth of hell:

The Gates wide op’n stood,

That with extended wings a Banner’d Host
Under spread Ensigns marching might pass through

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Before their eyes in sudden view appear
The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark
Illimitable ocean without bound
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height,
And time and place are lost. (2.884-86, 890-94)

In this scene, the labic gates of hell protect a type of a birth canal that will expel Satan and his army from hell into chaos – a space that intimates the liquidity of the womb and the fluid shapelessness of the abject. The multiple allusions to the female body, corrupt reproduction, and sexual assault suggest that Strephon’s groping the pot, penetrating Celia’s most private space without consent may be rape too; in fact, it may perform a reproductive function and result in Hope. The Narrator agrees: he twice describes Strephon as a robber or thief – the operating definition of a rapist in early modern discourse: Strephon “stole in” and “stole away” (7, 116).7

Strephon’s sortie on Celia’s inner space scripts sexual difference in ways similar to rape.8 He expresses that difference both emotionally and physically, through his disgust and immediate desire to flee. His response is an attempt to effect boundaries and temper the contaminating qualities of Celia’s foul objects and excrement, for these retain

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7 “The act of taking anything by force; violent seizure (of goods), robbery; The act of carrying away a person, . . . by force;” and “Violation or ravishing of a woman. Also, . . . sexual assault upon a man” (OED). See also the Latin (rapere) and Greek (αρπάγη) etymologies of rape which mean “to seize” (Hoad 388, Lewis and Short 1532).

8 On rape as script and an act that scripts sexual difference, see Sharon Marcus.
materially something of her body. As a result, we can read geographic space as a matrix for the cultural discourses that produce gender difference and inequity: Strephon’s identification with the larger world depends upon Celia’s domestication; his hegemony needs her otherness, for “cultural categories of high and low, social and aesthetic, like . . . the physical body and geographical space, are never entirely separable” but essential to the “ordering and sense-making of society” (Stallybrass and White 2-3). Strephon’s presence in the chamber also reminds us that identity is not just a matter of establishing difference but a matter of seeing – seeing the other and “keeping the low-Others at a distance” (Pile 176 emphasis added). As Laura Mulvey suggests and other film theorists also argue, space is crucial to the production of desire, “the distance between observer and observed . . . [is] essential to the ‘pleasure’ of the voyeur” (Williams 86), who “needs the gap which represents for him the very distance between desire and its object” (Doane “Masquerade” 180-181, emphasis in text). But Strephon’s investigation, his movement from room to room, proximity to specific objects, and actual contact with the chamber pot dissolves the space required to constitute both identity and desire. The lack and difference associated traditionally with woman breached, the borderline between abject and subject dissolved, provokes a psychotic crisis of identity for Strephon, and it extinguishes his desire. Strephon realizes that the feminine mystique he so urgently

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9 See Grosz who argues, “Detachable, separable parts of the body – urine, faeces, saliva, sperm, blood, vomit, hair, nails, skin – retain something of the cathexis and value of a body part even when they are separated from the body. There is still something of the subject bound up with them – which is why they are objects of disgust, loathing, and repulsion as well as envy and desire” (81 Volatile). See also Kristeva who reads bodily fluid and excrement as the body itself (3).
sought to discover is merely a construct. Rather than finding difference, he finds similarity: like man, “Celia, Celia, Celia shits” too (118).  

For the reader, the representation of woman as signifier of difference collapses completely once one realizes that there is no female subject in the poem. Although the space of the poem holds together the fragmented, metaphorical body Strephon imagines, Celia is erected merely from a discourse about her. Like the imagined stench of her toes, she is an ephemeral presence we can almost sense, almost smell, but cannot perceive as a human body that matters. Celia’s absence reminds us that her chamber comprises both Strephon’s imaginary representation of woman as well as the very real fear he harbors of woman. If, however, Strephon discovers that woman is more like man than different, then perhaps he does not fear, as Ellen Pollak suggests, “the idea of be(com)ing like a woman” (165 emphasis in text), but that woman is not castrated and can do him harm. As Linda Williams explains, “the notion of the woman as a castrated version of a man is . . . a comforting wishful fantasy intended to combat the child’s imagined dread of what his mother’s very real power could do to him” (89). The real fear is not that she is castrated, but that she is not and therefore maintains “the power to mutilate and transform the vulnerable male” (89-90). This

10 The Narrator also asserts that Strephon’s mistake was to violate space, to look too closely “behind the scene” (133). As a result, he wishes “Strephon blind” (129).

11 This is a significant point that to my knowledge has not been addressed in feminist accounts of “The Lady’s Dressing Room.” See, for example, Pollak, who argues that Swift unmasks, undresses, and compulsively fixates on Celia’s body (Poetics 165), and Landry, who explains Strephon’s description “comes to seem grotesque because of the gap between the body’s corporeality and the conventions by which the body has been traditionally represented” (136). See also Grundy, who argues “Swift’s Celia is . . . wholly and disgustingly physical” (343) and Campbell, who claims that Swift locates “the unseemly realities” of “commercial exchange” on “the body of a woman” (69). Or Bean, who has it both ways: “Swift juxtaposes the morality of women and the consequences of time upon physical bodies” (9), although Celia’s room is empty of her presence and reflects the spectator’s interpretation (13).
hypothesis may explain Strephon’s drive to enumerate the objects in Celia’s chamber that represent erotic power and conjure body parts he never sees: “A dirty smock appeared, / Beneath the arm-pits well besmeared,” “Hard by a filthy basin stands, / Fouled with the scouring of her hands,” “A pair of tweezers next he found / To pluck [the hairs that] on her chin like bristles grow” (11-12, 37-38, 55-58).\textsuperscript{12} As Strephon scours the matter in Celia’s room, anatomizing her body from “arm pits” to “forehead” to “hands,” “teeth and gums,” “toes” “chin” and “nose,” he slashes or mutilates that body, enacting fantastically Celia’s castration. That Strephon cannot perform this ritual on a body that does not exist, suggests, as Williams would likely explain, that Strephon fears Celia because she “has none of his own vulnerability” (97); it also reminds us that annihilating Celia would result in a masochistic obliteration of self: Strephon needs the abject to survive. In the end, perhaps Strephon’s fear of woman is warranted, for we learn in the final stanza that the Goddess “Vengeance” punishes Strephon “for his peeping”; now “his foul imagination” and “vicious fancy” compulsively link “each dame he sees” with Celia (120-3). Strephon, like the fetishized, voiceless, disembodied woman he depicts, is ultimately castrated himself and stripped of all desire.

Despite the vengeance waged upon Strephon, the Narrator recuperates Strephon’s phallogocentric vision. He wants to love, enjoys loving, but discloses that for him love is not idealistic, not romantic, not mutually advantageous but fully human and buried within the mechanisms of subjectivity. Knowingly, the Narrator understands that he cannot

\textsuperscript{12} See also lines 23-26, 39-42, 51-52, and 63-68.
completely annihilate the abject object of his affection, as Strephon would do. Rather, his
desire feeds on violence. Subjugation and degradation arouse delight and pleasure:

Should I the Queen of Love refuse,

Because she Rose from stinking Ooze?

To him that looks behind the Scene,

Statira’s but some pocky Quean.

When Celia in her Glory shows,

If Strephon would but stop his Nose;

Who now so impiously blasphemes

Her Ointments, Daubs, and Paints and Creams

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He soon would learn to think like me,

And bless his ravisht Sight to see

Such Order from Confusion sprung,

Such gaudy Tulips rais’d from Dung. (131- 38, 141-45)

Unlike Strephon’s response to Celia, rising from the oozing “Ointments, Daubs, and
Paints and Creams” on her dressing table (138), the Narrator would not “refuse” Venus
“because she rose from stinking ooze” (131-2). Rather, despite woman’s disfigured,
excremental constitution, the Narrator would have each and every one. Relegating
woman to her naturalized position as the monstrous, low-other, the Narrator locates the
space to stimulate his desire and formulate his subjectivity (hence the repeated first-
person pronouns in the final stanza). His secured omnipotence and her subjugation
neutralize any threat Strephon perceived in her uncastratable body. Not surprisingly, the Narrator attributes this restoration of power to his vision. He “bless[es] his ravish’t sight to see / Such order from confusion sprung” (142-43). Woman remains a site of confusion that only the Narrator’s gaze can read meaningfully – a passive object he can control and classify definitively. When woman signifies difference and lack, the Narrator can pleasure himself. He can continue to delight in the violent gender relations upon which heterosexual desire may depend.  

Because it is satire, one could argue that “The Lady’s Dressing Room” merely mocks the violence it yields and in which it seems to delight; however, whether the poem attacks the vanity of men or women or both is unclear, particularly since the poem relies upon the denigrated, mutilated female body for expression. Either way, the language Swift employs reinscribes the oppressive structures (both linguistic and architectural) that compel woman’s subordination. The poem about an architectural space functions like the woman’s house: designed to close woman off from the world, it reiterates Mulvey’s theory of spectatorship, which presupposes woman’s ocular, corporeal, and linguistic passivity. Ironically, Montagu (re)conceptualizes Swift’s narrative by actively looking at the body figured within it and destabilizing its relation to social space. She does so by out-Swifting Swift. Mimicking his meter and rhyme, images and tropes, she mocks and redeployes his discourse to her own ends. In the process, she demonstrates an awareness of

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13 For an alternate interpretation, see Freedman, who argues that the Narrator’s reference to Statira is not about woman, but satire; however, Freedman’s explanation is still marked by the misogyny I point out: “to those, like the author himself, who look behind the mask or surface of the work, satire is indeed a pocky Queen, a royally diseased whore beset with the mire that attaches itself to satirist and satire from the incised and outside alike” (484 emphasis added). On the violence of heterosexuality, see, for example, Rich and MacKinnon.
the social constraints of gender and her refusal to internalize cultural ideologies that insist
upon her own objectification and subordination. As Luce Irigaray explains,

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of
her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself simply to be
reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself . . . to ‘ideas,’ in particular to
ideas about herself, that are elaborated in / by masculine logic, but so as to
make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to
remain invisible: the cover-up the possible operation of the feminine in
language. It also means to ‘unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good
mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed into this function.
(76)

Repeating and playfully exploiting representations of gender from Swift’s text, Montagu
exposes gender itself as artificial and pliable. Her argument correlates to Mary Ann
Doane’s theory of masquerade: “Flaunting femininity” and recognizing that
“womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed” creates a space between
woman-as-image and female reader that enables a female spectatorship (185).
Traditionally, “the female spectator is given two options: the masochism of
overidentification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire, in
assuming the image in the most radical way,” but masquerade “manufacture[s] a distance
from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable,
producible, and readable by the woman” (Doane “Masquerade” 191). Crafting characters
who don playfully and then refuse the mask of femininity conceived by Swift, Montagu implicitly theorizes an active female gaze.¹⁴

Like “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Montagu’s “The Reasons” opens with a male figure pursuing the female object of his desire, a prostitute named Betty; however, Montagu challenges the staticity of a masculinized gaze and woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” by representing woman as bearer of the look and, initially, her masculine counterpart as its object. The Narrator underscores this juxtaposition by identifying with and endorsing the point of view of the poem’s community of female characters and occupying a traditionally masculine authorial and ocular role. When we first see the Doctor, through the Narrator’s eyes, he appears more object than subject:

The Doctor in a clean starch’d band
His Golden Snuff box in his hand,
With care his Di’mond Ring displays
And Artfull shews its various Rays (1-4)

No less spectacular than Celia, the Doctor recalls the female, Petrarchan beloved, radiating sparkle, brightness, and whiteness: “A clean starch’d band,” “Golden Snuff box,” and a glittering “Di’mond Ring.”¹⁵ And like the eighteenth century Lady of Fashion, he “artfully” displays the objects he wears to suggest his social status. Though, we are told, he “jok’d, punn’d, and swore and writ” and “oft” “told” Betty stories of “days of yore” (9, 11, 12), as with most objectified figures, we never hear what he is

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¹⁴ Whether female spectatorship can be theorized remains controversial: See for example, Mulvey’s “Afterthoughts,” as well as Doane, Williams, and de Lauretis Alice and Technologies.

