PERSONAL PROPERTIES: STAGE PROPS AND SELF-EXPRESSION IN BRITISH DRAMA, 1600-1707

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This dissertation examines the role of stage properties—props, slangily—in the construction and expression of characters’ identities. Through readings of both canonical and non-canonical drama written between 1600 and 1707—for example, Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1607), Edward Ravenscroft’s adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* (1678), Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677), and William Wycherley’s *The Plain Dealer* (1677)—I demonstrate how props mediate relationships between people. The control of a character’s props often accords a person control of the character to whom the props belong. Props consequently make visual the relationships of power and subjugation that exist among characters.

The severed body parts, bodies, miniature portraits, and containers of these plays are the mechanisms by which characters attempt to differentiate themselves from others. The characters deploy objects as proof of their identities—for example, when the women in Behn’s *Rover* circulate miniatures of themselves—yet other characters must also interpret these objects. The props, and therefore the characters’ identities, are at all times vulnerable to misinterpretation. Much as the props’ meanings are often disputed, so too are characters’ private identities often at odds with their public personae. The boundaries of selfhood that the characters wish to protect are made vulnerable by the objects that they use to shore up those boundaries. When read in relation to the characters who move them, props reveal the negotiated process of individuation. In doing so, they emphasize the correlation between extrinsic and intrinsic worth. They are a measure of how well characters perform gender and class roles, thereby demonstrating the importance of external signifiers in the legitimation of England’s subjects, even as they expose “legitimacy” as a social construction.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Among the many complaints about Shakespeare’s *Othello* (c. 1603) that Thomas Rymer addresses in his *Short View of Tragedy* (1693) is the play’s emphasis on Desdemona’s handkerchief: “So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief! Why was not this call’d the *Tragedy of the Handkerchief*?”[^1] Rymer’s derision of this and other stage objects is in keeping with anti-theatrical polemics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Stephen Gosson’s *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions* (1576) and William Prynne’s *Histrio-Mastix: The Players Scourge, or, Actors Tragedie* (1633). Publishing five years after Rymer, Jeremy Collier would echo these sentiments in his *Short View of the Stage* (1698).[^2] These critics of the theater take to task the audience’s delight in and the playwrights’ dependence on spectacle. Rymer’s disdain for Othello stems in part from the prominence in the play of what he considers an insignificant object that detracts from the play’s “fable.” The complications in plot that arise as a result of the handkerchief’s circulation are not only “absurd,” but the handkerchief is, says Rymer, “so remote a trifle, no Booby, on this side of Mauritania, cou’d make any consequence from it.”[^3]

This dissertation makes much ado about the “trifles” that Rymer detested. Far from being insignificant, stage properties—props, slangily—are an integral part of dramatic productions. As the recent work of Frances Teague, Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, and Andrew Sofer

[^1]: Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: It’s Original, Excellency, and Corruption* (1693), 135-[36].
has shown, an appreciation of stage properties in dramatic criticism can, as Harris and Korda
state, “furnish new and invaluable information about the institution of the early modern London
public stage, its play-texts, its modes of cultural as well as theatrical production, and the larger
social and economic contexts in which it was embedded.” The critics have amply demonstrated
the need to redress the paucity of criticism on stage properties. Yet with the exception of Sofer’s
chapter on folding fans in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama, no critics have addressed at
length the props that circulate on the Restoration stage. This dissertation does just that.

Much recent criticism on stage properties defines what makes a stage object a prop. At
what point, for example, is a sword no longer part of a soldier’s costume and a stage property
instead? According to Teague, an object becomes a prop when “it functions differently from the
way it functions offstage. At the moment when the audience notes its entry into the dramatic
action a property has meaning.” For Sofer, however, motion constitutes an object’s status as a
prop: “The prop must physically move or alter in some way as a result of the actor’s physical
intervention.” I agree with Sofer that a prop must be understood in terms of its kinetic qualities.
And though I disagree with Teague that an object must “mean differently” in order to be
considered a prop—as Sofer notes, “[s]ome props do fulfill a practical or normal function on
stage”—both of these definitions insist on the importance of the actor in the transformation of an
object into a prop. Put another way, because objects become props (because they “function”)

5 See, e.g., Harris and Korda, Introduction, 1-19; and Teague, Shakespeare’s Speaking Properties, 9-11.
7 Teague, Shakespeare’s Speaking Properties, 16. Teague calls this a prop’s “dislocated function” (17).
8 Sofer, Stage Life of Props, 13. See Sofer’s introduction (1-29) for a survey of criticism and theory about stage properties.
9 Teague, Shakespeare’s Speaking Properties, 17; Sofer, Stage Life of Props, 13.
when they are put into motion by the force of an actor’s body, what props mean and how they mean are dependent on the bodies of the actors and actresses who move them.

In this dissertation, I examine the relationship between objects and bodies. I show how characters in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drama use stage properties as a means of self-expression. This is not to suggest, however, that objects were inconsequential to the formation and expression of identities prior to or after the seventeenth century. For example, sumptuary laws in England from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries associated particular fabrics and wearable objects with particular classes in an attempt, among other reasons, to keep rigid the distinctions between the social classes. This correlation between what one wore and who one was carries over as well to the basic indexical function of stage objects, for example the way in which a sword might identify a soldier or a scepter a king. Furthermore, Harris, Douglas Bruster, and Margretta de Grazia have recognized the role of objects in the construction of identity, be it in relation to ownership of skill and membership in a social body (Harris); new capitalist market forces (Bruster); or to the ways in which ownership of property, more generally, can make and unmake a person through its loss or retention (de Grazia). This dissertation complements these studies by examining the physical trajectories of objects as written in the plays through dialogue and stage directions, and by examining the role of objects as they mediate

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between bodies and identities. Read in relationship to the bodies that move them, stage properties underscore the often contentious relationships between subjects and objects both on the stage and off. The interaction of bodies and objects on stage demonstrates the negotiated processes of identity formation.

Stage props exemplify a process by which objects help characters negotiate the boundaries between self and other. The severed body parts, miniature portraits, and containers that I examine are the mechanisms by which characters not only attempt to differentiate themselves from others, but by putting these objects into circulation, the characters also demonstrate a desire to stabilize their identities. As an externalization of identity, however, these objects, and therefore the characters’ identities, are at all times vulnerable to reinterpretation and reinscription. The control of a character’s identity is mediated through the control of those objects that represent the character. At the same time that characters deploy objects as evidence or proof of their identities, the objects are simultaneously items that other characters must interpret. The props I examine help make visible some ways in which identities are contested and how a person’s private identity is often at odds with his or her public persona or reputation.

Though I primarily focus on Restoration drama, I begin with a discussion of stage properties in the revenge tragedies of the early seventeenth century in an attempt to identify continuities between early Stuart drama and the drama of the late seventeenth century. In the second chapter, “Mutilated Members and Separate Subjects in Early Seventeenth-Century Revenge Tragedy,” I demonstrate some ways in which characters use severed body parts as proof of their identities. The revengers use the fragmented bodies of other characters as a gauge of their own integrity. I analyze four revenge tragedies from the first forty years of the

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12 Sofer’s study does focus extensively on the movement of props on stage.
seventeenth century: *Hamlet* (1600), Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1606/7), John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614); and John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1629-33). In these plays, characters exploit severed body parts as proof of crimes that other characters and they themselves have committed; however, the objects do not successfully prove the revengers’ claims. The revengers cannot corroborate their claims with the severed body parts, nor do the props represent fully the identities that the characters invest them with. The revengers are unable to control the objects’ signification, which calls into question their ability to achieve the differentiation that they desire. I suggest that the props call attention to a broader cultural anxiety over the body’s reliability as a signifier of inwardness.

As I will show in chapter three, “Rhetorical Bodies: Producing National Identity in Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare,” bodies, or body parts, are a means of self-expression not only for individuals but also for entire societies. The use of bodies as props in the adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays produced between 1678 and 1682 replicates on a broader scale the revengers’ attempts to express and control their identities through the fragmented bodies of other characters. Both Michael Dobson and Jean I. Marsden have examined the role of Shakespeare’s plays in the formation of an English literary and national identity. Dobson compares an increasing adoration of Shakespeare over the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the growth of England as a capitalist and imperialist nation. He argues, “Shakespeare, in the course of the reformulation of British national identity which followed the Glorious revolution, came to serve as part of the acceptable face of the national past, and ultimately, suitably moralized,

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became by the 1760s one of the symbols of British national identity itself.”

Marsden similarly argues that the “later group of [eighteenth-century] adaptations, written largely during the course of David Garrick’s career, . . . reflected major changes in attitudes toward Shakespeare and the increasingly important role ‘Shakespeare’ played in the definition of Britain’s cultural identity.” As I show, however, the Tory adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays during the tumultuous years of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis (1678-82) attempt to reinforce an absolutist theory of the monarchy. The playwrights renegotiate the meanings of pre-Interregnum symbols of the monarchy in order to espouse a new national identity.

Early in Charles II’s reign, a growing concern over his ability to rule effectively attenuated the initial enthusiasm over his Restoration. Jonathan Sawday and Paula R. Backscheider have both examined how Charles used public spectacle as a means to redefine older symbols of national power and shore up his authority as sovereign. The exhumation and display of Cromwell’s, Ireton’s, and Bradshaw’s bodies in 1661 is one such attempt by Charles to reinscribe the monarchy on the bodies of his subjects. Like the revengers I discuss in chapter two, Charles marks out his integrity and authority as sovereign by displaying the rotting remains of the regicides’ bodies. Charles turns the bodies into objects of performance. They are like rhetorical devices, the persuasive mechanisms by which he dramatizes and reinforces his identity as king. Charles consequently demonstrates the ways in which bodies are used as a means to control his own representation.

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16 Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text*, 75.
Shakespeare’s redactors—among them Nahum Tate, John Dryden, Edward Ravenscroft, Thomas Otway, John Crowne, and Thomas D’Urfey—also exploit human bodies as propaganda in order to disseminate a national ideology. During the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, Titus Oates’s fabrication of a Catholic plot to overthrow the government and the subsequent anti-papist hysteria threatened national security and stability. Many people believed that England was on the brink of another civil war. Dryden argues as much in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) when he calls attention to the “giddy Jews[‘s]” propensity to rebel: “And once in twenty years, their scribes record, / By natural instinct they change their lord” (ll. 216, 218-19). Charles saw Shaftesbury’s attempts to exclude James from the succession as an infringement on his rights as sovereign. The bipartisan system that emerged as a result of the crises escalated the already tense relations between the government and parliament.

Though many of the plays produced during the four theatrical seasons between 1678 and 1682 addressed the contemporary political crises, all of the Shakespearean adaptations produced at this time are politicized and reflect a Tory philosophy. The plays exhibit a mistrust of mob rule and the calamitous consequences of political in-fighting. They show how “public lunacy” leads to “faultless kings run down by common cry / For vice, oppression, and for tyranny” (*Absalom and Achitophel*, ll. 788, 784-84). By exploring themes of political unrest and banishment, the plays demonstrate the detritus effects—both nationally and within the family—of civil disobedience.

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19 Though first produced in 1678, Shadwell’s Whig adaptation of *Timon of Athens* precedes the Popish Plot, if only by a few months. The chronology has precluded the play from this study. For the politicization of Shakespeare’s plays, see Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text*, 42-46.
The bodies of the characters within the plays are also politicized. They are consequently useful tools in the expression of the playwrights’ political anxieties, especially regarding what it means to be British. Like Charles II, the playwrights turn bodies into props in an attempt to disseminate a Tory ideology of absolute monarchism and to solidify British national identity: they distinguish England and English national character not only from other nationalities but also, and significantly, from past “Englands,” specifically the English national identity of the Interregnum.

The plays give special significance to the bodies of female characters. They present two categories of women: unchaste and politically ambitious women, who are a threat to the state, and chaste, marriageable women whom they exalt as national icons. The playwrights link the bodies of female characters to England; threats to female bodies are often matched by similar threats to England’s borders and soil. England’s purity, these plays suggest, depends on the purity of female bodies. The plays expose the paradoxical effect of putting the female body to the service of nationalist rhetoric: doing so might promote women as national icons, but at the same time, this elevation in status leads to greater control over women’s behavior and sexuality.