¹⁵ See Vickers, who observes that the Petrarchan beloved is typically described in terms of “blondness, whiteness, sparkle” (“Diana” 96).
saying (Vickers “Diana” 107). But, Montagu does more than simplistically reverse
gender roles here. The Doctor appears dressed for love and conspicuously arrayed in
items that might tempt a prostitute’s eye; however, unlike the Petrarchan poet (or even
Strephon in his first desiring glimpse of Celia), what Betty sees does not appeal to her,
nor does “this dull hard hearted Creature” have a “taste” for the Doctor’s “Wit” (10, 14,
15). In this scene, Betty plays three roles at once: the traditionally masculine desiring
agent, the Petrarchan goddess (for she harms her admirer by denying his advances), and
the repressed subject, who constitutes identity in opposition to an other. Montagu affords
Betty this powerful and complex subjectivity by denying the central male figure the
privileged role of visual interpreter.

This opening scene also intimates Montagu’s own spectatorial flexibility.
Montagu disrupts Swift’s master narrative by recognizing and undermining traditional
male and female roles. As Teresa de Lauretis suggests, as spectators women may
experience a “double identification with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical
subject [man], and with the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image [woman]”
(Alice 144). Indeed, Montagu perceives Swift’s poem as a gendered attack but rewrites
that script by problematizing gendered behavior – casting Betty in Strephon’s role and
making a spectacle of the Doctor – a status typically reserved for women. In the process,
she creates a heroine, who then as de Lauretis might propose, “functions not as a mirror,
a flat specular surface, but rather as a prism diffracting the image into the double
positionality of female Oedipal desire and sustaining the oscillation between ‘femininity’
and ‘masculinity’” (152). Accordingly, Betty (as well as her maid Jenny and the Narrator
as “The Reasons” develops) offers compound possibilities for narrative identification to Montagu’s readers. Such a figure is at once both “the object of the male’s desire, but also and more importantly, the place and object of female active desire” (152). Likewise, as Montagu mimics Swift’s text, she diffracts its misogyny and multiples its narrative possibilities, evoking the multiplicity and plurality of Irigaray’s “sex which is not one” in contrast to masculine singular “specula(riza)tion.” This emphasis on seeing and moving, on occupying both the binary terms of gender and exceeding them disturbs the binary logic of gender.

Reifying Swift’s narrative and its singular ocular perspective, the Narrator shifts our point of view from the domestic to the street. Once Betty receives the Doctor’s “Offering,” “return[s]” to play the “Blushing” lover (21, 29), and we, like she, “[expect] the Doctor’s warm embrace” (30), the Narrator chooses not to eroticize the Doctor’s and Betty’s love-making; rather, she demystifies man and his public space. What we find there is a group of fops – “their talents still mistaking” (39) – much like the Doctor in all his ornateness waiting outside Betty’s home: “The Beau,” donning his “Toupée,” attempts to pass for the “Politician” (37-8); the common “citizen” desires to be a “Wit” (39); and “Poor Pope,” whose work is but artifice itself, too “much Rhime and little reason,” strives to play the philosopher (45-6). Accentuating the constructed and performative nature of masculinity, Montagu asserts, the faces men wear in public are just as false and motivated by ambition as those of women who paint. Moreover, like Aphra Behn’s Narrator in “The Disappointment,” who laments male poets’ and lovers’ false claims to virility, Montagu’s Narrator regrets to find no other men in this locale than
those, who “strain for Wisdom, Beauty, Spirit” (50) – abstract aesthetic ideals as opposed to practical knowledge – and who consequently remain blinded by “th’impossible” (52).

Unlike a woman who removes her makeup each night and knows the limitations of her beauty, men, the Narrator implies, cannot separate the roles they play from their identities.¹⁶

Like Swift, Montagu arms those who possess visual prowess with the analogous power of language; whereas Strephon exercised that authority to degrade and silence Celia, Montagu’s community of women derides the Doctor’s discourse. Although the Doctor “jok’d and punn’d, and swore and writ / Try’d all his Gallantry and Wit” in an effort to charm Betty (9-11), his speech, anticipating his later impotence, falls flat. Her maid Jenny, who “could taste a Rhyme / And greiv’d to see him lose his Time” (15-16), also witnesses the Doctor’s shortcomings. The pun on “time” implies that Jenny may enjoy the Doctor’s poetry and regrets to see him wait but also suggests that the Doctor writes bad poetry and cannot keep his meter up. Moreover, the Doctor’s discursive deficiencies contrast sharply against Jenny’s demands for money and prescriptions of his (sexual) behavior: She “kindly whisper’d in his Ear / without that summ / It is in vain you write or come” (17-20). And Betty, securing the final word in the poem, vows to stifle his future utterances by sullying his verse: “I’m glad you’l write / You’l furnish paper when I shite” (88-9). Wielding the tools of abjection herself, Betty transforms the Doctor’s discourse, the manifestation of his phallic power, into excrement; now associated with the waste that passes through the areas of Betty’s body, the Doctor’s writing mirrors Swift’s

¹⁶ Behn’s Narrator complains, as she observes Cloris reaching for Lysander, “Her timorous hand she gently laid . . . Upon that fabulous Priapas [sic], / That potent god, as poets feign” (102, 4-5).
poem which traverses private space it perceives as feminine and excremental.\footnote{Note also that the Narrator, critiquing the speech of all men, alludes to Swift: “Nature” is a better teacher of “Instinct” (55) and indicator of “the path to shine or thrive” than “Man, Vain Man, who [foolishly] grasps the whole” or “preach[es]” (56). The Narrator, thus, asserts a linguistic power and knowledge that surpasses the understanding of men. The source of these four lines (initially inserted following line 54 in the standard version of Montagu’s poem) can be found in what Halsbund and Grundy describe as the “HMS. draft and printed text” (273):}

Breaking suit with Swift, Montagu both provides the Doctor with dialogue and undermines the phallogocentrism of his text that makes speaking subjects of men and silent objects of women. Nonetheless, if, as Jacques Derrida argues, “to name, to give names” reveals “the originary violence of language” (112), then “The Reasons” also emphasizes the gendered attack Swift deploys by manipulating the inevitable violence of language to empower one gender at the expense of the other: The Narrator, securing the position of maker of meaning, names and renames the “Doctor.” He is also the “Reverend Lover,” the “Priest,” the “Fumbler,” and the “Dean” (63, 68, 77, 85). This litany of titles obscure and wrest away his identity. In her eyes, he could be any Jon[athon].

Unlike Swift’s text which clearly confines woman to her socially designated place inside the home, Montagu’s expands the perceptual field and disrupts repeatedly the dichotomy of the gendered spheres. From the very beginning, we linger in the public road watching “The Doctor” “stalk[ing] down – – Street ” and envision him at the threshold of Betty’s house, punning and joking, swearing and writing, as he waits for “Admittance to the Bower” (1, 5, 8, 9). And we see Jenny, not an object in the house but an active subject and sexual agent, occupying the threshold, that architectural space of mobility and “place where the boundary [between public and private] is pierced” (Rendell 144); functioning...
as a powerful barrier between outside and inside, she controls the representation of space by limiting what we and the Doctor see and dictating what the Doctor must do to “enter here” (18 emphasis added). Just as he gains entry, the Narrator’s gaze shifts from the action inside the house to that outside where we encounter our foppish crew, the “Beau,” the “Politician,” the “citizen,” and the philosopher (43-5). In just as swift a fashion, the Narrator shifts our gaze from the public streets to Betty’s room where we witness the Doctor’s “disappointed” meeting with her (85). Although the Narrator’s look comes to rest in Betty’s chamber, the visual pattern of the narrative suggests that the eye of the text would swing back outside if the poem continued, allowing us to witness the Doctor exit from private to public, watch Jenny greet the next client, or envisage the Narrator’s next philosophical “digression” on city life (34). Montagu depicts a feminine area that oscillates between both public and private areas and questions implicitly the capacity of the gendered spheres to express gender or gendered space.

Because the spectators in the text are female, Betty’s private quarters and body also resist traditional interpretation. Refusing to represent either as titillating, Montagu instead de-eroticizes and renders them unimportant to the text – an effect, Mary Anne Doane explains, of the female gaze:

The textual assumption of a specifically female spectator also entails the assumption that she does not adopt a masculine position with respect to the . . . image of the female body. In other words, because the female gaze is not associated with the psychical mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism, it is no longer necessary to invest the look with desire in quite
the same way. A certain de-specularization takes place . . . a deflection of scopophilic energy in other directions, away from the female body.

(“Woman’s Film” 70)

Indeed, in the most explicitly sexual passage in the poem, the Narrator focuses not on the female but the male body. This easy juxtaposition reveals that the operating mechanism of violence is generic or structural rather than gendered, even if it is articulated in gendered terms:

The Reverend Lover with surprize
Peeps in her Bubbys, and her Eyes,
And kisses both, and trys—and trys.
The Evening in this Hellish Play,
Beside his Guineas thrown away,
Provok’d the Priest to that degree
He swore, the Fault is not [in] me. (63-69)

Although we are permitted, along with the Reverend, to peep at Betty’s “Bubbys” and “eyes,” we glimpse both body parts in one line, see the Reverend kiss them in the next, but sensual detail is withheld. Moreover, the Narrator immediately transfers our gaze to the Reverend’s body and his frustrated labor. We watch as he “trys—and trys” (65). These attempts, separated by a long caesura, a dash as opposed to a comma, forces our double-take so that we fixate on the Reverend. In this state, he recalls Behn’s Lysander in “The Disappointment,” who, shocked by Cloris’s eager response to his advances and refusal to play an appropriate feminine role, finds himself unmanned by an unresponsive
As with most spectacles, while we gawk, the narrative freezes, and in “The Reasons,” once we learn in the next line that “the Evening [was spent] in this Hellish Play” (66), our access to the sexual encounter ends. By literally changing the subject and visual perspective, Montagu highlights tensions between gender, authority, and literary production and challenges the phallocentric right to language by linking it to her male character’s sexual dysfunction. It is worth noting, however, that shielding the female body and female space from view also recuperates ideologies of femininity (i.e., physical erasure and modesty) that enable masculine domination, encourage feminine self-discipline, and produce docile female bodies. The space constructed, then, rather than expressing monolithically repressive gender roles, functions as a contested site for the competing social and political forces that generate genders, bodies, and identities.

Montagu, who clearly sympathizes with the prostitute, might also be charged with colluding with the social practices that eroticize women’s objectification and degradation; I would argue, however, that through the prostitute Montagu renders visible particular apparati of femininity and gender that phallocentrism typically strives to suppress. One of these mechanisms is the division of women from men as if a subordinate class. The prostitute, who mediated between social stratums, foregrounds class and class as a

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18 See Behn lines 89-90. I am not suggesting that Behn is unique merely because she writes of male sexual dysfunction; as Quaintance has documented, the impotence or “Imperfect Enjoyment” poem was a seventeenth century genre practiced in both England and France, dating back to Ovid. What is radical in Behn’s poem is her treatment of sexuality and gender roles. She refuses to eroticize woman as victim, a conventional pastoral trope, but makes of man a spectacle devoid of sensuality. See also Todd, who observes, “the poems by Ovid and Rochester [among others] . . . are told rather more from the male point of view than Behn’s and are more comforting to the underperforming man” (378).

19 See Mulvey, who explains, the “visual presence [of the spectacle] . . . tends to work against the development of the storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (“Visual” 589).
gendered issue. In the eighteenth century, “Prostitution was closely linked with poverty, and . . . advocated by much of the upper orders as essential for protecting good women from the promiscuous male” (Bullough 67). Recasting Swift’s Celia as a prostitute, Montagu distances herself and other ladies of quality from Swift’s complaint about “a lady” and from the smarmy men he depicts. In so doing, she criticizes Swift’s lamentable social class: unlike Strephon, he would not be visiting “a lady” but a woman of the lowest social order and even with this sure bet, he’d fail miserably, sexually and linguistically.\(^2^0\)

Unlike the real women (Montagu and friends) Betty protects, she is an icon neither of aristocratic femininity nor of bourgeois, passive womanhood but a self-sufficient subject.\(^2^1\) In the period, “prostitution was one of the few ways a woman could make it on her own, and if she had intelligence, sophistication, talent, and the right contacts, she could go far” (Bullough 72). Betty reflects these qualities in droves. She is victim neither of her economic situation nor profession. Certainly, she spends an evening engaged in hellish play with the Doctor, but her alienated labor attests to her disavowal of the romance the heterosexual contract promises. Further, she determines her price and her customers: when the Doctor blames her for his sexual dysfunction, she points out that “The blame lyes in” your age, “Sixty odd,” and demands that he leave the premises.

\(^{20}\) This is not to imply that all prostitutes in the eighteenth century were of the lowest social classes but to point out the hierarchical, cultural space between the positions of Lady and prostitute. See Bullough, who explains, because prostitution was perceived as “a class problem,” arguments for or against the profession often “ignored the women who served the middle and upper classes” (71).

\(^{21}\) See Pollack Poetics, especially 2-4, for more on “the myth of passive womanhood,” which she describes as a “dominant cultural code” that infiltrated both the upper and middle classes because of class mobility but was primarily “a middle class phenomenon.” See also Bullough, who asserts, in the eighteenth century “women were inevitably divided into the good and virtuous – those whom one married – and the rest. Prostitutes, the bulk of the ‘rest,’ were ubiquitous, since no standards of virtue were imposed upon the male” (62).
A testimony to her talent and intellect, we know the Doctor has “Long . . . waited for . . . Admittance to the Bower” in the past (8-9), and we watch as Betty protects the capital that funds her independence: she smartly locks away the Doctor’s “Offering” “in her trunk” (21, 27) – suspicious of he who would pick “her pocket” or “palm” “a cheat on” her (28, 81).

Hearing the story from Betty’s point of view is funny and functional. It produces an area in the text much like a “space-off” in film: “the space not visible in the [film] frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible” (de Lauretis Technologies 26). Exposing the larger framework of “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Montagu expands its boundaries. Swift would not have had access to a lady’s dressing room, she implies, and therefore could not have described one accurately. Further, the motivation for his writing was not a woman or her private quarters but his own self-hatred. He was humiliated sexually and socially for failing to keep up his end of the bargain: Once Betty refuses to refund her fee, the Doctor declares, “I’ll be reveng’d, you saucy Quean / . . . I’ll so describe your dressing room / The very Irish shall not come” (84, 86-87). Montagu pokes fun at Swift’s race and sexual inadequacy, for surely in this account this Irish “man” did not come. The bawdy humor and reinterpretation of events redirects some of the misogyny of Swift’s text. Further, by depicting the Doctor fully enraged and sexually frustrated, Montagu problematizes Swift’s autonomous male subject. He, by virtue of his omnipotent all-pervading eye, makes claims to know – all from a safe and unconflicted space that denies his own specificity and materiality. No wonder Betty impresses upon
Swift, go ahead, try all your gallantry and wit (10), in the end, “You'll furnish paper when I shite” (89), emphasizing his own physicality.

Ultimately, Montagu’s text provides what Felicity Nussbaum calls a “corrective function,” for it aims to “reform” the poet’s “victim.” In her analysis of men’s satire against women, Nussbaum claims that in order for a poem to initiate reform, “the [male] satirist must indicate that women’s vices do not arise so much from nature as from social and cultural pressures” (6). Montagu modifies this theory from a thoroughly gendered perspective: she draws attention to the constructed nature of men’s vices and their pervasive effect on cultural perceptions of women in an effort to amend those stereotypes. In a passage that borrows several images from “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Montagu’s Doctor swears at Betty, accusing her for their imperfect romp:

... the Fault is not [in] me.
Your damn’d Close stool so near my Nose,
Your Dirty Smock, and Stinking Toes
Would make a Hercules as tame
As any Beau that you can name. (69-73)

The Doctor, “fumbling” for excuses (77), criticizes Betty for not reflecting back to him that Herculean image of self he so desires and which the performance of ideal femininity bolsters. Unlike the ephemeral Celia, whose self-policing (along with Strephon’s disciplining eye) intimates her material and intellectual deficiency, Betty refuses to turn

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22 This claim could also be read against my argument on Swift. See for example, Solomon, Bean, and Pollak Poetics, especially 168, who contend that Swift is not so much misogynistic, as he is attempting to reveal femininity as a construct in order to correct or reform women.
the gaze of the other upon herself and accept that she is in anyway lacking. Accordingly, when Montagu transcribes the filth of an aristocratic woman’s chamber to a prostitute’s, she suggests a commonality in the status of all women and makes clear the powerful relationship between phallic subjectivity and architectural spaces that efface female subjectivity and materiality. She also links women’s (hetero)sexual labor to their apparent romance with fashion: Even if Betty’s smock is dirty and her toes stink, her grime and stench are the scatological residue of heterosexual service. In the *Nonsense of Common-Sense*, Montague again laments “that it is men who encourage women to devote themselves to the frivolities of fashion” (Campbell 69). She, thus, equates, as Mary Wollstonecraft would soon decry, woman’s obsession with beauty, fashion, and body as a type of willing slavery and subjection to men. She also confirms seventeenth century proto-feminist Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz’s (not to mention Simone de Beauvoir’s) complaint that men fashion women into either angels or whores, expect women to enact these roles through costume and behavior but withdraw their interest once women comply with their sexual demands. In this context, the simple shift from angelic Celia, whose name means heavenly, to prostitute bespeaks a cultural ideology of femininity within the heterosexual contract that reduces all women to whores.\(^\text{23}\)

Importantly, the prostitute, who masquerades as everyman’s object of desire, renders a theory of femininity dependent upon artifice void of meaning: emphasizing “the looked-at nature of the surface” (Rendell 150), rather than a specific woman’s identity, the prostitute reveals the space between performance and gender and exploits

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\(^{23}\) See de Beauvoir, esp. 157-223, and de la Cruz 157-59.
conventions of femininity as a means to her own end. Through Betty, Montagu can argue that while Swift may perceive all ladies as subject to the paraphernalia of femininity, perhaps many women merely manipulate the gender roles imposed upon them and thus mimic passive femininity rather than imbricate a masochistic ideology in their identities. In the material world, the subtle distinction between mimicry and identity is difficult to discern since the effects appear the same; however, Montagu's text itself serves as a specific example of just such an intervention. What's more, by dialogically engaging with a range of feminist thinkers, Montagu advances a tradition of writers who resist phallocentric subordination while redeploying that very rhetoric to rewrite gender relations. This effort finds literal articulation in the show of female solidarity expressed through her characters – the Narrator, Jenny, and Betty – who band together and repudiate the Doctor's efforts to assert his superiority on the basis of gender alone.

Montagu traverses and reconfigures the boundaries erected in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” critiquing the architectural and social structures that traditionally absorb woman or the feminine into male subjectivity. She disturbs the hegemonic elements of that universe, reduces their power and redirects that power elsewhere by reconstituting it in an other form. As a result, she exposes the violence of collapsing gender into materiality and transforms the way space is used and the bodies within it construed as gendered and sexual beings. Two hundred years ahead of her time, Montagu anticipates twentieth century architectural theorist Elizabeth Grosz’s call for a feminist re-vision of space:

24I have in mind here Butler’s argument that sex, as well as gender, is performative and that mimicry, or “drag,” as she terms it, disrupts the “regulatory fiction” of heterosexuality (Gender 175).
The project ahead is to return women to those places from which they have been dis- or re-placed or expelled, to occupy those positions – particularly those which are not acknowledged as positions – partly in order to show man’s invasion and occupancy of the whole of space as their own and thus the constriction of spaces available to women, and partly in order to be able to experiment with and produce the possibility of occupying, dwelling or living in new spaces, which in their turn help generate new perspectives, new bodies, new ways of inhabiting.

(*Space* 124)

Likewise, Montagu’s “The Reasons” teaches us how to see with a difference and imagines women occupying *a space of their own*. It is a space that refuses male violence and the feminizing mechanisms and social control on identity of the sort that Strephon wants to enforce. It does so by crafting an expanse that exceeds the stultifying private and engrosses both public and private places. Although rather utopic, perhaps this is the point: to clear cut a space away from those evoking masculine imperatives that obliterate, contain, and reduce woman to nothing more than representation itself. Montagu, in thinking such an area into becoming, does so from the outside, for only one alien to the masculinist ordering of language, architecture, and law can see in and (through its fissures) beyond it. So she produces a new space – a space conceived from the outside in.\(^{25}\)

\(^{25}\) Montagu might be described as an outsider due to her status as a woman writing in a largely male authorial domain but also as an aristocrat and woman. See Lowenthal, who observes, Montagu’s “letters
reveal that, in a world where all women were beginning to be told that it was improper for them to engage in public participation, an aristocratic woman had to confront the fact that her very aristocracy was in great measure dependent upon public view” (9).
SAME SEX DESIRE: A REFUGE FROM THE VIOLENT?

We now move from architectural space and early eighteenth century critiques of heterosexual desire to the pastoral world with which we began, but we shift our focus from the literary production of heterosexual romance to love expressed between women. The poems included here all identify threat as inherent to heterosexual desire and make specific claims to transcend that threat. This is an important observation because it reveals that those writing on love and desire in early modern England recognized the eroticization of violence as a generic characteristic. Accordingly, we watch as these authors grapple with how to address the conjunction of romantic love and aggression as they strive to imagine a desire free of violence. One of the ways they do so is by invoking a specific vision of the pastoral world: this is not one that grants all agency and desire to men – the all-empowered shepherd of chapter one pursuing the defenseless maid; rather, this pastoral evokes the Golden Age where lovers freely love, far-removed from real world practices and strictures that govern sexuality, propriety, and gender relations. They also attempt to circumvent convention by limiting the ocular and objectifying mechanisms of violence associated with conventional love lyrics and thus modify bodily representation. Instead of coding the body male or female and behavior as masculine or feminine, they develop a multi-gendered, ontological essence of embodiment that is designed to transcend the rather static association of pursuit and domination between subject and object, man and woman in heteronormative lyrics. The result is that both physically and culturally the characters and speakers in these poems seem less female than hermaphroditic. The creative process of writing such work requires that the authors
all assume a hermaphroditic perspective too—whether in negotiating among the
discourses of desire he or she appropriates, imagining the interiority or subjectivity of the
characters he or she creates, or both.