In my final two chapters, I focus on comedy in order to identify continuities between these plays and the tragedies and histories that I discuss in chapters two and three. In their discussions of props in Shakespeare’s plays and early modern drama, respectively, Teague and Bruster both acknowledge that “genre strongly influences both the number and kind of props that a play uses.”\footnote{“The Dramatic Life of Objects,” 79; see also tables 3.1 (80) and 3.2 (84), which examine the frequency of props across genre in Shakespeare’s plays (3.1) and in early-modern non-Shakespearean drama (3.2). As Bruster acknowledges, “the frequency of hand props appears to have been more greatly influenced by historical moment than by genre” (“The Dramatic Life of Objects,” 85). Without a similar catalog of props in Restoration drama, I am unable to make the same conclusions regarding number and type of props across the genres. Yet the argument that}
synecdochic (as are the severed body parts and bodies) of characters’ bodies and identities. That is, I explore the use of objects—miniature portraits, containers, and legal documents—that are representative of characters’ bodies and identities. I suggest that the use of these objects is similar to the body parts and bodies: characters circulate them in an attempt to differentiate themselves from others in the plays. The comedies of the Restoration replicate the processes of self-expression that I discuss in my opening chapters.

Comedy’s generic concerns with marriage and money contextualize my discussion of miniatures and containers. In chapter four, “Moving Miniatures and Circulating Bodies in Aphra Behn’s The Rover,” I examine Behn’s female characters, who employ miniature portraits as a means of self-expression. The movement of the women’s miniatures correspond to the similar movement of women’s bodies. The men gain control of the women’s pictures and their bodies. I extend my discussion of the categorization of women by demonstrating how Behn criticizes not only the bifurcation of women into two mutually exclusive categories—virgin and whore—but also how she seeks to offer an alternative to the limited and unsatisfactory options that this division presents women: marriage or prostitution. Through the character of Hellena, Behn spoofs restoration comic convention by drawing attention to the ways in which women can move men. Behn demonstrates some ways in which women can subvert the patriarchal control of female representation for their own benefit.

My final chapter, “Containing Identity in Three Restoration Comedies,” explores the use of boxes, cabinets, and bags as props in William Wycherley’s The Plain Dealer (1677), William Wryderley’s The Rivals (1669), and John Dryden’s Absalom and Achitophel (1681). Different genres require different kinds of objects still obtains. Bodies and body parts as props appear with much less frequency in both comedies and romances. Teague’s “Property Lists for Shakespeare’s Plays (Appendix A, pp. 157-93) and “Property Categories and Frequency” (Appendix B, pp. 195-97; see especially Table B: Frequency of Properties in the Folio) are also useful. Teague discusses props and generic differences at length in chapters 3 and 4 (54-87).

21 Sofer discusses props as “identity metonymies” (Stage Life of Props, 21-22).
Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700), and George Farquhar’s *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (1707). I argue that these objects function as tokens of identity in much the same way as the miniatures of chapter four. They also parallel the use of severed body parts as identity tokens. In the early seventeenth century, the body was considered a sort of cabinet or container that housed a person’s identity. Similarly, the containers that circulate in these three plays, when opened, disclose the legal identities of the characters who own them. The revelatory scenes in which boxes are brought on stage at the end of the plays are similar to Giovanni’s revelation of the heart at the end of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*. Both the containers and the heart demonstrate the vulnerability of a person’s identity. Yet unlike the heart, the boxes and their contents are on the one hand more successful in expressing a person’s identity; on the other hand, the boxes are also more vulnerable to theft.

These comedies also reveal the importance of property in the construction and expression of identity. As de Grazia has shown, what one owns directly correlates to who one is.\(^\text{22}\) The Widow Blackacre’s identity as a law-monger is contingent upon her status as a widow and her access to her jointure. Freeman’s “theft” of her bags and her son Jerry as well as his annuity of £400 per year complicate and threaten the Widow’s autonomy. Freeman infringes on the boundaries of the Widow’s selfhood by threatening to deny her the rights that she so values. Devil though Freeman may be, the Widow must make a deal with him in order to preserve her rights.

Freeman’s singling out of the Widow also calls attention to the anxieties that female ownership of property induces in the male characters. De Grazia’s argument regarding the corresponding nature of property and identity is all the more resonant for women who are both

\(^\text{22}\) See, e.g., De Grazia, “Ideology,” 27.
potential property and who have only limited access to ownership of property. Property
ownership accords women rights and responsibilities that they otherwise lack, which in turn
allows them to infringe on the masculine public sphere, to use Jürgen Habermas’s terminology.
These plays, and their props, call attention to the importance of property ownership for women at
the same time that they demonstrate the increasingly limited access that women had to property.
As the Widow Blackacre’s plight demonstrates, property ownership allows women to escape,
however conditionally, their prescribed, and often oppressive, roles as second-class citizens.

The stage properties that I examine throughout this dissertation reveal the playwrights’
awareness of objects as an important apparatus in the expression of identity. The playwrights
also acknowledge that these objects make vulnerable the boundaries of selfhood that the
characters wish to protect. The props both help and hinder the characters’ attempts of
differentiation. Once circulated on stage, the interpretation of these objects often becomes
contested; the characters’ identities frequently become contested as well. Redefinition, even only
potentially, of the object threatens to undermine an identity that a person creates for himself or
herself, causing the individual always to work against external interpretations of his or her
identity. The body parts and bodies, miniatures, and containers help make visible the negotiated
process of individuation. They demonstrate the externalization of identity and the importance of
these externals in the legitimation England’s subjects. In doing so, they also reveal some ways
people during the early modern era understood and responded to changing conceptions of the
individual.
CHAPTER 2

MUTILATED MEMBERS AND SEPARATE SUBJECTS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY REVENGE TRAGEDY

In act 3, scene 6 of Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1607), the body part that ought to be most recognizable is not recognizable at all. Ambitioso and Supervacuo, the Duke’s stepsons, are presented with their younger brother’s “yet bleeding head” (3.6.35), but they cannot identify him. In fact, they initially mistake Junior Brother’s head for Lussurioso’s. Only when Lussurioso enters the stage do they realize their mistake. After Lussurioso’s exit, Ambitioso accuses the officer, “Slave, cam’st thou to delude us?” He asks to see the severed head again, and again he does not recognize it: “Who’s head’s that then?” he asks (3.6.71, 80). Ambitioso and Supervacuo must be told that the severed head is Junior Brother’s. This scene takes up in smaller scale the play’s larger investigation of the relationship among bodies, body parts, and identity.

Six years before the first production of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Hamlet, who is himself consumed with questions of identity and inwardness, demonstrated a similar confusion when confronted with Yorick’s skull:

1. *Clo.* Here’s a skull now hath lien you i’ th’ earth three and twenty years.

*Ham.* Whose was it?

1. *Clo.* A whoreson mad fellow’s it was: whose do you think it was

*Ham.* Nay, I know not. (5.1.173-78)


The gravedigger, like the officer, must tell Hamlet to whom the skull belonged: “This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick’s skull, the King’s jester.” And Hamlet asks, doubtfully, “This?” (5.1.173-182). The prince cannot identify the remains of his once-beloved jester. Only when named by others are the head and the skull identifiable. The uniqueness once ascribed to the body parts no longer obtains. The skull, like the head, loses its transcendent value.

These confrontations with human remains reveal a complex question that is explored in many early seventeenth-century tragedies, especially revenge tragedies: to what extent can people rely on the body as an object of knowledge, not only of the macrocosmic and microcosmic worlds to which it was often analogized, but also as an object of knowledge about the self? In *Hamlet*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), and John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1629-33), severed body parts function as a kind of forensic proof as the revengers use them in their attempts to distribute personal, not legal, justice. However, the proof that the characters seek is not substantiated by the available evidence because the characters’ invest severed body parts with meanings beyond their material significations. As the objects by which the revengers endeavor to differentiate themselves from others, the severed body parts become a means of self-expression, the other’s severed body a gauge of one’s integrity. Yet much as severed body parts fail as reliable proof, so too do they fail to establish fully the identities of the people who use them. This, I argue, is their greatest epistemological failure. The differentiation between self and other that the revengers desire proves elusive, or even fantastic.

In the early modern era, the human body was as an object of knowledge of both world and self. Gail Kern Paster emphasizes the analogical nature of early modern thought:
Analogy bore the imprint of God, the visible workings of divine patterning. It organized the world in a network of mutual functionality that enlivened all animate life in a hierarchical continuum of ensoulment (empsychos), ascending from vegetables to imperfect animals such as sponges, to perfect animals such as birds and mammals, and finally to the human being, uniquely endowed with an intellective soul.\(^3\)

The human body was central to constructing and understanding these analogies. A model for structuring social and political institutions and interpreting natural phenomena, the body was “[c]onventionally [understood] as an image of the world,”\(^4\) the key through which to interpret “divine patterning.”\(^5\)

The “discovery” of the body in anatomy theaters, which flourished after the publication of Andreas Vesalius’s *Humani corporis fabrica* (1543), enhanced the belief in the body as an object through which humans could better understand the world.\(^6\) The anatomists’ rending of the body was not merely a scientific endeavor but one with philosophical, religious, and political implications. Anatomy was considered a “pathway to truth,” the body the object of knowledge via which humans could obtain that truth.\(^7\) Anatomists partitioned the body into ever smaller pieces for the purposes of constructing a “new ‘body’ of knowledge.”\(^8\) Through observation,

\(^4\) Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 4.
\(^5\) For more on the body and analogy, see David A. Hillman and Carla Mazzio, who state, “the spatially imagined body was perhaps the most common vehicle for the making of social and cosmic metaphors in early modern Europe” (Introduction, in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Hillman and Mazzio [New York: Routledge, 1997], xiii).
\(^6\) Michael Neill argues, “Like the macrocosm with which it was habitually analogized, the microcosmic body was to be treated as a site of discovery, with important consequences for the understanding of human biology and pathology” (*Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 104).
\(^7\) Devon Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 2. Hodges makes useful comparisons between anatomy as a medical procedure and anatomy as a rhetorical device.
experimentation, vivisection of animals, and comparative anatomy, anatomists mapped the corporeal geography of the body in order to make visible its as yet uncharted territories.

The greatest mystery of the human body, the territory anatomists most hoped to discover, was the self thought to be hidden within the body’s protective layers. For Helkiah Crooke, writing in 1615, “Anatomy is as it were a most certaine and sure guide to the admirable and most excellent knowledge of our selves, that is of our owne proper nature.” Yet the partitioning of the body in anatomy theaters challenged the notion that the self was located within the body. For all the pressure on the body to convey a person’s identity, it seemed increasingly to become an impediment to that self-expression. The empirical examination of the body in the anatomy theater, while offering knowledge about the body’s function and structure, demystifies the symbolic nature of the body. The desire to achieve an empirical understanding of the body diminished the kinds of truths made available through the body. While anatomists could learn about the body’s physiology (for example, William Harvey’s discovery of circulation), the body, even in the moments of its most blatant exposure, confounds the attainment of epistemological certitude. The process of anatomy exposes the anatomists’ inability fully to control the body’s signification in the first place.

The “culture of dissection,” to borrow Jonathan Sawday’s phrase, of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was matched in the drama of the period by a similar proliferation of dismembered and fragmented bodies. Tragedies and history plays alike present audiences with the violent destruction of character’s bodies. Hands, fingers, heads, limbs, and tongues—body parts that are especially meaningful in the location of the self within the body—frequently

10 Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, viii (but see also viii-ix). Margaret Owens notes that “severed heads and dismembered body parts turn up with remarkable frequency in late medieval and Renaissance drama” (*Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005], 13).
circulate on stage. The revenge tragedies of the early seventeenth century reenact the fragmentation of the body in search of truth that occurred during the anatomy theaters. The emphasis on the body as an object of knowledge applies also to these single body parts. Characters in these plays rely on severed body parts as proof of their actions and assertions. Both the gravedigger in *Hamlet* and the officer in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, to return to my opening examples, use the skull and head, respectively, as proof, in this case of the identities of the people to whom the body parts were once attached. The officer not only hopes to prove with Junior Brother’s head that he has fulfilled the Duke’s orders, but he also uses it to verify exactly which brother he has executed.