In chapter one, the pastoral world figured as a lair for innocent women and den
for aggressive masculine desire; however, in John Donne’s “Sapho to Philaenis,” Aphra
Behn’s “To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagined More Than Woman,”
and Katherine Philips’s “Friendship’s Mysterys, To my dearest Lucasia,” pastoral space
is reconfigured as a safe haven for love, expressly between women. Donne’s “Sapho to
Philaenis” depicts the poet as she renounces her relationship with her male lover Phaon
for the more physically and emotionally satisfying relationship she experiences with
Philaenis.\(^\text{1}\) In it, Sappho sounds much like the speaker in Shakespeare’s sonnet 130, who
insists his love is real because his beloved is too. Likewise, Sappho explains that
Philaenis is not like the women so extolled in Petrarchan lyrics, “soft, and clear, and
strait, and faire, / As Down, as Stars, Cedars, and Lilies are” (21-22), but of “natural”
beauty (35). Sappho’s compliment is also poetic critique, since she is correcting the
conceit that beautifies woman by ornamenting her discursively with the beauties of nature
rather than her unembellished body. Accordingly, she questions why Philaenis should
desire “some soft boy,” the young swain typically associated with those narratives,
especially when his physique and proclivity to be inconstant imply danger: “His chin, a
thorny hairy unevenness / Doth threaten, and some daily change possess” (33-34).

\(^{1}\) Donne spells Sappho with one p, and editors of his work have followed suit with his preference. Since
critics of his poem and on the related topics here all spell Sappho with two p’s, I follow this modern
practice except when citing Donne’s poem directly.
Sappho is not concerned simply with physical aggression but the literary script of violence manifest in the heterosexual contract:

Thy body is a natural *Paradise*,
whose self, unmanur'd, all pleasure lies,
Nor needs *perfection*; why shouldst thou then
Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man?
Men leave behind them that which their sin shows,
And are as thieves trac’d, which rob when it snows. (35-40)

In this passage, Sappho restates her initial argument: Philaenis, you are perfect already; love with men is violent. And, again, Sappho’s point is part romantic plaint and part poetic critique. She challenges the pastoral convention that depicts the female body as pastureland and equates male sexual desire with the productive power to cultivate or perfect that land. The language of husbandry enables her to emphasize the “harsh rough,” physical “tilling” of penetrative, procreative sex. She also compares man’s contribution to excrement, for the female land-body is fertilized, “manur’d,” by that which the male body expels. Sappho’s observation exposes the gender relations such narratives cultivate. Adorning the female body in poetic hyperbole and subjecting that body to a violent will is to sublimate the feminine to masculine generative desire. As such, swain mirrors poet, whose generative cravings propagate these lyrics. Such behavior is criminal, Sappho suggests. It designates both lover and poet a robber or thief – a rapist in early modern discourse – who takes that which is not his and worse yet, leaves woman to bear the
evidence of his sexual aggression in the visual fact of her pregnant body and in the narratives of subjection such poetics generate.²

In contrast to the violence of masculine literary and physical desire, Sappho argues that were she and Philaenis to couple, their lovemaking would not disrupt the systems of the natural world nor would it invite social condemnation:

... our dalliance no more signs there are,

Than fishes leave in streams, or Birds in air.

And between us all sweetness may be had

All, all that Nature yields, or Art can add.

Love between women, she argues, is unmarked by the graffiti of masculine desire or physical strife and is as natural as nature itself. There is also a subversive quality to Sappho’s claim. She urges Philaenis to recognize her sexual agency and execute it because unlike men who “leave behind them that which their sin shows,” “our dalliance” leaves “no signs.” They can disregard cultural ideologies of proper gendered and sexual conduct because one female body cannot impregnate another. Contrary to Sappho’s assertion, Elizabeth D. Harvey reads this scene, which lacks “signs” as an example of gendered and authorial violence. She argues that Donne in ventriloquiizes Sappho’s voice and “marginalizes her within a utopian world that – despite its allusion to the Golden Age – is narcissistically sterile” (133). Like its representation of “love between women, ... Sappho’s poetry is also without signature and without poetic ‘offspring’” (133). This is a

² The OED defines rape first as theft. “The act of taking anything by force; violent seizure (of goods), robbery,” secondly as a physical, possibly gendered, crime, “The act of carrying away a person, esp. a woman by force,” and thirdly as sexual assault: “Violation or ravishing of a woman. Also, ... sexual assault upon a man.”
significant appraisal of a poem that so directly confronts the limitations of pastoral
discourse to express female desire and questions its customary representation of male-
female attraction as normatively violent. Sappho insists no less than three times that
together she and Philaenis have “all”: “all sweetness . . . All, all that Nature yields, or Art
can add.” Because of her description of Philaenis, we already know that she represents
nature itself to Sappho and that Sappho herself is art, both artist and art critic in the poem.
Rather than figuring barrenness, together they are indeed “all,” encompassing everything
from nature to culture. Rather than alluding to the Golden Age, as Harvey argues, Sappho
and Philaenis replicate the fertile abundance of that pastoral mythos in their union. The
poem, not textually bankrupt after all, multiplies, too, the generative quality of their
relationship. Sappho produces it to commemorate their love, Donne reproduces it in the
poem he pens, and scholars propagate both in their research on Sappho, her work, and
this poem. This critical discourse on Sappho preserves her words and perpetuates her
poetic forms and ideas. In fact, “Sapho to Philaenis” itself alludes to the triangular
relationship depicted in one of Sappho’s best known and most complete poem
fragments. One might argue then that Donne dialogues with Sappho in much the same
the way early modern male writers did regularly with their literary forefathers. To do so
is to insert Sappho into poetic tradition and identify her as important to western literary
history.

Sappho’s interest in this poem is not limited to genre; what she finds appealing is
a concept of desire that lacks the threat intrinsic to heteronormative literature. Sappho

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3 See Sappho “Seiaure.”
circumvents such constructs through the body itself. In keeping with her assertion that
love between women is safe and inconspicuous since it cannot be visibly detected,
Sappho represents same-sex love as metaphorically autoerotic and disinterested in a
differentiated subjectivity:

My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two,

But so, as thine from one another doe;

And, oh, no more; the likenesse being such,

Why should they not alike in all parts touch?

Hand to strange hand, lippe to lippe none denies;

Why should they brest to brest, or thighs to thighs? (45-50)

In this passage, Sappho adopts the traditional stance of Petrarchan poet but gazes upon
and catalogues her own body. We watch as she scans her lips, eyes, and thighs and
becomes both subject and object: she compares her features with those of Philaenis’s
objectified body and initially notes difference: “My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy
two.” In this brief moment, desire is constructed conventionally – between a speaking
subject and a passive object. This object is multiplied, however, in Sappho’s own body
image and the body she imagines as Philaenis’s. The mirrored reflection asserts a
“likeness” between objects that fuels Sappho’s carpe diem complaint. If their bodies are
so similar, why not unite? To do so would fuse figures as naturally and seamlessly as fish
in the sea or birds in the sky. Like the metaphor she employs, Sappho imagines herself
absorbing into the other, her own hands, lips, breasts, and thighs an extension and a
mirror of Philaenis’ body. It is no wonder that this identification elicits an autoerotic response, since Sappho teases, sexual union is and is not sex when two bodies look alike:

Likenesse begets such strange selfe flatterie,

That touching my selfe, all seemes done to thee.

My selfe I embrace, and mine owne hands I kisse,

And amorously thanke my selfe for this. (51-54)

Modern psychoanalytic theory suggests that lesbian desire is produced through a female subject’s “turn[ing] inward . . . , hallucinating the lost object by a sign which stands for both the object and its absence” (de Lauretis Practice 92). In this context, it is significant that Sappho writes to an absent lover, that her own body and psyche – her “self” (a reference invoked five times) – signifies Philaenis, even as the solitariness of that “self” signifies Philaenis’s absence. Autoerotic fantasy participates not only in the formation of subjectivity. In its deepest stages it also dissolves the difference between subject and object (de Lauretis 93). Indeed, looking into her mirror, Sappho observes, “Me, in my glass, I call thee; . . . O cure this loving madness, and restore / Me to me; thee, my half, my all, my more (55, 58). What began as a desire expressed between subject and object has come full circle; Philaenis more than reflects Sappho’s body: she is an extension of it, as Sappho’s is an extension of Philaenis’s.

Like Donne, Philips also distinguishes Sapphic love from the violence of heterosexual desire and situates it within the pastoral. In her “Friendship” poems, Philips

4 See also Laplanche and Pontalis (5-34).

5 Sappho echoes Marlowe’s Edward II, who sees in his lover a mirror image of self: asserting their unity and dispelling social and political disunity, Edward presses Gaveston, “Why shouldest thou kneel? Knowest thou not who I am? / Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston” (1.1.141-42.).
addresses almost exclusively a circle of women on whom she bestows pastoral sobriquets, such as Lucasia or Rosania. She adopts Orinda for herself. This “Society of Friendship” functioned as a coterie and a safe venue for Philips to circulate her work in manuscript form. Publishing in this manner was strategically smart, for it meant that Philips’s writing did not challenge cultural injunctions against public, female voice and it simultaneously evoked the writerly practices of the upper classes who participated in the patronage system and circulated their work privately. Modern literary critics often compare Philips’s metaphysics to those of Donne and find in her work multiple allusions to his sensual poems; it is not surprising, then, considering Philips’s skill and her subject matter – female friendship – that Philips’s contemporaries, such as Abraham Cowley, Henry Vaughan, and Sir William Temple, deemed Philips the first English Sappho. However, her admirers constantly qualified this accolade and invoked Philips’s virtue to inhibit comparison between Philips’s and the suspect sensuality in Sappho’s verses (Andreadis Sappho 78).

While her peers may have wanted to minimize the Sapphic bent of her poetry, crowning Philips the English Sappho encourages readers to look for homoerotism in her lyrics. In “Friendship’s Mysteries, To my dearest Lucasia,” Orinda calls out,

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6 Hobby and Souers, among others, have identified several members of Orinda’s “Society” as personal friends of Philips (i.e., “Lucasia” is actually Anne Owen, “Rosania” Mary Aubrey, etc.). For the most complete list, see Hobby (79).

7 See Traub, who argues, “in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the ideology of chastity rendered same-gender female eroticism between conventionally ‘feminine’ women as culturally insignificant . . . ; however, by the end of the seventeenth century, chaste femme love became an object of cultural anxiety” (“Perversion” 25). Andreadis charts a similar continuum based on of Sappho. By the mid-seventeenth-century, the very time Philips is writing, the poet is an icon of transgressive, monstrous, female-female sexuality (Sappho 45-53).
Come, my *Lucasia*, since we see
That Miracles Mens faith do move,
By wonders and by prodigy
To the dull angry world let's prove
There's a Religion in our Love.