Like the gravedigger and the officer, Ferdinand, Vindice, and Giovanni use a severed body part to identify a person. Ferdinand implies that the dead man’s hand that he gives the Duchess belongs to Antonio. Though Vindice names only once the skull that he carries during the first three acts of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, his first address to the skull in the play’s opening scene makes clear his insistence that the skull, “[o]nce the bright face of [his] betrothed lady,” is Gloriana’s (1.1.16). For Giovanni, Annabella’s heart represents her roles as his sister, his lover, and “mother to [his] child unborn” (5.6.50). It is perhaps this impulse to locate Annabella’s true self that compels Giovanni to rend open her body. He has read her letter calling off their affair, but he does not believe her. Giovanni cannot reach the recesses of Annabella’s interiority through the letter, so he digs deeper into her bodily interior to find it. His opening of the letter prefigures the scene in which he enters the stage “*with a heart upon a dagger*” (5.6.9). Just as he “Unrip[s] the seal” to the letter, Giovanni “unrips the seal” of Annabella’s chest to see inside her

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11 See, for example, the essays by Nancy J. Vickers (3-22), Carla Mazzio (53-80), David Hillman (81-106), Stephen Greenblatt (221-242), and Katherine Rowe (285-309) in Hillman and Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts.*
12 John Ford, ‘*Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1629-33), in *The Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama*, ed. David Bevington (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002). All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.
body (5.3.23). When Giovanni shows the heart on a dagger to Soranzo and his guests, he believes that his audience will recognize that the heart is Annabella’s.

Where for the gravedigger and the officer identification of a body part is an end in itself, for the revengers, identification is a means to an end. Their use of severed body parts is at once more layered and more complex than the gravedigger’s and the officer’s. The need to identify the body parts results in part because the revengers also hope to substantiate their claims that they have either been the victims of others’ crimes or that they have committed crimes themselves. In the opening scene of The Revenger’s Tragedy, Vindice uses Gloriana’s skull as proof of the Duke’s murderous lust. His token of revenge, Gloriana’s remains are for Vindice a constant reminder of the crimes enacted against his fiancée, his family, and himself. He addresses the skull:

Thee when thou wert appareled in thy flesh

The old Duke poisoned,

Because thy purer part would not consent

Unto his palsy lust; for old men lustful

Do show like young men, angry, eager, violent,

Outbid like their limited performances.

Oh, ’ware an old man hot and vicious! (1.1.31-37)

The skull represents the deadly consequences of unnaturally lustful old men and verifies the corruption of the court from which Giovanni has dissociated himself. Its reduction to bone, its lack of flesh, exacerbates the image of grotesque consumption by the “fat folks” of the court who adorn themselves in “costly three-piled flesh” (11. 45-46). When Vindice reveals Gloriana’s skull to the Duke in act 3, scene 5—when he trespasses the law and commits murder—Vindice
again insists on the skull as proof of the Duke’s crime: “Duke, dost know / Yon dreadful vizard? View it well; ’tis the skull / Of Gloriana, whom thou poisoned’st last” (3.5.147-49). For the play’s first three acts, Gloriana’s skull represents not only the murdered woman but also the corruption, lechery, and gluttony of the society that Vindice so disdains. She is a reminder both of the evils that he wishes to purge from his society and of the loved ones he has lost because of those evils. As Vindice’s “study’s ornament,” moreover, Gloriana’s skull is for all appearances an object of contemplation in the memento mori tradition. Yet the implications of Vindice’s address to the skull, his obsession with her death and the court’s corruption, suggests that he uses the skull less to contemplate his own mortality than to contemplate and remember the deaths of Gloriana and his father, both of whom died as a result of the Duke’s malevolence.

Like Vindice, Ferdinand and Giovanni rely on severed body parts to prove criminal acts; they use the hand and heart, respectively, as evidence of the crimes that they have committed. Though audiences eventually learn that the hand Ferdinand leaves with the Duchess is not Antonio’s, he wants her to believe that it is her husband’s: he wants her believe that he has killed Antonio. Giovanni likewise assumes that the heart he shows Soranzo and his guests will convince them that he has murdered Annabella. He enters the stage with Annabella’s heart on his dagger and presents it to the banqueters. In what amounts to a public trial, Giovanni acts as his own prosecutor. He confesses,

Be not amazed. If your misgiving hearts
Shrink at an idle sight, what bloodless fear
Of coward passion would have seized your senses
Had you beheld the rape of life and beauty
Which I have acted? My sister, oh, my sister! (5.6.10-20)
The bleeding heart is for Giovanni proof of his guilt. He willingly submits his evidence to the jury of men who will pass judgment on him for his crimes.

Ferdinand and Giovanni commit their crimes because, like Vindice, they believe that they have been victimized. The Duchess’s hypogamic marriage to Antonio is for Ferdinand an infringement on himself, his family, and the class to which he belongs. He believes that the purity of his family and his class has been tainted by Antonio who, though a steward and a gentleman in his own right, is not of Ferdinand’s and the Duchess’s aristocratic status. Giovanni also perceives himself as a victim because of his sister’s marriage. Annabella’s exogamic marriage to Soranzo is to Giovanni a betrayal of their earlier, preexisting “marriage.” He considers their match as more worthy because of their close kinship. When Giovanni courts Annabella, she tries to deny him by calling attention to their relationship: “You are my brother, Giovanni” (1.2.32). He responds, “You / My sister, Annabella. / I know this”

And could afford you instance why to love
So much the more for this; to which intent
Wise Nature first in your creation meant
To make you mine; else ’t had been sin and foul
To share one beauty to a double soul.

Nearness in birth or blood doth but persuade
A nearer nearness in affection. (1.2.232-40)

In Giovanni’s logic, his and Annabella’s nearness in kinship attests to the legitimacy of their love for each other. It would be a sin, he suggests, not to act on their love. Annabella’s betrayal when she marries Soranzo is consequently not only a betrayal of their love, but it is also a betrayal of their fraternal ties.
The severed body parts serve more than just evidentiary purposes in these plays. They also are the weapons by which Giovanni, Vindice, and Ferdinand commit their crimes. The heart, skull, and hand are prosthetic. As the object by which Vindice kills the Duke, Gloriana’s skull becomes an extension of Vindice. Man and skull act as one agent. Vindice mimics the Duke’s poisonous penetration of Gloriana by poisoning the Duke with Gloriana’s skull and penetrating the Duke with his dagger. Gloriana’s skull is similarly a sign of Vindice’s inwardness. It represents for Vindice a moment in his personal past. As Vindice layers meanings onto the skull, he does so specifically in relationship to himself: “Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love, / My study’s ornament, though shell of death, / Once the bright face of my betrothed lady . . . .” (1.1.14-16). Vindice elides the boundaries between himself and Gloriana, marking the skull as an object in which his identity is reflected. Thus when he describes Gloriana in the subsequent lines and “fill[s] out” the skull’s “ragged imperfections” (1.1.17-18), the description is as much about Gloriana’s perfection of beauty and virtue as it is about the prize he lost at her death. Her unparalleled beauty was a direct reflection on himself, distinguishing him from others who settled for “the artificial shine / [o]f any woman’s bought complexion” (1.1.21-22). When Vindice cries to the Duke, “Look, monster, what a lady hast thou made me, / My once betrothed wife” (3.5.167-68), his elision between self and skull is all the more apparent. The former line suggests a merging between man and skull, as if Vindice has been made “a lady” by the Duke’s crimes. He calls attention to his own emasculation. By describing the skull in relation to himself, Vindice, not Gloriana, becomes the ultimate victim of the Duke’s malice.

Ferdinand’s use of the dead man’s hand is perhaps the most literal demonstration of this paradigm whereby characters turn another’s severed body part into a prosthesis. He extends the dead man’s hand in place of his own. His ambiguous language suggests that the Duchess should
take the hand for his own. She appropriately responds to Ferdinand’s peace offering, saying “I will affectionately kiss it [the hand]” (4.1.45). Ferdinand’s reply has the appearance of brotherly affection: “Pray do,” he tells her, “and bury the print of it in your heart.” Understood within the parameters of socially coded exchanges, Ferdinand appears to ask the Duchess to think on him with affection. The hand, and by association the man, should be permanently fixed in her emotions. Ferdinand relies on the language of love and friendship in the rest of this passage, heightening the sense of reconciliation. He says,

I will leave this ring with you for a love token,
And the hand, as sure as the ring; and do not doubt
But you shall have the heart too. When you need a friend,
Send it to him that owed it; you shall see
Whether he can aid you. (4.1.45-51)

The ring, hand, and heart that Ferdinand offers to leave the Duchess are further signs of his affection. In those moments before the Duchess realizes that the hand she holds is not her brother’s, the hand is, for all intents and purposes, an extension of her brother.

By proving their crimes, and thereby the ways that they have been victimized, the revengers desire to prove their own integrity. They want most to differentiate themselves from those characters, and the societies, that they deem corrupt and contaminated. The severed body parts represent the revengers’ identities. Ferdinand, Giovanni, and Vindice turn the body parts into signs of themselves. They are a means of self-expression, a visual demonstration of the boundaries of selfhood. Giovanni believes that in displaying Annabella’s heart he displays not

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only Annabella but also himself: the heart is one “in which [his] is entombed” (5.6.27). It is an extension of himself, the externalization of his own interiority.

As a genre, revenge tragedy is concerned, almost obsessively, with the problems of self-expression. And no character is more consumed by inwardness and a person’s ability to differentiate himself from others than Hamlet. Hamlet’s first line—“A little more than kin, and less than kind” (1.2.64-65)—calls immediate attention to his pressing desire to distinguish himself from others, especially Claudius. He suggests an inverse relationship between his kinship to Claudius and what he perceives as their very real categorical differences. Paster suggests that even Hamlet’s choice of clothing, his “inky cloak” and “customary suits of solemn black” (1.2.77-78), “expresses his desire not to blend in,”\(^{14}\) that is, his need to make the distinctions between himself and others as perceptible as possible. In this, he has much in common with Vindice, Ferdinand, and Giovanni. Each of these characters wants to shore up the boundaries of his selfhood and make visible his differences from other characters.

All four revengers position themselves on the margins of their societies, demonstrating their desire to differentiate themselves. They separate themselves from others in an attempt to protect the vulnerable boundaries of their selfhood. Vindice has isolated himself from the court, apparently for an extended period of time because Lussurioso does not recognize him. Both he and Hamlet, in their first appearances on stage, enter with the court but dissociate themselves from the ostentatious pageantry, commenting on its corruption and condemning it through speech and spatial distance. Even Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, who depends upon those lower in class than he as a means to gauge his own social position, repudiates those very people and insulates himself within his own class.

\(^{14}\) Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 36.
Giovanni is likewise a stranger to his society. Not even Annabella recognize him. She sees Giovanni and turns to Putana,

But see, Putana, see: what blessed shape
Of some celestial creature now appears?
What man is he that with such sad aspect
Walks careless of himself? (1.2.31-34)

Putana tells Annabella, “‘tis your brother,” and Annabella seems incredulous. “Ha!” she says, “Sure ’tis not he. This is some woeful thing / Wrapped up in grief, some shadow of a man” (1.2.35-37).

The Friar’s opening admonition to Giovanni to “[d]ispute no more” on his more-than-brotherly love for Annabella marginalizes the scholar even more (1.1.1). Giovanni is “lost” (1.1.35); a victim of an acute lovesickness, Giovanni, the Friar suggests, must take immediate action in order to reintegrate himself within the bounds of socially acceptable behavior before his disease progresses to untreatable stages. As if Giovanni’s prohibited desire could contaminate the Friar, he tells Giovanni, “No more! I may not hear it” (1.1.12). From the Friar’s point of view, Giovanni is a threat to court and state: he must be quarantined. The Friar tells him, “Hie to thy father’s house. There lock thee fast / Alone within thy chamber . . . . For seven days’ space” (1.1.69-78). Though Ford’s play marks Giovanni as an outsider from the beginning, it also, like Hamlet, The Revenger’s Tragedy, and The Duchess of Malfi, takes pains to establish the corruption of the political and social authorities within the play. Giovanni’s forbidden lust is set directly against the Cardinal’s and even Soranzo’s malfeasance.

I have delayed an extended discussion of Hamlet because, for all his similarities to Vindice, Ferdinand, and Giovanni, his understanding of his own identity is significantly
different. Where other revengers, both his prototypes (e.g., Hieronymo and Titus) and his successors, exhibit an absolute belief in their own integrity, Hamlet is at all times aware of its vulnerability. He dissects his mother’s choice of words when she remonstrates him for mourning his father too long. Having noted the “common” fact of human mortality, she asks Hamlet, “If it be, / Why seems it so particular with thee?” (1.2.74-75). He answers,


Seems, madam? nay, it is, I know not “seems.”

’Tis not alone my inky cloak, [good] mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspension of forc’d breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected ’havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, [shapes] of grief,
That can [denote] me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show,
These but the trappings and the suits of Woe. (1.2.76-86)

Hamlet believes in his own integrity, but he acknowledges its complexity in a way that the other revengers do not. In her excellent reading of this passage, Katherine Eisaman Maus says,

Hamlet distinguishes between the elaborate external rituals of mourning and an inner, invisible anguish. His black attire, his sigh, his tear fail to denote him truly not because they are false—Hamlet’s sorrow for his father is sincere—but because they might be false, because some other person might conceivably employ them deceitfully. Even
reliable indicators or symptoms of his distress become suspect, simply because they are defined as indicators or symptoms.\textsuperscript{15}

In acknowledging the possibility of falsehood, Hamlet also acknowledges that those mechanisms of self-expression available to him are always imprecise, that the “true” Hamlet is always at a remove from the Hamlet others meet. They leave him open to the possibility of misinterpretation, just as his mother misinterprets the extent of his grief. The disparities between Hamlet and Claudius and his father and Claudius that Hamlet would like to measure precisely can only be conveyed in approximations. Thus his dependence on analogy and antithesis—his “So excellent a king; that was to this / Hyperion to a satyr” (1.2.139-40)—rhetorical displays that are no more precise in their denotation than the “trappings and suits of woe.” They approximate the breadth of the disparity between Claudius and Old Hamlet, but they also point up that these differences cannot be communicated with the exactness that Hamlet would like. Hamlet’s predicament calls attention to “the importance in English Renaissance culture of two fantasies: one, that selves are obscure, hidden ineffable; the other, that they are fully manifest or capable of being made fully manifest. These seem to be contradictory notions, but again and again they are voiced together, so that they seem less self-canceling than symbiotically related or mutually constitutive.”\textsuperscript{16} For example, Hamlet believes that he can know others but that they cannot know him; he can “tent [Claudius] to the quick,” but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot “pluck out the heart of [his] mystery” (2.2.397; 3.2.365-66). On the other hand, Hamlet’s disdain for “the trappings and the suits of woe” is tied up with a fear of being unable to express himself fully; the possibility of deceit means that the Hamlet others know is always, potentially, a false Hamlet.

\textsuperscript{16} Maus, \textit{Inwardness}, 28-29.
Hamlet’s secrecy throughout the play suggests that he would rather withhold his identity from others than risk being misinterpreted by them. Nine times he enjoins Horatio and Marcellus “[n]ever [to] make known what [they] have seen” after his encounter with his father’s ghost (1.5.144). He swears them to secrecy because of his fear that they “will reveal it” to others (1.5.19), thereby potentially corrupting the ghost’s story. Yet it is not only the ghost’s existence he wishes them to keep secret. He tells them,

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd some’er I bear myself—
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on—
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
With arms encumb’red thus, or this headshake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As “Well, well, we know,” or “We could, and if we would,”
Or “If we list to speak,” or “There be, and if they might,”
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught of me—this do swear,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you. (1.5.169-180)

Hamlet wishes them to keep secret the cause of his “antic disposition” because he fears that they will undermine his attempt to discover the truth of the ghost’s admission. As much as he disdains the ambiguity of outward show, Hamlet depends upon this ambiguity in his search for proof of Claudius’s crime.
Hamlet’s comprehension of his vulnerability is also evident in his awareness of the ethical paradox of revenge. As much as he desires retribution for his father’s murder, he recognizes as well that killing Claudius through vengeful means will ultimately make him more like Claudius and less like the father he revere. Hamlet delays not because he questions whether he should kill Claudius but because he questions how he should kill his uncle. Where the other revengers are impulsive and quick to action, sometimes regretting their rashness as Ferdinand does when he stands over his sister’s body, Hamlet labors over what action he ought to take.

Hamlet’s delay distinguishes him from the other revengers, who wish to demonstrate a truth to others, not discover a truth for themselves. They already believe in the veracity of their claims and the legitimacy of their actions. This discrepancy is evident in the different uses that the other revengers and Hamlet make of severed body parts. Gloriana’s skull, the dead man’s hand, and Annabella’s heart are proof for Vindice, Ferdinand, and Giovanni of their ability to differentiate themselves from others. The men use these body parts as signs of themselves; Hamlet does not. Where Hamlet recognizes his eventual mortality when confronted with Yorick’s skull, Vindice, Ferdinand, and Giovanni fail to recognize the ways in which their use of these objects reflects their own inevitably mortality back onto them. They may project multiple meanings onto these objects, as Ferdinand does when he first extends the hand to the Duchess and as Vindice does when he first speaks to Gloriana’s skull; but ultimately, they insist upon the singularity of each object’s meaning by associating it with a particular person.

Hamlet is aware, however, of the skull’s interpretive potential. He is wary of Yorick’s skull when the gravedigger hands it to him. Hamlet has spent the first half of this scene playing with the possibilities of the other skulls’ meanings. The skulls could have been the “pate of a politician,” a courtier, a lady, or a lawyer. Yet the implications of Hamlet’s assertions undermine
his lightheartedness. In acknowledging the possibilities of the skulls’ identities, he acknowledges as well his desire to make meaningful distinctions in the face of death. He acknowledges the importance of the very trappings that he scorns in his first speech to his mother. He says, “Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? . . . This fellow might be in ’s time a great buyer of land, with his statues, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries” (5.1.98-106). These quiddities and quillities, Hamlet suggests, are the very things that the lawyer needs in order to denote his identity as a lawyer. Hamlet is caught in a double bind. Like Ferdinand who needs the lower classes in order to assert his own social status, Hamlet needs the very trappings that he disdains in order to assert his own identity.

Hamlet calls attention to the importance of outward signs when the gravedigger hands him Yorick’s skull. He says,

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorr’d in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss’d I know not how oft. . . .
Where be your gives now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table a roar. (5.1.184-91)

In fact, the general movement of this passage is from fully embodied man to symbolic skull. Hamlet first addresses the skull as Yorick, but by the end of this speech, Hamlet has reverted to traditional symbolism, associating the “chop-fall’n” skull he holds less with Yorick the man than as a vanitas emblem: “Now get you to my lady’s [chamber], and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come; make her laugh at that” (5.1.192-95). Hamlet is unable to sustain a precise allocation of identity to the skull. The skull could be anybody’s.
For Hamlet, Yorick’s skull is yet another reminder of his own vulnerability; but for Giovanni, Ferdinand, and Vindice, the fragmented body of another becomes a gauge of their own integrity, their destruction of other people’s bodies a reclamation of their selfhood. They fragment others’ bodies in order to recuperate their own identities. Through their acts of revenge, Giovanni, Ferdinand, and Vindice not only seek personal justice against those who have wronged them, but they also attempt to shore up the boundaries of their selfhood. The circulation of the body parts inverts the exchange of women’s bodies in the marriage market. Rather than forging homosocial bonds, the use of body parts in these plays is generally to demarcate the boundaries between men. The body parts are not a means to alliance and sameness but a means of differentiation. After he poisons the Duke and before he and Hippolito nail the Duke’s tongue to the floor, Vindice forces the Duke to stare at the skull: “Look, monster, what a lady has thou made me, / My once betrothed wife” (3.5.167-69). Vindice reveals himself by revealing the skull. The Duke asks, “Is it thou, villain?” As the Duke’s body disintegrates (his “teeth are eaten out”), Vindice affirms his identity: “‘Tis I, ’tis Vindice, ’tis I,” he asserts (3.5.170). Having throughout the play imagined himself in a feminine position, as one who is penetrated by others—for example, by the court’s corruption and when Lussurioso gives him money—Vindice now becomes the penetrator. He imagines himself whole in his act of fragmenting another. At their entrance in act 4, scene 2, Hippolito tells his brother, “So, so, all’s as it should be; you’re yourself” (4.2.1). Though this line ostensibly refers to the fact that Vindice has changed out of his Piato costume, it suggests just as well that Vindice is “himself” in the sense that he has regained that integrity of selfhood that had been damaged when he lost Gloriana and his father.

When Giovanni severs Annabella’s heart from her body, he severs as well all ties to men outside of his family. He tries to regain the purity he perceived in his family and Annabella
before her marriage to Soranzo. It is, moreover, an attempt to thwart Soranzo. He says after he stabs Annabella,

Soranzo, thou hast missed thy aim in this;
I have prevented now thy reaching plots,
And killed a love for whose each drop of blood
I would have pawned my heart. (5.5.99-102)

In order to preserve what he deems his, Giovanni must destroy it. He murders Annabella so that he can “save [her] fame” (5.5.84). Murdering his sister, he suggests, is a testament to his love for her. Ironically, Giovanni’s efforts to “save her fame” destroy Annabella’s reputation all the more, for he outs Annabella and himself as incestuous lovers. He also makes a public declaration of selfhood by openly acknowledge the affair that he and his sister have kept secret from everyone but the Friar. He tells his father, “For nine months’ space, in secret I enjoyed / Sweet Annabella’s sheets; nine months I lived / A happy monarch of her heart and her” (5.6.43-45). Giovanni physically removes Annabella’s heart in an attempt to literalize the metaphor, demonstrating how he is “monarch of her heart” both in her life and in her death, “For,” as he says, “in my fists I bear the twists of life” (5.6.71). He cuts out her heart in order to protect his own integrity.

Where Vindice and Giovanni put female body parts into circulation in order to fortify the boundaries of their selfhood, Ferdinand withholds his sister’s body from circulation when he imprisons her. He endeavors to nullify the Duchess’s marriage by separating his sister from her husband. Moreover, Ferdinand’s ambiguous language when he gives the Duchess the dead man’s hand perverts the socially coded meanings of the handclasp and the exchange of hearts that he has utilized to perplex her. What the Duchess does not realize because she can see neither the
hand nor the ring is that Ferdinand’s language here is not metaphorical. The handclasp in this scene travesties the play’s original handclasp between Antonio and the Duchess. It is as if, by undermining the meanings of the handclasp he can somehow undo the handclasp that joined the Duchess and Antonio in marriage. He implies the end of her marriage by returning to her the ring that she gave Antonio as a sign of her love. The Duchess’s heart is not a storehouse of memory in which to bury the print of her brother’s hand, as Ferdinand implies, but is, instead, the graveyard in which she should bury the print or memory of her husband. Here, as when he has Bosola murder his sister, Ferdinand attempts to bolster his sense of self by isolating what he perceives to be a contaminating agent. He symbolically severs the ties between himself and Antonio. He attempts, like Vindice and Giovanni, to shore up the boundaries of his selfhood and protect his identity from further infringement.

Though Hamlet is disturbed by his double alliance to Claudius, Yorick’s skull is not, like Gloriana’s skull, Ferdinand’s severed hand, or Annabella’s heart, an agent in his revenge. Hamlet does not use the skull; he does not put it into circulation. As Sofer points out, Hamlet “drop[s] the subject”; Sofer argues, “[b]y insisting . . . on Yorick’s essentially emblematic function, Hamlet forestalls the inevitable and defers rather than confronts the truth of his own demise.” Yet Hamlet’s concern is less with the inevitability of death than with “the essential meaninglessness, the nonsense of human existence beneath its metaphoric dress.” Faced with death’s inevitable erasure of those things that distinguish one man from another in life, Hamlet

17 See Dale B. J. Randall, who argues, “It is complexly significant, then, that while supposing she holds her brother’s hand, extended in fraternal peace, the Duchess is told that she holds her husband’s. Only when lights are brought can she see that she holds neither. At this point the audience should see that the Duchess’s own hand and the ‘dead’ one together make a terrible mockery of the image of the sacramentally endorsed ‘hand in hand.’ What Webster has given us is a potent visual reminder of that well-developed earlier scene in which the Duchess takes Antonio’s hand, places a ring up on his finger, and marries him” (“The Rank and Earthy Background of Certain Physical Symbols in The Duchess of Malfi,” Renaissance Drama 19 [1987]: 175).

18 Andrew Sofer, The Stage Life of Props (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 94, 97-98. Sofer argues that both Yorick’s skull and Gloriana’s “[take] on an active role that undermines the very selfhood the protagonists seek to establish” (92). For more on the “anamorphic” qualities of skulls as stage props, see 89-115.
must ultimately come to terms with his reliance on “the trappings and the suits” that mark the boundaries between him and other people; he must accept these imprecisions.