For though we were design'd t'agree,
That Fate no liberty destroyes,
But our Election is as free
As Angels, who with greedy choice
Are yet determin'd to their joyes.  (1-10)

On the surface, this passage seems more political than erotic. In it, Philips refers to the
English civil wars, which were provoked by deep-seated religious quarrels or in Orinda’s
words by “miracles” and “faith.” Employing the rhetoric of retreat, a popular convention
in royalist poetry of the period, Orinda presses Lucasia to join her, far from the “angry
world” and the male violence that space engenders. This is not an indecent proposal,
Orinda suggests, for they will prove, like men, that they are motivated by religious
conviction. While Orinda’s contentions are fair enough, they are also fraught with
homoerotic tension. The rhetoric of retreat was a regular topos of the pastoral, carpe diem
complaint invoked by male, royalist poets to express their political dissatisfaction for
their displacement but also to woo women. Likewise, Orinda suggests a safe Platonism to
this relationship; she and Lucasia will transcend the “dull angry world” to their own
sacred, utopic space. Only, again, this is a convention of heteronormative lyrics of desire,
in which the woman signifies spiritual purity and the poet’s desire to achieve that
wholeness or to achieve her.⁸ Accordingly, this relationship may not be as friendly or
“innocent” as Orinda assures us it is (17). Retreating together, she and Lucasia form an
exclusive, single-sex community where they will prove not their friendship but their
“love.” Like Donne’s Sappho, Orinda may declare that sexual “liberty” that leaves no
signs and pleasure that is “free[ly]” chosen and enjoyed between two bodies “design’d
t’agree” is innocent (6-9). If so, posing as friends allows a certain sexual freedom that
eschews cultural ideologies of the family and procreative sexual activity without
attacking those principles directly. As Valerie Traub has argued, in the early modern
period, “chastity served some women as a veil – not just in the conventional sense of
hiding and enclosing the body, but also as a cover for erotic activity that, if publicly
expressed in repudiation of reproductive ideology, would have invited censure”
(“Perversion” 35). The metaphysics of Philips’s verse flirts with the reader, both
concealing and revealing the secular “mystery” to this sacred “friendship.”

Orinda suggests, like Donne’s Sappho, that there is a certain natural wholeness to
the quality of love she shares with Lucasia; rather than expressing this physically,
however, Orinda employs a metaphysics of desire. This discourse should deflect attention
away from the body, but the metaphors she uses are so highly physical that they convey
instead an erotics of sexual intercourse. Describing the depth of their union, she explains
to Lucasia,

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⁸ See, for example, Berry, who observes, “a chaste woman could serve as a bridge between the material
world and an invisible spiritual dimension[, which] enabled Petrarchan poet and Neoplatonic philosopher to
elaborate a new concept of masculine wholeness and self-sufficiency through or across her idealized
figure” (2)
Our hearts are doubled by the loss,
Here Mixture is Addition grown;
We both diffuse, and both engross:
And we whose Minds are so much one,
Never, yet ever, are alone. (11-15)

Orinda insists upon a metaphysics of oneness that recalls Sappho’s description of her bodily assimilation with Philaenis. Through the “loss” of distinct subjectivity, Orinda and Lucasia meld into each other and double that which they once were. Likewise, their psyches are so compatible that they are more one person than two and are therefore together even if physically separated. Orinda’s language here – to double, to mix, to add, to grow, to spread by diffusing and increase by engrossing – attests to the pregnant nature of their relationship: their simultaneous diffusion and engrossment suggests, as Luce Irigaray would come to note, the erotic capacity of two lips always touching. This image is redoubled in Philips’s allusion to mercury, a substance irresistibly drawn to itself that engrosses when diffused, and restated again when she asserts, “we are ourselves but by rebound” (23). 9 Donne’s “Sappho to Philaenis” also represents unity within a motif of division: Sappho’s “thoughts” are often with Philaenis, Philaenis’s “image” resides in Sappho’s “heart” only to be both “driven” and “drawne” from thence so that she is ultimately “rob’d” of Philaenis’s “Picture, Heart, and Sense” (7-12); at the same time, the “Memory” of Philaenis “dwells” within Sappho, who constantly replays what she has kept and lost in her mind and in her verse (13-14). In both Donne and Philips, this

9 Representing two souls or selves melding into one is a common feature of Philips’s Friendship Poems. See, for example, L’amitié: To Mrs. M. Awbrey, “To Mrs. Awbery at Parting,” and “A Friend.”
discursive division and constriction functions as an erotics of intercourse. This may explain why Philips cannot (or does not want to) sustain the decorporealized depiction of same-sex love with which she begins the poem.

Philips can no longer resist the physical in the final stanza of her poem. What is surprising, however, is that the images she leaves us with are shockingly violent, especially since, she argues, this love is to transcend the worldly and masculinized strife inherent to it:

Our Hearts are mutual Victims laid,
While they (such power in Friendship lies)
Are Altars, Priests, and Off'rings made:
And each Heart which thus kindly dies,
Grows deathless by the Sacrifice. (26-30)

In purely platonic terms, the union of “hearts” and the artifacts of their devotion – “altars, priests and off’rings” – recall the first stanza by attesting to the “Religion in [Orinda’s and Lucasia’s] Love” (5). However, Orinda’s argument is also informed by the pastoral trope that associates the spoils of war with sexual pursuit and, sometimes, assault. This convention often conflates the female body with icons of religiosity and represents sex as an act of worship or colonization, and Orinda suggests the violence of these narratives in her word choice: they are both “victims,” subject to “death,” and both offering ritual “sacrifice.” In this context, if one reads “heart” as the seventeenth-century pun on female genitalia, then what Philips crafts is an intensely erotic and aggressive love scene between the “friends.” Each conquers and is conquered by the other, which causes “each
Heart” to die, that is to achieve orgasm. This self-effacing sacrifice that one friend will make for the other wards off the death of their “friendship” and instead, sustains and nurtures it.

Aphra Behn, England’s second Sappho and the “young succeeding Phoenix,” who arose “from Orinda’s spicy obsequies” (W. 45-46), also employs pastoral to critique genre and express Sapphic desire. True to pastoral convention, in “To the Fair Clarinda,” the speaker describes a fair maid and a youthful swain:

Fair lovely Maid, or if that Title be
Too weak, too Feminine for Nobler thee,
Permit a Name that more Approaches Truth:
And let me call thee, Lovely Charming Youth. (1-4)

Although we expect to find a young man and a young woman in this environment, we do not expect one body to represent both man and woman. Yet, the speaker implies that there is some greater “Truth” in such a representation and dons this persona herself. She enters the poem as a subject and expresses interest in both the “lovely Maid” and the “Charming Youth” housed in Clarinda’s body (1, 4). Also true to pastoral tradition, a pursuit ensues. Only, as we might expect, the triangular relationship between speaker and the two figures Clarinda embodies complicates this convention:

. . . Without Blushes I the Youth persue,
When so much beauteous Woman is in view.
Against thy Charms we struggle but in vain
With thy deluding Form thou giv’st us pain (7-10)
Alluding to the rape narrative inherent in pastoral, the speaker suggests that she, rather than one of the two characters she has just identified with Clarinda’s’ body, will do the pursuing. She further complicates the scene by suggesting that she chases the male “youth” because she finds the beautiful “woman” before her irresistible. The “pain” and the “struggle” that results is straight out of Petrarchan discourse: the cruel mistress denies the poet’s advances, harming him with her beauty, while the poet struggles against her charms, which hold him captive. So, who is male and who is female? In this instance, Behn imagines a struggle not between a male speaker and a female character or between two bodies resisting each other but two bodies struggling to resist a shared desire for the same body. Behn emphasizes this mutuality through her repeated use of the subjective, possessive, and objective cases of first person plural pronouns, “we,” “our,” and “us” (9-15, 20-21).

In contrast to masculinist narratives of love, in which woman stands as object and man as subject, both the speaker and Clarinda act as desiring subjects in Behn’s poem. Clarinda occupies a double-positionality, however, for she is also an object of desire to the speaker and to herself. This association replicates modern, psychological theories of lesbian desire: Two women, who desire the female body, fantasize about the other. Each woman also imagines that she is the object of her lover’s desire. At some level, each woman recognizes her own body as the source of this desire. As a result, each becomes both a desiring subject and an object in that relationship (de Lauretis Practice 92-96, 227-53, 296-97). That this premise functions at the level of fantasy is intriguing, for the speaker of Behn’s poem reveals that her tryst with Clarinda is also “imagin’d”; despite
the speaker’s and Clarinda’s slippery gender play, their desire is ultimately expressed as that between women:

In pity to *our* Sex, sure thou wer’t sent,

For sure we might Love, and yet be Innocent:

For sure no Crime with thee we can commit;

Or if we shou’d – thy Form excuses it. (12-15 emphasis added)

Again, as Donne’s Sappho and Philips’s Orinda have asserted: even if play leads to sex or if friendship leads to love, love-making between women conceals the offense, for it cannot be physically detected after the fact.

The representation of the body in Behn’s poem is similar to that in Donne’s “Sapho to Philaenis.” They merge and meld together seamlessly, endlessly through a series of gestures suggestive of hermaphroditism. Initially, Behn’s speaker and Clarinda join as a matter of their gender play. Clarinda is the “Feminine,” “fair lovely Maid” or “nymph” and the “Noble” “Lovely Charming Youth” or “Swain” (1-4, 11); the speaker, who identifies herself as female (13-15), is similarly multi-gendered, for she peruses the “Youth” “without blushes” as would a man, she implies (5-8). Their playful struggle (Clarinda’s and the speaker’s), inhabiting and swapping bodies, mirrors the masculinity and femininity “join’d” in Clarinda’s body. As the speaker explains in the final stanza,

Thou beauteous Wonder of a different kind,

Soft Cloris with the dear Alexis join’d;

When e'er the Manly part of thee, wou’d plead
Thou tempts us with the Image of the Maid,
While we the noblest Passions do extend

The Love to Hermes, Aphrodite the Friend. (18-23)

The speaker’s excitement that Clarinda embodies both “Cloris” – the silent, objectified, “tempt[ing]” “Maid” – and “Alexis” – the active, “Manly” subject suggests that what stimulates her desire is not simply playing the pursuer but Clarinda’s pursuing and objectifying her in return. In this moment, the speaker also morphs with the audience: we all watch a pastoral meta-narrative – witness the swain pleading and the maid demurely tempting – simply by looking at or imagining Clarinda. In the process, Behn obscures whether it is Clarinda’s female body or the eroticized, heteronormative pursuit narrative that body produces that stimulates desire. As a result, Behn diffuses the Sapphic bent of her poem. She displaces same-sex desire similarly when the speaker declares her “love” to “Hermes” rather than Clarinda and offers her “friendship” to “Aphrodite.” Even so, Clarinda still offers the transgressive possibilities of a Herm-Aphrodite.10

As Behn’s poem evidences quite literally, these “Sapphic” lyrics suggest more a hermaphroditic than same-sex desire. This is a result of two dichotomous mechanisms: the poet’s representation of the sexed body and reliance on conventional, gendered scripts. Each of the poets here deploy the female body to supersede the sexual violence typical of pastoral. Set in opposition to the will to emotionally dominate and the force relations of penetrative sex, these female figures seamlessly, fluidly fuse into one another.

10 Behn seems to forward, finally, a heteronormative narrative, but when the speaker promises her friendship to Aphrodite, she recalls Sappho, who wrote love poems to the goddess. See, for example, Sappho’s “To Aphrodite” and “Aphrodite of the Flowers at Knosos Coming Down from Heaven’s Mountain.”
or morph into one body. However, these authors also code desire according to heteronormative conventions: In other words, the bodies retain a certain heterosexual essence that conditions the representation of love. In Behn’s piece, the hermaphroditism is obvious – a matter of persona – and also, like the other poems, a matter of structure. In each a solitary speaker controls the narrative and provides us with our only perspective on the beloved; likewise, each poem is crafted, at least implicitly, on pursuit, for each is designed to woo the woman it addresses. Such mechanisms replicate the gendered custom of lyric poetry that figures the poet/speaker as almost exclusively male and the object of his eye as female.