In the conclusion of this scene, Hamlet does just that. He is stunned to discover that the funeral procession that he and Horatio witness is Ophelia’s. He watches as Laertes, overcome with grief, leaps into Ophelia’s grave. Yet Hamlet will not be outdone in his grief for Ophelia. He reveals himself to the cortege and says,

>What is he whose grief
> Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow
> Conjures the wand’ring stars and makes them stand
> Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,

>Hamlet the Dane! (5.1.254-58)

Hamlet contradicts here his earlier disavowal of “the trappings and suits of woe” (1.2.86). His grief, he suggests, is more deeply felt than Laertes’. His grief requires the “emphasis,” the dramatic displays and the “phrase[s] of sorrow” so profound that they “[conjure] the wand’ring stars.” But these displays are little different from the “customary suits” and “windy suspirations,” the fruitful river in the eye” and the “dejected ’havior of the visage” that he earlier says cannot “denote [him] truly” (1.2.83). If anything, they are more emphatic. The grammatical construction of the passage is telling. In answer to his question “What is he,” Hamlet says, “This is I,” the verb indicating a direct equivalence between the external manifestation of his sorrow and his identity. Hamlet names himself, thereby making his most pronounced articulation of selfhood in the entire play. Hamlet makes no distinction between the external signifiers of his interiority and that interiority. They are the one and the same. He suggests, in other words, that these externals do indeed denote him truly. In many ways, then, this moment answers the question with which
the play opens (“Who’s there?”), a question that introduces the play’s thematic concerns. That Hamlet makes this declaration over Ophelia’s coffin is not insignificant, for, like the other revengers, it is a dead body (a female body, no less) that becomes the impetus for his declaration of difference. Unlike the other revengers however, he does not invest this body with his own identity.

Although Giovanni, Ferdinand, and Vindice believe that the body parts will verify their claims, the severed parts frequently fail to prove anything at all. Giovanni cannot confirm without corroborating evidence that the heart he holds belonged to his sister. His audience—like Hamlet and Ambitioso and Supervacuo—must be told whom the part came from. Their inability to recognize the heart mimics Annabella’s inability to recognize Giovanni when she first sees him. The Cardinal’s line on first seeing the spectacle sums well the failure of a body part to fulfill the evidentiary purposes to which it is put: “What means this?” he asks (5.6.14). Frustrated, Giovanni asks again, “Look well upon’t. D’ye know it?” (5.6.28), but neither his previous reference to Annabella (“My sister, oh, my sister!”) nor his confession sufficiently registers the association of woman and organ. The heart confuses rather than clarifies. “What strange riddle’s this?” asks Vasques (5.6.29). The heart is not the reliable evidence that Giovanni wishes it were.

Giovanni cannot prove his own guilt. Though brandishing the heart, Giovanni must assert his guilt no less than five times before his audience believes him. In lines 10 through 14, Giovanni displays the bloody heart, assuming that Soranzo will immediately know that the heart is Annabella’s. When Soranzo cannot interpret Giovanni’s actions or his words, Giovanni refines his language, explicitly stating the “rape of life and beauty” that he “has acted” (5.6.16-20). As
his confessions progress, Giovanni must resort to an ever-increasing specificity in his language in order to frame the spectacle he presents to the banqueters:

'Tis Annabella’s heart, ’tis. Why d’ee startle?
I vow ’tis hers. This dagger’s point plowed up
Her fruitful womb, and left to me the fame
Of a most glorious executioner. (5.6.30-33).

Here, Giovanni mentions Annabella by name and calls attention to the dagger that he holds in order to make the association between the two more obvious. The repetition of “’tis” and the adamancy with which Giovanni asserts his crime emphasizes his urgency to communicate what he has done and his increasing frustration at his inability to do so. The heart cannot convey of its own accord what Giovanni wants to express. It is inadequate proof of his crime.

When Soranzo sends Vasques in search of Annabella, Giovanni describes his crime more precisely:

Do sir. Have you all no faith
To credit yet my triumphs? Here I swear
By all that you call sacred, by the love
I bore my Annabella whilst she lived
These hands have from her Bosom ripped this heart. (5.6.55-59)

The dramatic entrance and display that Giovanni desired are reduced to perpetual repetition until Vasques returns to verify Giovanni’s claims. Neither the heart nor Giovanni’s words signify successfully the claims he uses them to make. Giovanni’s need for precise language exposes the inadequacy and ambiguity of the body parts.
The body parts undermine the veracity of the revengers’ claims. Separation from the body compromises a body part’s functionality, distancing it from its practical purposes as a member of the body. The dead man’s hand cannot grasp the Duchess’s in return, nor can it fulfill its symbolic purpose of “seal[ing] the peace” and affirming social relationships. Moreover, the simultaneous demands on the body parts as objects in and of themselves and as objects associated with the bodies from which they came complicates their signifying functions. The body parts act as objects but must assume the meanings of an entire body, creating a slippage between how they are used and what they mean.

Severed body parts function as the material manifestation of something absent, and the meanings that they generate at least partially derive from the meanings of their absent bodies. Instead of the body experiencing the sensation of a phantom limb, the part experiences a phantom body, so to speak. For example, Hamlet’s initial impulse when the gravedigger gives him Yorick’s skull is not to remark on the skull’s “bonineness” or “skullness”; instead, he imaginatively reconstructs the “complete” Yorick that he knew when Yorick was alive. This is not to suggest that Hamlet ignores the skull’s physical qualities—it does, of course, make him gag—but before this occurs, the skull is imaginatively reconnected to Yorick’s body, the face reconstituted. Though Hamlet is unable to sustain his speculative reconstruction of the skull, before he reverts to the vanitas symbolism, he must imagine the entire Yorick in order to project onto the skull Yorick’s identity. When Hamlet contemplates the fate of Alexander’s remains, it is the look and smell of the skull that he calls attention to: “Dost thou think Alexander look’d a this

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19 Another example occurs in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1622). When De Flores offers Beatrice-Joanna Alonzo’s severed finger, Beatrice emphasizes the part itself when she startles and exclaims, “What hast thou done?” De Flores reminds her that the finger was once a part of “the whole man” (in *The Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Bevington, 3.4.25). He claims that severing the part is only a minor infraction when compared to the greater crime of murder. By enforcing this associating, De Flores restores the link between body and part, insisting on the finger as a sign of the murdered man.
fashion i’ the’ earth? . . . And smelt so? pah!” (5.1.91-100). Hamlet’s physical responses to the skull emphasize the grotesqueness of the object, ultimately diminishing the skull’s symbolic impact.

Vindice’s description of Gloriana’s skull also calls attention to Gloriana’s absent body. In a blazon of sorts, Vindice reconstructs Gloriana’s face, albeit in economic terms. His emphasis on Gloriana’s desirability further enforces the connection between the prop and her body as he progresses from the cold object that he holds to the heat that the living woman once induced in other men.

Oh, she was able to ha’ made a usurer’s son
Melt all his patrimony in a kiss,
And what his father fifty years told
To have consumed, and yet his suit been cold. (1.1.29)

Vindice’s puppeteering in act 3, scene 5 continues the figurative reconstruction of Gloriana’s body that he begins in the opening scene. Through costume and makeup, he reanimates the skull, turning it into an agent of its own revenge.

As characters turn the body parts into signs and overload them with meaning, the symbolic registers in which they frame the parts ultimately collapse. Ferdinand seems to relish the ambiguities of the dead man’s hand. The Duchess has no cause to assume that the hand Ferdinand extends belongs to anyone other than her brother. In the darkness of her chamber, she cannot recognize that the hand does not belong to Ferdinand’s body. The Duchess comments on the hand’s coldness, but attributes this to possible illness: “You are very cold,” she tells Ferdinand, “I fear you are not well after your travel” (4.1.51-52). Her misrecognition exacerbates the imprecision of Ferdinand’s language in the lines prior to and following her acceptance of the
hand. He tells her, “Here’s a hand, / To which you have vowed much love; the ring upon’t you gave” (4.1.43-45). Ferdinand’s could easily refer to himself, as the Duchess assumes. Yet neither Ferdinand’s language nor the prop is conclusive of Antonio’s death. The Duchess misses the allusion to Antonio’s hand.

As if anticipating the Duchess’s inability to associate the hand with Antonio, Ferdinand puts Antonio’s ring on the hand and prepares a display of wax bodies that resemble the bodies of the Duchess’s family. Not until Bosola reveals the bodies in the discovery space does the Duchess believe that the hand is Antonio’s. When the lights come up, the sight of the hand repulses her: “What witchcraft doth he practice, that he hath left / A dead man’s hand?” (4.1.34-35, emphasis added). As the article indicates, the hand is indefinite: it is unrecognizable. The “sad spectacle” of bodies—neither the hand nor even the ring—ensures the Duchess’s belief in Antonio’s death. In the moments between Ferdinand’s exit and the discovery of the corpses, Ferdinand’s “proof” of Antonio’s death is unsuccessful because the hand is unidentifiable. Moreover, the prop signifies falsely. It claims a body to which it does not belong. The Duchess’s “ocular proof,” like Othello’s, is misleading. The body parts require external signifiers to circumscribe their potential meanings. As the emblematic registers containing the hand expand and collapse, so too do the hand’s meanings. Ferdinand belies the hand’s usefulness, emphasizing the gaps in the symbolic allocation of meaning to the body. He has performed well the rites of reconciliation, but he has sealed no peace.

On their own, the severed body parts are insufficient evidence. The heart cannot prove Giovanni’s crime; neither does it effectively stand for Annabella. Giovanni’s inability to express

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20 Peter Stallybrass comments that “Othello’s demand for ‘ocular proof’ is but one example of the obsessively staged desire to see—to trace the body’s surfaces as if they were the visual proof of a finally stabilized signification” (“Reading the Body: The Revenger’s Tragedy and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption,” Renaissance Drama 38 [1987]: 121).
himself clearly demonstrates the tension between a character’s desire to endow a body part with uniqueness and the part’s inability to express that uniqueness. By themselves, body parts resist identification. As if to disprove Giovanni’s claims of murder, Soranzo sends Vasques in search of Annabella, telling Vasques to “[b]ring the strumpet forth” (5.6.54). To make the presence of the heart signify, Vasquez must find its absence. He assumes that she is still alive. When he returns to acknowledge that the heart does indeed belong to Annabella, Vasques stills seems perplexed: “’Tis most strangely true,” he says, as if he is not sure that the body and the heart really do belong to each other. In other words, even when he sees that the heart came from Annabella’s body, there is nothing proper to the heart that marks it specifically as a part of her body.

The body parts are also inadequate proof of the revengers’ identities. When Giovanni states that his heart is “entombed” in Annabella’s, he displaces her identity with his own. Yet he is no more able to express his identity via Annabella’s heart than he is able to identify Annabella with it. Throughout these plays, characters consider the heart a site of truth, demonstrating the cultural phenomenon whereby the heart was “the locus of self.”21 As much as Giovanni insists that his identity resides in Annabella’s heart, so too does he believe that his secrets, his self, reside within his own body. In his opening response to the Friar, Giovanni envisions the body as a sort of cabinet, the heart within it, a smaller, more private compartment in which a person’s most intimate secrets are housed:22

21 Scott Manning Stephens, “Sacred Heart and Secular Brain,” in Hillman and Mazzio, eds., 264. Indeed, characters refer to the heart no less than twenty-eight times in each play. The final tallies are Hamlet, 33; The Revenger’s Tragedy, 28; The Duchess of Malfi, 30; and ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore, 30. I include in this count references to “heartstrings” and “heartaches,” as well as those instances, especially in The Revengers Tragedy, in which “heart” is used as an oath.
22 But see Neill who compares the body to the theatrical discovery space: “It is almost as if the body [in the anatomy theater], like the discovery space which gave the Elizabethan stage it structural focus, existed to challenge the curious gaze, as if it were there to be opened. . . . In a fashion ambiguously poised between the metaphoric and the literal, the interior of the body was imagined as inscribed with the occult truths of the inner self” (Issues of Death,
Gentle father,

To you I have unclasped my burdened soul,

Emptyed the storehouse of my thoughts and heart,

Made myself poor of secrets; have not left

Another word untold which hath not spoke

All what I ever durst, or think, or know. (1.1.12-17)

In his confession, Giovanni imagines that he has “emptied” himself and made visible the secrets stored within the confines of his body. The desire to know oneself and others is thus figured as the ability to see within a person’s body. The corollary of this is that an absolute expression of self requires making visible one’s own interior. For example, when Annabella believes that Giovanni teases her about his love for her, he “Offers his dagger to her” saying,

And here’s my breast. Strike home!