The disparity between gender and sex represented here can be attributed to early modern debates about the body and the cultural proliferation of bodily possibilities that appear in medical, literary, and political texts in the period. Thomas Lacqueur has argued that early modernists perceived a one-sex model of the body in which maleness or femaleness was a matter of “degree” “not of kind” (125). A woman’s body was an equal but less perfect version of man’s. Physically, it lacked the heat to push out its sexual organs, which meant that at some level it was deformed, but it also meant that vagina could be likened to penis, labia to foreskin, scrotum to uterus, and ovaries to testicles.11 This equation subordinates biological facts to cultural truths and establishes gender difference rather than differentiating between the sexes. Michael McKeon largely agrees with Lacqueur, for he argues that it is not until the late seventeenth-century that the

11 Lacqueur argues: “it was precisely when talk seemed to be most directly about the biology of two sexes that it was most embedded in the politics of gender, in culture. To be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to be organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes . . . Everything one wants to say about sex – however sex is understood – already has in it a claim about gender” (8, 11).
modern system of gender difference begins to emerge. Prior to this period he explains, “embodied sexuality was relatively elastic and fluid . . . ‘Nature’ was not conceived as a physiological bedrock stabilizing sexual personality; and the distinction between the biologically grounded category ‘sex’ and the socially constructed category ‘gender’ was therefore largely unintelligible” (301). However, as I mention in chapter one, texts such as birthing and midwifery manuals argue against this single-sex model. So too do discourses on cross-dressing. Long before the late seventeenth century that McKeon identifies, the Jacobean pamphlets *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* demonstrate a developing awareness that gender and the body could be thought of in separate terms. The pamphlets are designed to eradicate the physical confusion that can result when men and women swap clothes, but they also contrast discourses on the body, which they term “kind,” “creation,” and “nature,” with those on gender or “custom.”

Part of the instability of sex-gender categories can be attributed too to the politics of selfhood and nationhood in early modern England. As Stephen Greenblatt observes, senses of interiority, autonomy, and subjectivity were just beginning to develop in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries largely in response to outside forces (2). Ronald Corthell confirms this view, arguing that religious and political differences in particular often required a person to adopt a subject position he or she did not identify with and therefore came to “represent an estranged or divided subject” (272). Recently, Cynthia Marshall also argued that the early moderns possessed a masochistic desire for self-

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12 Part of the problem with modern interpretation of these discourses is that early modern writers often use terms like kind and nature to imply the body, while modern critics of gender and sexuality employ these terms to expose the ideologically-laden, social construction of gender through the body.
fragmentation that was reinforced by cultural aesthetics and “textual violence” in particular (2-3, 12). Her theory coincides historically with the performative, cohesive self-fashioning Greenblatt observes. Although these hypothesis can contradict each other, together they suggest a cultural urge toward violent subjectivity and the instability of the subject in general. This variability is not too surprising when one considers the political propaganda of Elizabeth I and James I and VI. Elizabeth often referred to herself more as a king or a prince than a queen and exploited the unstable sex-gender system of her world to exert political power. In her much mythologized speech to the troops at Tilbury during the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth deflected attention away from her sexed body to the powerful body-politic she represents:

I know I have the bodie, but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and Stomach of a King, and of a King of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any Prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my Realm, to which rather then any dishonour shall grow by me, I my self will take up arms, I my self will be your General, Judge, and Rewarder of everie one of your virtues in the field.

In this address, Elizabeth insists upon her kingliness and military prowess. She can strike fear in the hearts of foreign princes, who desire her land or her body which signifies England, and will take up arms alongside her soldiers to defend her people. Such theatrics, however effective in a staged political venue,13 aroused anxiety in such courtier-poets as Raleigh and Spenser. They fixated on Elizabeth’s gender and sexuality

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13 According to Susan Frye, the myth of Tilbury may have indeed been just a myth. Apparently a second version of the speech was reread the following day by a chaplain to the soldiers who were not at Tilbury. The chaplain’s authority further complicates issues of authority and gender (101).
and became frustrated by their inability to control discursively and physically the female sovereign who continually breached patriarchal norms of gendered behavior.\textsuperscript{14} James too used gender as a discourse to be exploited. He often figured himself as father of England, duplicating Elizabeth’s formulation of self as the mother of her people and wife of her country. In the wake of Elizabeth, James called for the enforcement of sumptuary laws and regulations (at the very moment the \textit{Hic Mulier} and \textit{Haec-Vir} pamphlet wars begin [Howard 420-1, Levin 127]) in an effort both to reinforce the sexual division of gender and to fix the social order by thwarting the upwardly mobile merchant class from dissimilating the nobility.\textsuperscript{15} James’ injunctions are rather ironic, since he did much to destabilize class hierarchies and sexual propriety himself by selling titles to and conferring knighthoods on his favorites with whom he may have enjoyed more than platonic relationships.

From a gendered and sexed perspective, the representation of bodies in the Sapphic poems included here speak to their cultural moment. However, the coalescence of bodies in these works is not merely a matter of ideology or physique but bound up in the complex structures of subjectivity. As critical analysis of pastoral convention might suggest, what happens on these pages is not just a matter of the speaker projecting her fantasies onto the beloved; as the speakers in Donne’s and Behn’s poems show, this projection is highly subjective, requiring that the speaker turn inward psychologically

\textsuperscript{14} See Berry, esp. 146-65, and Greenblatt, esp. 157-92.

\textsuperscript{15} Orgel argues that sumptuary laws were foremost concerned with regulating social class and only by extension gender (\textit{Impersonations} 98-101, 107-8); Jean Howard, while conceding that such laws were class-oriented, insists that they were also instrumental in “producing and marking gender difference” and “underpinning sexual hierarchy” (423).
toward the self or imagine her self – her body – as other. More so than the explicit gender play exhibited in Behn’s poem, signified in Elizabeth I’s behavior, or documented in generic convention, this transaction is indicative of a psychological hermaphroditism and was recognized as such by those living in England during the early modern period. With the advent of English Civil Wars, physiological mutability – even its metaphorical representations – become increasingly problematic and loaded with social and political meaning. This is in part attributed to the violation of the king. Decapitated and quartered in front of his constituents, Charles I serves as a metonym for a divided nation. The state, a body-politic at war with itself, was physically torn between royalists (the head) and republicans (a headless corpse). This fracture threatened to redouble itself if the English chose against the “unified, integrated” royalist vision of government and instead for the “disjointed, factionalist” radical enterprise for which the republicans lobbied (Sawday 139). As a result of this political disorder, representations of hermaphrodites and the language of retreat infiltrated the literature, broadsides, and political pamphlets of the period. Sometimes, like the poems discussed above, these images depict a physical, fluid integration of two distinct bodies; in others, they describe a mental process of turning inward to protect the self or a call for a physical withdrawal from court to country, from culture to pastoral, without addressing the constructed nature of sylvan space. In direct response to the political violence of the period, these documents articulate a discourse of schizophrenia reflective of the illness infecting the entire country (128-38). I would argue that at some level Donne, Philips, and Behn adopt a hermaphroditic relationship to their work: Philips does so in negotiating the discourses of desire she appropriates, Donne does
so in imagining the interiority of the characters he creates, and Behn does so on both levels – appropriating (and exploiting) heteronormative discourses of desire and imagining the multi-gendered subjectivities of her characters.

One might read the sex out of Philips’s poetry and argue that it is merely political critique dressed in a royalist discourse of retreat. Surely, Philips questions what “free[dom]” and “liberty” mean (7-8, 18), if one must live as in “captivity” or “banishment” (16, 18), and what distinguishes “thrones” corrupt and those “more innocent” (17). However, Philips does not envision a world divided merely between royalists and the rabble; she also imagines a space in which gendered hierarchies are turned upside down. Orinda and Lucasia look down (both figuratively and literally) on a “dull angry world” marked by the ravages of war (4). This place, disordered by “tedious” divisions and “shuffled” “titles” (22, 24), is produced by men, whose “faith” can be “move[d]” by political promises and promised religious “miracles” (2). Likewise, the space Orinda and Lucasia occupy is influenced by the world below: those who were once on the bottom (women, republicans, radicals) are now on top. Accordingly, in this space, Orinda and Lucasia assume not female roles but powerful, masculine positions: they are “Both Princes, and both Subjects too” (25). Although her culture advocates women’s silence, the inversions of social order that characterize the civil wars and interregnum are also precisely that which enable Philips’s public, poetic voice. Like Orinda, then, who desires to merge two bodies in one, Philips is also a split subject: she represents herself as royalist in her poetry; however, her ideology of female superiority and speech grow out
of the upheaval of liberal, radical ideas that split the nation and provoke royalist
discourses of retreat in the first place.

Despite Orinda’s assurances that she and Lucasia have risen above the violence of
the male world below them, the generic characteristics of this poem suggest that it may
have more in common with the sadomasochistic features of the pastoral and Petrarchan
lyrics of Philips’s male contemporaries. Orinda explains that she and Lucasia share a
divinely sanctioned union and natural predilection for each other, but she obscures
whether or not they have a choice in that union:

For though we were design'd t'agree,
That Fate no liberty destroyes,
But our Election is as free
As Angels, who with greedy choice
Are yet determin'd to their joyes. (6-10)

Although the likeness of their bodies suggest that they are “fate[d]” to couple and that
their agency in this matter is “determin’d,” Orinda insists that she and Lucasia are not
without “liberty” or “choice” and in fact are “greedy” to comply with what seems a
divine and natural ordinance. However, there are two problems with Orinda’s argument.
First, it was not a cultural premise that women should couple because of the natural
design of their bodies or some sort of shared gendered essence. Close female friendships
evolved as a source of concern because they were perceived increasingly as a threat to the

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16 See also Hageman, who argues, Philips claims here that “Like the Angels who joyfully (and
paradoxically) seek the fate to which they are ‘determined,’ the poet and Lucasia happily choose the
friendship to which they have been ‘elected’/chosen by God” (603).
What Orinda suggests, then, is that she and Lucasia behave in direct opposition to cultural prescripts on procreative sexuality and use the body itself, since they look “design’d” and “determin’d” “t’agree,” as an excuse to rebel. To do so is to assert a self-authorized authority in the space she and Lucasia occupy and, for Philips, in the space of writerly discourse. Secondly, the violent nature of Orinda’s word choice suggests both that there is a pleasure in violence and that the case she makes is over-determined itself. Perhaps this isn’t a utopic or consensual relationship after all. The liberty Orinda insists upon may actually mask the type of gendered domination typical of carpe diem complaints that deny female agency and voice. In this context, it is interesting that we never hear Lucasia speak or consent. And like most Petrarchan conceits, this union may be mere fantasy, for Orinda’s call, “Come, my Lucasia,” is never answered (1).