Rip up my bosom; there thou shalt behold

A heart in which is writ the truth I speak. (1.2.209-11)

Annabella might disregard Giovanni’s words, but his heart, he suggests, cannot lie. The heart is both a site of writing and the repository of a person’s secrets. Surveillance of the heart, Giovanni believes, makes available the otherwise inaccessible self. Soranzo, too, demonstrates his belief in this paradigm when Annabella will not tell him the name of her lover. “I’ll rip up thy heart,” he tells her, “And find it there” (4.3.53-54).

123). The sense of inward penetration in order to discover a person’s secrets through the external layers of the body replicates the inward penetration through public then private rooms that Patricia Fumerton discusses in her essay on Elizabethan miniatures and sonnets. Fumerton argues, “‘Publication’ of the miniature . . . while creating a sense of inwardness—and thus appearing to respond to a real need for expressing the inner, private self—could only be achieved after submitting the viewer to a series of outer, public ‘rooms’” (Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], 72).
The association between heart and self is prevalent in other plays of the period as well. In Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (1591), Richard’s equivocation when he woos Anne evokes the secrecy of the heart and its ability, when seen, to betray those secrets. He offers his bare breast to Anne, but he never offers to show her his heart. Richard mimics the posturing of a lover, but his subtle modifications of the language allow him to avoid any real threat of exposure:

My proud heart sues, and prompts my tongue to speak.

....

Lo here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,

Which if thou please to hide in this true breast,

And let the soul forth that adoreth thee,

I lay it naked to the deadly stroke,

And humbly beg the death upon my knee.

*He lays his breast open: she offers at [it] with his sword.* (1.2.174-78)\(^{23}\)

Maus argues that when Richard kneels, he asks Anne to “open him up.”\(^ {24}\) Yet this exactly what Richard does not do. There is no suggestion of ripping or tearing apart his chest, so Anne can see within him. Rather, he asks her to “hide” the sword in his “true breast.” This implies not a “ripping up,” as in Giovanni’s language, but a sheathing of the sword inside his body, which would keep closed or stopped the wound through which Anne ought to be able to see his heart. Richard prevaricates; the only thing he “lays naked” to Anne’s view is his breast; never once does he offer or suggest that she should or can see his heart. He also displaces the supposed

\(^{23}\) All citations are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

truths of his heart onto what was considered the most untrustworthy of organs, the tongue.\textsuperscript{25}

When Richard’s “heart sues,” it “prompts” his tongue to express his emotions. And when Anne says, “I would I knew thy heart,” he again emphasizes instead his words: “‘Tis fig’r’d in my tongue.” (1.2.192-93).\textsuperscript{26} Richard’s failure to disclose the truth, his elision of any sort of revelation is, as Maus says, a “false theater of exposure,” not only because the interior that Richard suggests he has within him is false, but also because he offers to expose nothing.\textsuperscript{27}

The revengers’ inability to contain the meanings of the severed body parts parallels their own inability to fortify the boundaries of their selfhood. Their assertion of difference is ultimately subsumed into a narrative of assimilation, sameness, and, thereby, self-negation.\textsuperscript{28} The acts of revenge by their very nature disprove the integrity that the characters in these plays wish to assert. In enacting their revenge, Vindice, Giovanni, and Ferdinand become like the people that they detest; they infringe upon the boundaries of another’s self in the same ways that they themselves have been or believe they have been infringed upon.

The revengers imagine themselves as antidote to their poisoned societies. To be so, however, they must become like the poison that they want to counteract. In order to infiltrate and

\textsuperscript{25} See, e.g., Carla Mazzio, “Sins of the Tongue,” in Hillman and Mazzio, eds., 53-80. Other dramatic examples of the fear of loose tongues occur when Hieronymo cuts out his own tongue at the end of The Spanish Tragedy (1582-92) to protect his secrets and when Vindice and Hippolito nail the Duke’s tongue to the floor in order to silence him.\textsuperscript{26} When Richard uses the language of exchange, he once more emphasizes concealment, not disclosure. Anne’s breast, he says, “encloseth my poor heart” (1.2.204).

\textsuperscript{27} Maus, Inwardness, 51. Maus contends, “Of course Richard’s interior does not exist, at least not as he has constituted it in his speech, but Anne cannot know whether it does or not, and Richard knows that she cannot know. Baring his breast to her, pleading for a murderous ‘discovery,’ Richard devises a false theater of exposure.” Neill likewise compares these scenes from Richard III and 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore: “Combining this metaphor [regarding the mirroring of destructive passion] with that stock figure of Love’s Cruelty, the lady’s theft of her inamorato’s heart, Giovanni gives the whole complex figure a wildly theatrical twist that may seem to recall Richard of Gloucester’s sardonic parody of courtly devotion before Lady Anne. Unlike the histrionic Richard’s however, Giovanni’s posturing is a kind of deadly earnest, marked by that sudden explosion of emotions; and so that it shall not be forgotten, the language of the play keeps the old emblems of Love’s Cruelty constantly active in the audience’s mind” (“‘What Strange Riddle’s This?’: Deciphering 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” in John Ford: Critical Re-Visions, ed. Neill [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 173).

\textsuperscript{28} For a more positive reading of moments of self-negation in Renaissance literature, see Cynthia Marshall, The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
purify the system, they must become like that system, if not in intention then in action, often exceeding in their retribution the initial wrongs against them. Soranzo has “stolen” Annabella’s heart from Giovanni, so Giovanni literally takes her heart back. Vindice’s penetration of the Duke’s body is repetitive and incremental. Each penetration becomes a more intense replication of Gloriana’s initial penetration until Vindice surpasses in his own retribution the Duke’s original crime. He accompanies his gleeful assault on the Duke’s corpse with sound effects, as he turns the postmortem assault into a macabre, one-sided fencing match: “Sa, sa, sa; thump!” (5.1.64). Vindice delights in the profuseness of his violence.

Even Hamlet’s decision not to kill Claudius while he is praying exemplifies the excessiveness of the revengers’ retribution. Hamlet says, “Now might I do it [pat], now ’a is a-praying / And now I’ll do’t—and so ’a goes to heaven,” which Hamlet decides is “not revenge” (3.4.73-74, 79). He prefers to wait until he catches Claudius “about some act / That has no relish of salvation in’t . . . [so] that his soul may be as damn’d and black / As hell, whereto it goes” (3.4.91-95). The revengers’ tit-for-tat (and then some) mentality leads them to commit crimes that are worse and more violent than the original crimes that they want to revenge.

The revengers are no more able to shore up the boundaries of their selfhood than they are able to prove their claims with the severed body parts. Giovanni kills the person he loves most; and, even with Annabella’s heart in his hand, he is unable to convey either his or Annabella’s identities. To the banqueters, he is not a man expressing his love for his sister-lover, but a “frantic madman” and a “Monster of children” (5.6.42, 62), the “Inhuman scorn of men” (5.6.69). To them, he is less than human. Ferdinand loses not only his “dearest friend” as a result of the Duchess’s murder (5.1.279), but he also begins his descent into madness and lycanthropy. He says that his revenge resulted from “a distract[ion] of my wits,” that “her marriage . . . drew a
stream of gall quite through my heart” (5.1.278, 285-86); yet it is only after he has viewed her body and mourned his impulsiveness that he begins to exhibit any sort of “distraction.” His attempts to protect his integrity are not rehabilitating; they are, instead, self-cancelling. In act 5, scene 2, the doctor explains Ferdinand’s illness:

In those that are possessed [with lycanthropy] there o’erflows

Such melancholy humor they imagine

Themselves to be transformed into wolves,

Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night

And dig dead bodies up—as two nights since

One met the Duke ’bout midnight in a lane

Behind Saint Mark’s Church, with the leg of a man

Upon his shoulder; and he howled fearfully;

Said he was a wolf, only the difference

Was, a wolf’s skin was hairy on the outside,

His on the inside; bade them take their swords

Rip up his flesh . . . . (5.2.8-10)

Where the banqueters call Giovanni inhuman, Ferdinand self-identifies as such. He believes that he is an animal. And in his request for someone to “rip up his flesh,” he calls for his own mutilation and death.

Vindice acknowledges his own self-cancelling behavior. Throughout the play, Vindice performs multiple identities, each time eliding the differences between these selves and his, which challenges the notion that a true or real Vindice exists in the first place. He conflates his own identity and his honor with Piato’s. Having sworn an oath to Lussurioso while pretending to
be Piato, Vindice insists that he must keep this promise even though the promise is not his own (that is, Vindice’s). He must do so, he says, in order to “maintain [his] shape” (3.5.16). Vindice again conflates his identity with Piato’s when Lussurioso hires him (as Vindice) to kill Piato. Lussurioso asks him, “You know him: that slave-pander, / Piato, whom we threatened last / With irons in perpetual prisonment” (4.2.131-33). Vindice’s aside is telling; he says, “All this is I’” (4.2.134). Vindice also performs himself in this scene. When Hippolito brings Vindice to meet Lussurioso, Hippolito says, “How will you appear in fashion different, / As well as in apparel, to make all this possible?” (4.2.22-23). Vindice replies,

Why, I’ll bear me in some strain of melancholy,
And string myself with heavy-sounding wire,
Like such an instrument that speaks
Merry sadly things. (4.2.27-30)

Vindice muddles the boundaries between his selves all the more when he and Hippolito drag the Duke’s body, which they have dressed as Piato, onto the stage. He says,

I must kill myself. Brother, that’s I; that sits for me. Do you mark it? And I must stand ready here to make away myself yonder—I must sit to be killed, and stand to kill myself.
I could vary it not so little as thrice over again; ’t has some eight returns, like Michaelmas term. (5.1.4-9)

Unable successfully to police the boundaries between being and seeming, Vindice does indeed become his own enemy. As he aptly says, “’Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes” (5.3.130). Vindice’s protean selves belie the existence of a singular, knowable Vindice; the multiplication of Vindice’s identities throughout the play leads to his effacement.
Vindice’s, Ferdinand’s, and Giovanni’s self-assertion leads to their eventual self-negation. They are a casualty of their own attempts to purge their societies of contamination. In a way, the severed body parts that they put into circulation are like religious relics in that they memorialize the dead. Gloriana’s and Yorick’s skulls stand in for the people whom Vindice and Giovanni once loved. As tokens of revenge, and often the objects through which characters obtain their revenge, they help purge and reunify poisoned societies. Yet the body parts lack the apotropaic values usually associated with relics in Pre-Reformation England. They do not ward off evil, and their restorative powers are, at best, limited. By the end of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, there is no sense of a healed society. The Duke and his corrupt family have been killed, but Antonio’s ascendency to the dukedom does not suggest a society that is any less corrupt. His need to execute Vindice and Hippolito implies that he will expose himself to resentment much as the former duke did. The play nods at a restored order, but the sense is that restoration is not necessarily permanent. *'Tis Pity She’s a Whore* presents a similar pessimism. The Cardinal speaks the plays final lines, suggesting that he will restore the society to order, yet he is himself a corrupt individual.

The use of severed body parts as stage props in the revenge tragedies of the early seventeenth century emphasizes to the complex nature of self-expression. The body parts’ frequent inability to signify adequately the meanings with which the characters invest them mimics the fraught process of individuation that results, at least partially, from the belief in a disparity between a knowable exterior and a secret interior.29 The mechanisms that protect the individual from probing inquisitors are also the mechanisms that hinder self-expression. Even Hamlet, who of all the revengers is most successful in shoring up the boundaries of his selfhood,

29 See especially Maus, who argues, “in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England the sense of discrepancy between ‘inward disposition’ and ‘outward appearance’ seems unusually urgent and consequential for a very large number of people, who occupy virtually every position on the ideological spectrum” (*Inwardness*, 13).
must rely on Horatio to “tell [his] story” (5.2.349). The plays consequently reveal the importance of external signifiers in the expression of selfhood even while they suggest that these externals are malleable and imprecise. The act of self-expression makes that self vulnerable and susceptible to reinscription, belying the inviolable sense of integrity that the revengers wish to uphold.
CHAPTER 3

RHETORICAL BODIES: PRODUCING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN RESTORATION

ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

Eighteen years after Charles II’s return to England, the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis of 1678-1682 marked a period of civil unrest, the likes of which England had not seen since the tumultuous years of the 1640s and the civil wars. Titus Oates’s fabrication of a Catholic plot to overthrow the government intensified anti-papist sentiment and led to the execution of over twenty Catholics, many of them prominent members of the gentry and Lords in parliament.¹ The revelation of the plot exacerbated an already anxious Protestant contingency that was threatened by what they perceived as a growing Catholic influence in the government. James, the Duke of York, brother and heir to Charles II, had openly declared his conversion to Catholicism by his refusal to take the Test Act in 1673; the king’s wife, Catherine of Braganza, was a practicing Catholic; and Charles’s attempts at leniency toward Catholics, eventually circumvented by parliament, and his secret dealings with his cousin, Louis XIV, led to fears of his own crypt-Catholicism. The political crisis that ensued, spurred by Shaftesbury’s introduction of the Exclusion Bill into Parliament in an attempt to block James’s succession, led to the emergence of a bipartisan system that would exist in England for the following two hundred years.

England experienced at this time the vociferous expression of two competing ideologies. While the Whig opposition backed the proposed succession and favored a stronger parliamentary role in the government, Tory propaganda repeatedly made recourse to the absolutist theory of

¹ Fourteen Catholics were executed between June and August 1679, a time period that John Kenyon calls “the great holocaust of the Plot” (The Popish Plot, 2d ed., reprint [London: Phoenix Press, 2000], 205). By the summer of 1679, twenty-two Catholics had been executed.
monarchy expounded by James I and Robert Filmer, among others. In *Patriarcha*, which was most likely written in the early 1630s but not published until 1680, Filmer argues that the king was sole and unconditional ruler. Whigs believed in the opposition’s right rebel; Tories saw such rebellion as the instigation of another civil war.  

Written in reaction to the civil turmoil instigated by the Popish Plot and exclusion crisis, the Tory adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays produced during the four theatrical seasons of 1678 to 1682 engage characters’ bodies as a means to propagate a nationalist ideology. Shakespeare’s redactors utilized their characters’ bodies as props, turning them into rhetorical devices of nationalist propaganda. The threats to and mutilation of men’s and women’s bodies serve as warnings to the people about the consequences of disloyalty to the state and sovereign and the destructive ends of rebellion. In their use of female bodies as props, moreover, the plays demonstrate the increasing importance of women in the construction of national identity. The plays distinguish two categories of women. Aggressive or politically ambitious women are detrimental to the state, a destruction that is marked on the bodies of the nations’ subjects, especially male bodies. Conversely, violence to the bodies of virtuous women corresponds to similar violations of England, geographically and geologically. Through these bodies, the playwrights are able visually and rhetorically to explore issues of succession on a political and a domestic level as they chart the emergence of a new nationalist ideology.

I begin by examining the exhumation and hanging of the regicides in 1661. I argue that Charles’s use of their bodies as props is paradigmatic of the dramatic use of bodies as props, or

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2 The exact date of composition is unknown. Johann P. Sommerville estimates that the Chicago manuscript was probably written before 1631 and that the Cambridge manuscript was written between 1635 and 1642. See Sommerville, “The Date of Filmer’s *Patriarcha*,” in Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxxii-xxxiv.

visual rhetorical devices, in the construction of national identity. The bodies of Oliver Cromwell, Henry Ireton, and John Bradshaw act as propagandistic apparatuses in the establishment of a new national ideology.

The 24-31 January 1661 issue of *Mercurius Publicus* doubly reinforces the ways in which the events of 30 January 1661 mark one of many moments during the first year of Charles II’s Restoration in which the symbols of national power are adapted for the purposes of redefining the nation in a period of drastic change. Opening with a report of Charles II’s proclamation by act of Parliament that 30 January should be “a day of Fast and Humiliation . . . in consideration of that horrid and unexpressable Murther committed on the sacred Person of His MAJESTIE’S blessed Father King CHARLES the First of ever glorious memory,” the issue closes with the following account:

This day *Jan.* 30 . . . was doubly observed, not only with a solemn Fast, Sermons, & Prayers at every Parish Church for the precious blood of our late pious Soverain King Charles the First, of ever glorious memory; but also by publick dragging those odious Carcasses of Oliver Cromwell, Henry Ireton, and John Bradshaw to Tiburn. On Monday night Cromwell and Ireton in two several Carts were drawn to Holborn from Westminster, after they were digged up on Saturday last, and the next morning Bradshaw; Today they were drawn upon Sledges to Tiburn, all the way (as before from Westminster) the universal outcry of the people went along with them. When these their Carcasses were at Tyburn, they were pull’d out of their coffines and hang’d at the several angles of that Triple Tree, where they hung till the Sun was set; after which they were taken down, their heads cut off, and their loathsome Trunks thrown into a deep hole under the Gallows. . . .
The passage juxtaposes an act of national mourning with an act of national forgetting. Where the apotheosis of Charles I in the opening lines serves to memorialize the murdered king, the spectacle of the hanged Ireton, Bradshaw, and especially Cromwell—the mutilation of their bodies into ever smaller pieces and their disposal underneath the Tyburn gallows—is a symbolic attempt to efface identity, “to blot” the regicides and the traumas of the civil war and the Interregnum “from the popular mind.”

Charles’s presence through his “precious blood,” a communion-like symbol that raises the murdered king to Christ-like importance, reinforces, in Jonathan Sawday’s terms, “the collective myth of the divine nature of the monarch.” As Charles becomes more than human, the regicides become less so; they are “Carcasses,” objects acted upon, things ignominiously dug up, dragged, hanged, quartered, and finally buried in a common grave as if they were rubbish. The paragraph achieves this effect through its focus on the regicides’ bodies and the king’s blood. That is, Charles’s divinity emphasizes, and is emphasized by, the detailed depiction of the fate of the regicides’ earthly remains. The martyred king’s memory is contextualized within a framework of the fragmented bodies of Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw.

Charles’s blood and the regicides’ bodies are rhetorical devices through which this passage, an example of pro-Stuart propaganda in the early 1660s, not only expresses a belief in the rightness of the posthumous execution, but it also implicitly expresses a belief in the rightness of Charles II’s restoration. It achieves these effects, in other words, by exploiting the

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4 Jonathan Sawday, “Re-Writing a Revolution: History, Symbol, and Text in the Restoration,” *The Seventeenth Century* 7.2 (1992): 171. The paragraph demonstrates well the tension between the desire to forget and the reality of such an impossibility that Sawday discusses (see, e.g., 184-85). Paula R. Backscheider also notes that “[t]his spectacle went beyond showing people their ‘folly’ to aiming at an ultimate discrediting” (*Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993], 8). She continues later, “Cromwell’s body was not only expunged from Westminster Abbey but an attempt was made to assure that every remnant of it would be eaten by birds or rot away and become dust in the wind” (21).

5 Sawday, “Re-Writing a Revolution,” 186. Sawday develops the “conflation of Charles II, Christ, and Charles I”: “Christ, who rose from the dead, and cured the sick, and Charles I, the innocent sacrifice, are met in Charles II—the risen king, the bridegroom” (186).
very means that would be so important to Charles’s establishment of his identity as monarch and of the nation’s identity as a whole. The exhumation and display of the bodies, in addition to the executions of regicides during the previous autumn, engage in one of the oldest symbolic performances of state power. Every moment of the spectacle was rich with historic symbolism and the memory of the traumas that the nation had so recently experienced. The excess of the performance, mimicked in the passage by the overwhelming focus on the regicides instead of Charles I, is integral in the production and display of state power. Within the framework of Charles II’s return to England, this production of power becomes especially meaningful.

Both Sawday and Paula R. Backscheider have examined Charles II’s dependence upon both the reclamation of pre-Interregnum symbols of power, as well as the creation of new symbols and the redefinition of older symbols as a means to establish his authority as sovereign. As Backscheider notes, theater, including public spectacle, was one means for Charles to disseminate his conception of monarchy. She states, “the best means of mass communication was public spectacle. Traditional royal ceremonies, existing civic events, and even public displays of the operations of government (such as street pavings and hangings) were available as hegemonic apparatuses.” Where Backscheider reads this moment as one of cleansing, or wiping the slate clean—“Now [i.e., after the executions of 1660 and the events of 30 January] Charles

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6Michel Foucault argues that the public execution “is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. . . . [I]t deploys before all eyes an invincible force” (Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Trans. Alan Sheridan, 2d ed. [New York: Vintage Books, 1995], 48-49).

7See Sawday, “Re-Writing a Revolution,” and Backscheider, Spectacular Politics, especially chapters 1 and 2. Both Sawday and Backscheider suggest that conception of monarchy and legitimacy that Charles II and his supporters attempt to establish does not go unquestioned: “Indeed, even at the moment where a triumphal vindication of the new king’s legitimacy was being displayed, we can glimpse the pressure of the alternative—the counter-claim—urging itself from the past into the present” (Sawday, “Re-Writing a Revolution,” 180). Backscheider’s second chapter examines the way Charles’s “effort was met by the corrective tropes and themes of writers who had spent the Commonwealth period in England and held a different idea of monarchy and, more significantly, of the future (Spectacular Politics, xiii).

8Backscheider, Spectacular Politics, 1-2. Backscheider examines more extensively the ways in which Charles exploited public spectacle and made himself an object of spectacle, as a means of maintaining royal power and prerogative (3).
was determined to mark the nation as his and to reinscribe the monarchy”—I suggest that the regicides’ bodies play a crucial role in this marking and reinscription. It becomes itself a “hegemonic apparatus” through which Charles propagates a particular conception of the reinstated monarchy and his nation more broadly. More than an act of “discountenancing and discrediting,” the events of 30 January, a “hideous but magnificent theater,” symbolically enact through the bodies of the regicides the dismembering of the Republic and the “re-membering” of England and the monarchy.\(^9\) This spectacle was a purgation of the regicides from corporate memory; it was simultaneously one of the most expressive if grotesque articulations of both Charles’s identity as monarch and the identity of the nation. He marks the regicides bodies in an effort to inscribe his and the nation’s identities.

Charles engages in an act of self-definition that parallels the attempts of self-expression by the revengers that I discuss in the previous chapter. He marks out the boundaries of his two bodies by putting out for view the broken and fragmented bodies of Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw. He defines himself in opposition to the regicides’ rotting bodies in order to construct an identity for himself as sovereign and, as head of a body politic, an identity for his nation. His display suggests that he and his kingdom are uncorrupted and indivisible.\(^10\) More than a simple staging of revenge, this act is an expression through the eradication of the regicides’ bodies of Charles’s identity as king. The bodies are governmental propaganda exploited for the purposes of disseminating a new national ideology. In this dramatization of state power, rather than being actors in the theater of their own executions, as were the Republicans executed for regicide in late 1660, the regicides were, instead, objects of performance, the stage properties in Charles’s

\(^9\)Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, 7. Quoting Foucault, Backscheider acknowledges that through these events “Charles gave the people the kind of ‘predominance of public life, the intensity of festivals’ that Foucault has described as giving a society ‘new vigour’ and forming it ‘for a moment [into] a single great body’” (7-8).

dramatization of sovereign power. He demonstrates how the control of bodies becomes integral in the control of his own representation.

During the tumultuous years of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, the theater was once again a platform for pro-Stuart sentiment. Both the state and the stage were suffering the backlash of Titus Oates’s fabricated plot and the subsequent attempts to bar James from the succession. According to Michael Dobson, the political turmoil “generated a theatrical climate in which every play produced was potentially controversial, certain to be scrupulously interrogated by censors and audiences alike for covert or explicit propagandist intentions, secret plots or dangerous sympathies.”

The increased scrutiny resulted in an increasing number of Shakespearean adaptations. Although the two patent theaters produced a handful of unaltered Shakespearean plays and adaptations in the 1660s and early 1670s, most notably D’Avenant and Dryden’s *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island* (1667), which Shadwell would later adapt for operatic performance, the number of adaptations produced during the 1678 to 1682 seasons was significantly more substantial. Of the approximately forty-two “new” plays produced during these four seasons, nine were adaptations. The genres of the preceding decade and a half were insufficient vehicles through which to address the political crises. Heroic drama was less frequent by the mid-1670s. The genre’s emphasis on heroic action and the grandiose, often foreign settings jarred with the public events of the late seventies and early eighties.