The tension between Lucasia’s absent consent and Orinda’s desire is compounded by the bondage metaphors that run through the poem. For example, in stanza four Orinda insists:

We count our own captivity
Then greatest thrones more innocent:
’Twere banishment to be set free,

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17 See Traub, who explains that because “the middle-class conjugal unit was increasingly idealized as a locus of harmony, spiritual equality and companionship . . . and the expansion of a capitalist mode of production . . . gradually rendered the idea of the dynastic family less crucial to the success of the bourgeois individual, . . . the production of the social necessity for a mutual and exclusive desire in and for marriage rendered chaste female friendships potentially disruptive to the familial basis of social order. Interrupted, redefined, and harnessed into a teleology that demanded an increasingly conscious commitment to heterosexual desire both before and after marriage, same gender female bonds became a focal point of anxiety” (“Perversion” 40-42).
Since we wear fetters whose intent
Not Bondage is, but Ornament. (16-20)

Orinda’s and Lucasia’s relationship, marked by metaphors of enslavement and war, figure the pair as alternately captive, fettered, or banished – an ideology of domination and submission bolstered by their political “Prince[ly]” and “Subject[ive]” role playing (25). But again, Philips assures us that such violent aspects of their relationship can be reread. She insists on Lucasia’s and Orinda’s innocence, on the “free[dom]” in their “captivity,” and of the “ornament[al]” quality of their shackles. These assurances, however, rely on a discourse of threat inherent in heteronormative seduction or pursuit narratives and, in this instance, anticipate the final stanza of the poem in which Orinda and Lucasia act as colonizers of each other’s bodies.\(^\text{18}\) Without the gendered references, this poem could be spoken by a male voice. Ventriloquizing poetic conventions and political discourses typically associated with the activities of men, Philips adopts a hermaphroditic relation to her work in much the same way male authors have been criticized for miming women or robbing female poets of their voices.\(^\text{19}\) Paradoxically, this poetic subversion may explain why Philips’s writing was not seen as transgressive: mimicking her male “peers,” she does not appear to challenge popular opinion concerning hierarchal government or poetic, gendered power: the speaker controls the female love object, who is subject to authorial will. Nor does she confront her culture’s

\(^{18}\) See below 116-17. See also Philips’s “To the Truly Noble, and Obliging Mrs. Anne Owen, on my first Approaches,” for a similar but much more graphic illustration of physical conquest and erotic pursuit and her “Injuria Amici,” an incredibly violent response to unrequited love.

\(^{19}\) For more on male appropriation of the female voice, see Harvey.
assumptions about femininity. She asserts that Orinda’s and Lucasia’s relationship is a friendship and, by staging that relationship as retreat, she stages it in a properly feminized sphere disassociated from the male, public realm. In so doing, Philips inscribes herself into a male-oriented poetic tradition. By exploiting heteronormative expressions of love to depict (or at least allude to) love between women, she also refashions their erotic power.

In contrast to Philips, whose authorial hermaphrodism develops as a result of literary discourse, Donne assumes a more physical and mental act of cross-gendering: first, he imagines what a desiring woman must feel and second, he envisions love between two women. To represent a desire that registers as believable to the reader, Donne must exceed the heterosexual paradigms typical of his secular work and the violence of his religious poetry. To be sure, Elizabeth D. Harvey, who has formulated the harshest critique of gender politics and voice in “Sapho to Philaenis,” argues that the poem fails on each of these counts:

‘Sapho to Philaenis’ is less a celebration of lesbian love than a rivalry between men (Ovid, who censors Sappho by representing her in heteronormative terms, and Donne, who competes with Ovid for mastery over Sappho); in attempting to speak for Sappho (and the lesbian in general), Donne commits a type of textual appropriation akin to the Philomela myth and dependent upon Sappho’s silence; this transgression functions as an act of colonization similar to Donne’s ‘Elegy 19,’ in which the speaker famously links the conquest of his mistress’s body to that of
the New World, declaring, ‘O my America, my new found land.’ (123-25, 128-29)

On one hand, while I agree such a reading is possible, it also disregards key claims within the poem itself. Donne makes clear that he imagines a relationship between Sappho and Philaenis that directly opposes those typical of love lyrics in which woman serves as object to be tilled or mined for her physical or writerly value (21-22, 31-40). To write this poem, Donne must see with a difference and eschew the difference of his own gendered experience to imagine Sappho recognizing sameness in her mirror. This perception is evidenced when Sappho gazes upon and scans her own body parts in a blazon: “lips, eyes, and thighs” (45). When deployed by a male speaker, this literary device usually eroticizes the body to appeal to the masculine imagination. Perhaps Sappho’s dreaming a sensual embrace that moves from hands to lips down to more intimate parts like breasts and thighs offers such a reading (49-50). However, as Sappho marvels at her own image in the mirror, she reclaims the female body and refashions the gaze of desire by excluding men from its practice. Importantly, the occasion also provokes a sense of identity unavailable to women in masculinist representations of the female body: As Sappho gazes at the parts of her body in her “glasse,” she recognizes her “self” and admits “Me . . I call thee” (55). The structure of this scene is evocative of Lacan’s theory of the “mirror stage” in infant development. A “spatial identification . . . extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of totality;” through a desire for the other, the “specular I” becomes the “social I” or a subject (5). Fascinated with the body in the mirror, which she initially

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20 See, for example, Vickers “Blazon,” esp. 96.
perceives as Philaenis, Sappho mimics that figure. However, only after “a flutter of jubilant activity” (1) – denoted by Sappho’s comparison of body parts, her desire for the other, and the excitement in her voice – Sappho recognizes the mirror object as her self. As I discuss earlier, this passage is riddled with references to the self, and in Lacan’s formulation visual identification precedes language and subject formation. Indeed, as a result of looking in that mirror, Sappho employs the powerful first person pronoun, “I” – four times in as many lines (53-56) – and calls out, articulating a desire to reconcile a fragmented self: “restore / Me to mee” (57-8). Rather than robbing Sappho of her subjectivity, Donne personifies her as an agent who speaks, writes, and creates the type of love letter she might have composed in her life. She does so through regular mechanisms of visuality and violence, defining herself against the other she desires.

While Harvey insists that in this moment Donne robs Sappho of her voice, I would argue that this is an instance of authorial hermaphrodism. The violence Harvey detects has more to do with the violence that must occur to induce subjectivity, to produce subjectivity in the creative act. She argues that the lines “Likenesse begets such strange selfe flaterie, / That touching my selfe, all seems done to thee” can be read “as a slippage between ventriloquized and authorial voices, in which Donne’s characteristic pun on his name functions as a signature, transforming ‘thee’ to Donne” (Donne “Sappho” 51-2; Harvey 131). Such a “dislocation of voice reveals both the ventriloquist and the voyeur, the first producing speech that appears to emanate from a source other

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21 In light of Sawday’s argument, it is interesting that Lacan considers the failure of this process madness (“Function”). Donne’s Sappho also complains of a split subjectivity or irreconcilability between two parts of her body as a type of “madnesse” (57).
than the real speaker, and the other deriving pleasure from a looking that requires no participation (as Donne watches Sappho watching – and touching – herself)” (131-32). If the word “thee” refers to Donne, then Donne is not passively watching “Sappho watching and touching herself” but actively participating, watching and touching himself. This transaction would reproduce the very difference Sappho experiences with Philaenis and express a desire identified with lesbian love.22 What I am getting at is, if Donne writes himself into this scene, might it not also constitute a Lacanian moment for him? Some critics contend that the physical fluidity between Sappho and Philaenis in this poem is modeled on the Aristophanic myth of Plato’s Symposium in which “divinely-bifurcated same-gender and cross-gender couples . . . reunite . . . [because] at one time they were the same person” (Holmes 169).23 What if this is also the case for Donne and Sappho? Both write intensely and skillfully of erotic passion and sexuality, and Donne may indeed consider Sappho his poetic equal. If so, then this moment may instance an authorial hermaphrodism in which Donne observes his likeness to Sappho: he merges with his other half; he “cures” the sort of “madnesse” Sawday observes and “restores” a divided, fragmented body, “Me to mee; thee, my halfe, my all, my more” (58). This restoration enables Donne to recognize his “self” in the mirror: “Me, in my glasse, I call thee” (55). Such a union would not usurp Sappho’s literary reputation or appropriate her voice. It would make whole two poetic halves.

22 To refer back to de Lauretis’s theory of lesbian desire, see below 102.

23 See also Mueller 94.
In “To the Fair Clarinda,” Behn practices the authorial hermaphroditism we discerned in Philips and Donne. She employs heteronormative expressions of desire and imagines eroticism from multi-gendered perspectives. Like Philips, Behn uses the language of retreat to script a narrative of seduction and pursuit that typically assigns particular actions to particular genders, but Behn problematizes this construction by assigning both male and female roles to the speaker and to Clarinda. As a result, the danger inherent in such narratives is also present. Clarinda may indeed harbor the “snake” that engenders the fall of man and threatens paradise and, more immediately for the speaker, threatens the ethos of libertine love with the fact of pregnancy (17). This construction suggests that the scene is fixed in heteronormative terms. However, the gender play that stimulates the erotic tension in the poem challenges any sort of normative essence that these gender roles may evoke and thus argues against a singular expression of sexual desire. Carol Barash similarly notes: “paradoxically, this love poem to another woman is more clearly encoded in terms of male and female oppositions than any of Behn’s heterosexual love poems . . . if Clarinda is both maid and youth, both Hermes and Aphrodite, then men and women can no longer be understood as oppositionally ‘nymph’ and ‘swain’” (174). “To the Fair Clarinda” offers both a homoerotic account of desire and a heteronormative narrative of pursuit that can be read simultaneously. Likewise, Clarinda’s desirability is produced by the titillating interplay between her characterizations both as vulnerable (the pursued) and empowered (the pursuer). This gendered ambiguity is reiterated in her body which joins both Cloris and Alexis. The female speaker, who also acts as pursuer and pleasures herself voyeuristically
by harnessing the male gaze and watching a pursuit narrative play out across Clarinda’s 
body, also experiences a type of hermaphroditism when she reads herself, “our sex,” on 
that body (12), even as she also acts as Clarinda’s pursuer. Accordingly, her statuses as a 
desiring subject and a desired object are multiplied, too. Behn’s poem, written after the 
Civil Wars that inform Philips’s work, suggests that hermaphroditism no longer signifies 
the same type of threat it did in the middle of the seventeenth century. The royal head 
restored to the body-politic, this literary representation of hermaphroditism ceases to carry 
the same political weight and political critique it might have conveyed a decade or two 
earlier. It no longer warns of a monstrous disorder infecting the social body but celebrates 
and welcomes that disorder as reconstituting and symbolizing a new version of the 
Golden Age. Pastoral can express a love unhindered by social strictures, and the 

\textit{jouissance} of libertinism can pertain not just to sex and pleasure but to bodies too. 
Reconstituted, the divided body elicits excitement because, like the restored kingdom, it 
offers so many pleasurable possibilities.

As with Philips and Donne, the hermaphroditism in this poem extends from 
character to poet.\textsuperscript{24} Ros Ballaster expresses a strain of this argument in biographical 
terms:

\textsuperscript{24} Much has been made of Behn’s gender in relation to her writing and the consequent association of her 
writing with prostitution. Catherine Gallagher’s “Who was that Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the 
Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn” is perhaps the most influential essay on this topic; however, 
Derek Hughes has carefully shown that Gallagher was neither familiar with the contemporary poem from 
which the critique of Behn as poetess-punk originated, nor did she understand, factually represent, or seem 
to read most of the Behn material she incorporates into her argument. Jonathan Goldberg recently 
complicated Gallagher’s analysis, but, like other critics, he too reads Behn as the fictional narrator in 
\textit{Oroonoko} and cites the preface to \textit{The Luckey Chance} without considering its context/the issue to which 
Behn is responding.
Aphrodite is both the goddess of love, and the lover of Aphra. Aphra is then both subject and object of her own poem. The riddling tautologies of the poet are a seductive plea to her reader to abandon the search for a unitary identity behind the writing, whether that of the lover or the beloved. The reader . . . is encouraged to take his or her pleasure from pursuit of sexual meaning, rather than in its definitive resolution. (76)

Ballaster’s argument shares much in common with Harvey’s critique of Donne. But gender matters. It is interesting and fun to encounter a female poet who assumes multiple sexed bodies and gendered roles and suggests to her readership a spectrum of sexual pleasures and potentialities; not so for a male poet. His doing so is always associated with the will to dominate. I would suggest that this response and the sense that it is pleasurable to watch a woman play also suggests the extent to which our own ideas about gender and sexuality are constructed and somewhat insurmountable.

Nevertheless, I appreciate Ballaster’s witty and suggestive reading of Behn’s word play, since it plays up the ambiguity of her poem, and it is crucial to understanding the eroticism of the poem – charged as it may be with the violence of heterosexual desire – or not. Rather than read Aphra into her verse, however, I am much more interested in the hermaphroditic lens through which Behn must see to engage and transform generic and gendered conventions. This facility is partially a matter of the historical moment in which Behn writes. “To the Fair Clarinda” represents the fluidity of the early modern one-sexed body and gestures toward modern gender roles that become increasingly proscribed from the eighteenth-century onward: Clarinda can be said to embody man and
woman physically (a one-sexed body in a sense) and enact the behavioral practices that
come to be associated with femininity and masculinity (gender) in the Enlightenment.
This ability to see hermaphroditically, into and through the looking glass so to speak,
requires the skills of what we might term a strong “close reader” and the analytic
capacities of a literary critic. In fact it mimics the gaze of the literary critic, who must
position herself outside of a text while looking at it in its entirety. For one working in the
early modern period and with gender and sexuality in particular, it requires that one
assume the gaze of another and transcend whatever fixed sense of modernity or sexual or
gendered identity one consciously understands in order to essay, portray, and interpret the
lived experience and recorded perceptions of another.

The hermaphroditic eye of author and critic are also suggestive of the creative
process of character development and the inner-relation between authorial subjectivity
and that character. It is the fictional character that constitutes the writer’s identity. Like
the beloved whose persona is construed through the violent, desiring gaze of his or her
admirer, so too is the literary character constructed through the imaginative, controlled
writer’s eye. In the heteronormative texts from chapters one and two, violence seems
directly attributable to desire because it pits one gender against the other. However, these
Sapphic poems, which all claim to eschew violence by, in a sense, eradicating the
problem of gender, demonstrate that what I have identified as an erotics of violence is
bound by the violence of the creative process itself, the triangular relationship of
ocularity, discourse, and objectification necessary to subject formation and character
creation. These works suggest that perhaps violence is inescapable, inherent not only to desire but to the constitution of self, and a living, breathing, livable sense of subjectivity.
CONCLUSION

In this study, I have attempted to chart patterns in representations of love and desire in early modern English literature and analyze how particular spaces (a visual plane or social or geographical areas) stimulate desire to turn violent or to be expressed in violent ways. I am especially interested in how violent structures and discourses of violence affect voice and the gendering of speakers, characters, and authors in the period. This project grew out of an interest in the blazon, that literary device that displays and through display heralds the beloved, and feminist film theory on spectacle. These critiques, like mine, focus on the female body. One way I would like to expand this study is to consider what happens to men when these similar technologies are set in place. Under what circumstances are male figures fragmented and displayed, either as objects of desire or in staged spectacles? What is the effect on the female viewer and the male viewer? What does it suggest about gender? When does the violence of that representation coalesce with desire? Or does it?

Initially, I intended to integrate both text and image in the project, since my work focuses largely on literary representations of the visual, and I have taught this work most productively to my students when I have likened female bodily display in the Renaissance to that in modern visual communication, especially advertising. Modern advertisers have done little to dispel the Beauty Myth made popular by Petrarch over four hundred years ago, perhaps because as Linda Nochlin argues, “fragmentation, mutilation and destruction might be said to be the founding tropes of visual rhetoric” (9): Like her Renaissance sister, the modern ideal woman is still a model of whiteness and brightness
and the media at once (re)members her as an amalgamation of eroticized, fragmented body parts. These spectacular images are designed to espouse desire in women to emulate the “perfect,” because violated, women they see pictured before them. What is missing from this formulation, as with my study here, is modern visual culture’s effect on men.

Years ago *GQ* Magazine encouraged men to self-police and self-fashion. Consumer culture and the fashion industry have caught up with *GQ*. Such periodicals as *Maxim* and *Men’s Health* are designed to influence men in much the same way modern advertisers have targeted women for the last several centuries.

My topics may seem disparate and unrelated, but what I am suggesting is a connection between visual image, consumer culture, and romance – a genealogy of eroticized violence that can be traced to the early modern period. On one hand, the term early modern problematizes identifying this sort of pattern because it suggests that we might read modern culture back onto a period from which we are alienated without attending to difference, even if we can indeed see glimpses or traces of ourselves. But we do indeed see glimpses and traces, and we can link attributes in the representation of eroticized violence in the Renaissance and uncover the cultural work of those texts as they continue to influence us today.

We self-fashion, modern magazines and advertisers suggest, to attract partners. As such, we absorb and conform to this violent mode of representation for love, and it becomes, unconsciously, part of our own working ideology of romance. In its most sadistic form, it is expressed in the modern preoccupation with plastic surgery – that focused attempt to isolate body parts and redesign them according to an image of visual
perfection – all in pursuit of pleasure and romantic happiness. It is the blazon in its most aggressive, visual form of embodiment. Feminist social critics Jean Kilbourne and Naomi Wolf have detailed the violent impact of media images upon women, especially those, as in Petrarchism, that rely upon pornographic or sadomasochistic narratives and represent desirability as subordination or violation itself. Such representations do not merely generate gendered and racial inequalities – the first by espousing difference and the second by whitewashing it – but constitute a marker of class. Indeed, the sheer number of modern women who seek to enhance their bodies and “market value” by enlarging their breasts and procuring other costly surgical procedures require the luxuries of expendable time and income. The reality show *Dr. 90210*, which asserts that “in

and the drama *nip / tuck*, set in pricey Miami, similarly expose cosmetic perfection as a signifier of social class. More frightening, their mass appeal attests to the populace’s seduction by beauty and our fascination with the cultural spectacle of body work; they also suggest to viewers that they too can make a celebrity-spectacle of themselves if they have money enough to buy into this prestigious social order.

This violent residue of Petrarchan dissection and corporeal ornamentation so infiltrates our culture that we may not recognize its more subtle manifestations. We can locate it in the mainstream, middle-class periodical *Glamour* and its seemingly benign “Do’s and Don’ts” page. A recent issue asks, what’s “Pretty in Pink?” It answers this

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105 While Kilbourne analyzes woman’s body image, Wolf treats woman as image in pornographic and sadomasochistic advertising, which pictures woman either “in a rictus of ecstasy,” convincing her that such sexual pleasure depends upon how she looks, or expresses heteronormative desirability as violation (133).

106 As *nip / tuck*’s tag, “Truth is only skin deep,” suggests, both shows argue that reality, as well as image, is relative and the ability to manage both is proportional to one’s financial status.
query by displaying bits and pieces of women’s bodies, often covering with black bars the eyes of those fashion victims who have fallen prey to the surveying gaze of the fashion police. This tactic may save *Glamour* legal plaints – but only because it effects a certain anonymity. Robbing women of their subjectivity, “Do’s and Don’ts” suggests that women merely are body parts. The page, thus, encourages women to self-police by replicating the objectifying gaze of the Petrarchan poet and fetishizing both their body and the paraphernalia of femininity that demarcates those figures as female. Once woman becomes fully vested in her “look,” then, literally, it won’t matter who she is: she simply will be what she wears. Like her textually displayed Renaissance siblings, she too fails to register culturally as a body that matters with human value.

Surely, critics and contemporary artists, especially those who read images and bodies as discursive artifacts, have posed revisionist readings of such cultural iconography. Susan Bordo interprets contemporary commercials and advertisements as visual documents that urge “women’s ‘bondage’ to the obsessions with slenderness and youth”; but she also suggests that a woman’s efforts to reshape her body through diet, exercise, or surgery may function as resistance rather than submission to ideologies of “femininity” (250-51).107 Barbara Kruger’s work, which so often employs both text and graphics to interrogate the signs that popular images of mass consumption express, performs a similar intervention. In fact, in her photomurals *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face, We Won’t Play Nature to Your Culture,* and *Your Comfort is My Silence,* she seems uncannily aware of the culture industry of Renaissance poetics, dominated as it is by a

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107 This hypothesis is complicated, however, by the devastating effects of anorexia and bulimia and the mounting number of deaths in purely cosmetic surgical procedures.
male gaze that objectifies and silences the beloved and posits an opposition between male
writer, as harbinger of culture, and woman, as and of the natural world. Krueger troubles
these conventions through pronouns that command us to look anew, even as she reveals –
not much has changed in four hundred years.

Although Bordo’s and Kruger’s work encourages us to rethink, review, and refuse
oppressive signs embedded in our culture, resistance expressed through such postmodern
mechanisms as manipulating image as text / text as image can be difficult to discern, for
the material effects all too often appear the same and are subject to individual
interpretation. Is the dieter or anorexic, Botox party host or plastic surgery fanatic
exerting power or merely absorbing the will of the powerful? A viewer of shows like Dr.
90210 and nip / tuck could argue either case: each depicts women willfully redefining
their bodies; however, each also glorifies and pokes fun at the spectacle of female
dismemberment and bodily augmentation. Moreover, the crew of all-male surgeons
absorb a woman’s possibly transgressive behavior by rearticulating, in Petrarchan
fashion, the operatives of the beauty industry as a masculine imperative and creative
function.

The conjunction of romance and violence is not limited to advertising or the
doctor’s office but assumes multiple media forms as popular entertainment. Romance
novels link the sensual and the violent. Their covers typically depict a half-ravaged
woman, her hair blowing in the wind, clothes falling off or torn from her body, a look of
surrender upon her face. All the while, a hulking paramour aggressively dominates the
scene behind her, controlling it entirely. Likewise, as Janice Radway has demonstrated,
the narratives of romance fiction depend upon a struggle between man and woman. She surrenders to her aggressive hero, and they live happily ever after. Visually and discursively, modern romance articulates the very attributes of assault inherent in the pursuit and seduction narratives we find in the early modern period. Lifetime television, which touts its consumer niche as “television for women,” features almost exclusively mini-series and made-for-tv movies about women who strike back because they have been sexually violated or hurt by love or about women who are stalked because of their sexual appeal or vulnerability. Similarly, video games, marketed primarily to teenage boys, showcase female side-kicks and superheroes who set out to save the world and yet appear so saturated physically with sexuality that they practically lampoon the bodies of real women. The hyper-masculine characteristics of the male figures in these games is simultaneously designed to instill fear in potential enemies and exude erotic appeal through visual representation of physical strength. This is somewhat ironic, since a player does nothing physical while appropriating this highly physical identity. The discourse of eroticized violence, likewise, infuses songs about love: “Love Hurts” and “Love is a Battlefield” were popular rock ballads in the 1970’s to name just a few. And, as Sid Ray has demonstrated, the early modern marriage advice is rather sadomasochistic itself. Lovers vow to don the yoke of marriage, tie the knot, possess, or have and hold – all phrases that retain their currency today.

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108 Significantly, according to Radway’s research, Harlequin or Silhouette romance novels account for one in six of all mass-marketed paperback novels sold in the United States.

109 See, for example, Jhally, who argues that boys and young men are conditioned through media images to identify threat, violence, and intimidation with normative masculinity.
I would like to disrupt the comfortable, easy genealogy of literary paternity by developing a genealogy of eroticized violence alongside it. This project would demonstrate how the cultural work of early modern texts continues to influence our modern world and expose how violent impulses of romance are absorbed from our literary past and perpetuated. This cultural heritage is important to acknowledge, for a period like the Renaissance carries with it a cultural prestige that undoubtedly informs our modern value systems.
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