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12 I exclude from analysis Shadwell’s adaptation of *Timone of Athens, The Man-Hater* (1678) because it was first produced in January of 1678, just prior to the onset of the Popish Plot.

13 Writing of serious drama more generally, Marsden comments, “By the end of the 1670s, however, playwrights and their audiences began to question the certainties of heroic action . . . . [A]fter 1675, serious drama displays a noticeably darker mood, which would deepen as the decade drew towards an end. The plays are often troubling, and heroism seemingly absent. These changes can be traced in part to the darkening political situation in England during the mid-to-later 1670s. The Restoration ‘honeymoon’ was over.” The plays leading up to and during the Popish plot and Exclusion crisis thus move away “from the optimism and expansive view of the heroic play. Instead, tragedy becomes increasingly topical and politically suggestive” (“Tragedy and Varieties of Serious Drama,” in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen [Oxford: Blackwell, 2001], 231-32).
Playwrights were less concerned with justifying the Restoration than with addressing the fears of civil war and threats of exclusion. Moreover, the Fletcherian tragicomedies of these earlier years, with their focus on romantic couples, were also inadequate to the task of addressing political issues. Playwrights found in the adaptations a medium through which they could express political views but do so with less risk of censorship. Those elements that appeared contentious they could attribute to the designs of the original material.14

In the process of adaptation, Shakespeare’s plays were heavily politicized.15 The plays were often altered thematically and topically to analogize the contemporary political crises. The adaptations engage questions of sovereignty, often in favor of absolutism, and predict the apocalyptic ends of faction and political in-fighting. Most of the adaptations explore the effects of banishment. Where the redactors of the early Restoration rewrote the romances, the adaptors of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis culled instead from Shakespeare’s histories and Roman tragedies, as well as King Lear and Cymbeline, which are set within Britain’s borders, making them useful for engaging political themes. Cymbeline was the only romance adapted during this time. This group of plays—including, in addition to Lear and Cymbeline, Titus Andronicus, Troilus and Cressida, Romeo and Juliet, Richard II (also called The Sicilian Usurper), the first Henriad, and Coriolanus—offered a compelling medium through which to investigate the effects of domestic political turmoil.16

All of the plays deal with banishment or plotting, sometimes both. In Otway’s The History and Fall of Caius Marius (1680), a Romanized adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, the

15 See Dobson, Making of the National Poet, 62-98; and see also Jean I. Marsden, The Re-Imagined Text, 40-46. Both authors offer detailed accounts of the revisions and alterations, including the new political emphasis, made to Shakespeare’s plays in the process of adaptation. See especially Marsden’s chapter, “Radical Adaptation,” in Re-Imagined Text, 13-46. Most critics who investigate these plays acknowledge their political import.
16 Marsden offers a brief summary of the political import of each play (Re-Imagined Text, 42-43).
lovers (Marius junior and Lavinia) are the casualty of political bickering between their fathers, who lead opposing factions. The familial disagreement is intensified by its enlargement to a political disagreement. Dobson argues that “the whole political plot of the play is relegated to the status of the pointless background feud between the Montagues and the Capulets . . . and the drama shifts decisively away from the public arena to the celebration of its doomed young lovers.”

Yet the title does not even mention the lovers; instead it promotes Caius Marius, the ambitious hero of the Whig-like faction, as the main character. The lovers’ plot is secondary to the play’s political purposes. Otway enhances the play’s pity and pathos with the thwarted love of the young characters, which occurs as a result of the political fighting. Otway enhances the play’s pity and pathos with the thwarted love of the young characters, which occurs as a result of the political fighting. Caius Marius calls attention to the negative consequences of oppositional politics and ambitious statesmen in large and small scale. It lessens the divide between public and private by showing how instability in the state leads to instability in the home. The titles of other adaptations also denote their political inclinations: John Crowne turns II Henry VI, acts 4 and 5, and III Henry VI into an invective against civil war and civil disobedience in his aptly titled The Misery of Civil-War (1680). From the outset, we are to understand his play as vehemently opposed to rebellion. Civil war, the title suggests, can end in nothing but disaster. Tate substitutes civil war for French invasion in his adaptation of King Lear (1681). He reflects thematically contemporary fears that the political chaos prompted by the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis would lead to another civil war.

Politicization is both cause and effect of adaptation. Adapting plays to contemporary political purposes alone was not enough to make them successful. The repertory system in the

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17 Dobson, Making of the National Poet, 78.
18 Barbara A. Murray notes, “Although much critical attention has been focused on the political implications of Otway’s work here, there seems to be some agreement among late twentieth-century critics that in his linguistic devices Otway’s specific intention was to move pity, and the effect of this is to reinforce political significance.” She continues by pointing out that much of the play’s pathos is focused on the character of Lavinia (Restoration Shakespeare [Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001], 130-31).
seventeenth-century required playwrights to cater to audience’s taste, as Dryden acknowledges in his *Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668): “To please the people,” he says, “ought to be the poet’s aim, because plays are made for their delight.” The Shakespearean adaptations thus required substantial revision in order to be profitable. Among the general categories of revision include the paring down of the language in order make the ideas and the metaphors less ambiguous, which helped effect a second goal of poetic justice. Virtuous should be rewarded, and villainous characters must perish (or, at the very least, be punished). Jean I. Marsden argues, “The distrust of ambiguity during this period can be tied both to an overwhelming concern with the drama’s effect on the audience and to a fear of disorder outside of literature, in the public mind and in the body politic.” For example, Nahum Tate’s *Lear* ends not as a tragedy but as a comedy. Cordelia gains a love interest in Edgar as a means to justify her filial disobedience at the play’s beginning, and both Lear and Cordelia live. The father bequeaths his kingdom to his sole-surviving daughter whose match with Edgar he blesses. The nation restored, the young lovers ascend the throne. In Dryden’s adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* (1678), subtitled *The Truth Found too Late*, a now-virtuous and innocent Cressida commits suicide in order to prove her loyalty to Troilus and amplify the tragic effect of the play. Tate’s *Ingratitude of a Common-Wealth: Or the Fall of Caius Marius Coriolanus* (1681) prefaces not the hero of the play but the commonwealth’s ingratitude to its warrior. The changes that playwrights made to ensure the success of their plays enhanced their political purposes.

20 Marsden, *Re-Imagined Text*, 14. She continues, “Not surprisingly, the polarization of good and evil within the plays parallels the political polarization which resulted in the formation of political parties. Good defines itself in opposition to evil just as the Tories defined themselves in opposition to the Whigs, who were themselves the party of opposition. In each case, the lines are drawn and ambiguities dissolved.”
Each aspect of adaptation and innovation, which Marsden has astutely categorized, works toward the goal of politicization, which is itself an alteration to the plays. In innovations in production methods introduced with the reopening of the playhouses in 1660 also led to alterations in the plays, which in turn heightened political motifs. Moveable scenery and machines allowed the redactors to emphasize their political themes with visual tableau. As Matthew H. Wikander observes, through technological innovations, “Restoration adaptors could add to Shakespeare a whole range of speaking pictures. Restoration stagecraft permitted the direct translation of the spoken word into the scenic emblem.” To the ending of Ingratitude, Tate has added Virgilia’s suicide and the spectacle of Virgilia’s and Martius’s mangled and dying son.

The bloodbath at the end of Titus Andronicus becomes, in Ravenscroft’s Titus Andronicus, or the Rape of Lavinia (1678), more horrific with its inclusion of a pyrotechnic exhibition, mounted heads, and a murdered baby. The revelation of Lavinia after Titus stabs her precedes a similar revelation of Chiron and Demetrius’s bodies. Titus says to Tamora, “Reveal then what is yet unseen.—Empress behold,” at which point “A Curtain drawn discovers the heads and hands of Dem[etrius] and Chir[on] hanging up against the wall. Their bodys in Chairs in bloody Linnen” (54). Poetic justice indeed: the two rapists are dismembered and displayed in a replication of the crime that they enacted against Lavinia. The cannibalistic consumption of their bodies is revenge for her rape, and the display of their few remains imitates the ignominious punishments used against traitors and other criminals.

21 See Marsden, The Re-Imagined Text (13-46) and “Tragedy and Varieties of Serious Drama” (228-42).
22 Marsden comments that the new plays and adaptations of the Popish Plot and Exclusion crisis “employed graphic displays of bloodshed to make their arguments more emphatic” (“Tragedy and Varieties of Serious Drama,” 235).
24 Edward Ravenscroft, Titus Andronicus, or the Rape of Lavinia (1687). All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.
Ravenscroft turns the bloody scene into a warning against traitors and faction-mongers by demonstrating the terrible ends to which they, too, will likely come. This spectacle is quickly succeeded by Tamora’s murder of her own son. By following the revelation of Tamora’s cannibalism after she has unknowingly feasted on her sons, the infanticide is framed as a kind of cannibalism, this time an intentional one. This display demonstrates the ways in which plotting and ambition “devours” both good and bad members of the nation. The play’s final scene also demonstrates the brutal ends of political intrigues while simultaneously emphasizing the racial stakes in the play. In the spectacular finish, Aron “snarle[s]” out his last lines as “Fire flames about” him (56). The Goths (Tamora and her sons), the Moor, and those characters who have been “tainted” by them—often literally so through physical mutilation—are purged from the play.

In the process of politicization, the bodies of characters become politicized as well. Each of these spectacles depends upon the characters’ bodies for emblematic effect. Like the bodies of the regicides, the spectacular bodies of these Shakespearean adaptations become rhetorical devices instrumental in the expression of a political, often Tory, outlook. The characters’ bodies are like stage properties. They are acted upon; they are exchanged; and they visually enhance the dialogue and themes of the plays. Human bodies, especially at the moment of destruction, offer powerful and moving symbolic emphasis to the plays’ political objectives as the characters’ bodies mimic in little the larger disintegration of the body politic. In one of the most gruesome spectacles of tortured bodies, Crowne’s *Misery of Civil-War* depicts “An Orchard for the Devil” in order to demonstrate the fruitless ends of plotting, ambition, and civil war. Two soldiers have stolen two countrymen’s money and raped their daughters. The second Soldier harangues the men, “This Country belongs, Sirrah, to your Landlord; and we have orders to take all the Money,
burn all the Houses, and hang all the people. We have obey’d our orders yet, and will.” “The Scene is drawn” to reveal a spectacle that supports the Soldier’s words: “and there appears Houses and Towns burning, Men and Women hang’d upon Trees, and Children on tops of Pikes” (3.3.73-79). The “misery” of civil war and rebellion is demonstrated through the bodies of the nation’s subjects. The families and the communities (“Houses and Towns”) are destroyed by the decimation of population more broadly. The society has become so disordered that innocent people hang, and the most innocent, the children, are impaled for view, much like the remains of traitors. Crowne uses these bodies as a warning against social disorder and political upheaval, which, he suggests, can only lead to the devastation of the nation’s most valuable resource—its people.

Perhaps more blatantly than any other character, the Duke of Gloster in Tate’s Lear reveals the mutilated body’s persuasive abilities. Having been blinded by Cornwall for assisting Lear, Gloster says that he will use his disfigured body to stir the people to revolt. Left alone on stage he says,

Must I then tamely Die, and unreng’d?

So Lear may fall: No, with these bleeding Rings

I will present me to the pittyng Crowd,

And with the Rhetorick of these dropping Veins

Enflame ’em to Revenge their King and me . . . . (39)

Regan’s taunt to Gloster, “If thy Eyes fail thee call for Spectacles” (38), becomes ironic. In a twist on meaning, this is exactly what Gloster does: he “call[s] for Spectacles” by turning his body into an object for public view as a means to urge the people to retribution. Three times


26 Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear* (1681). All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.
Gloster’s success is confirmed. In the following scene, an officer tells Regan that the “Peasants are all up in Mutiny”:

Old Gloster, whom you late depriv’d of Sight,
(His Veins yet Streaming fresh) presents himself,
Proclaims your cruelty, and their Oppression,
With the King’s Injuries; which so enrag’d ’em,
That now that Mutiny which long had crept
Takes Wing, and threatens your Best Pow’rs. (41)

The literal mutilation of Gloster, the political subject, stands in for the metaphorical mutilation of Lear’s public and private bodies, the crimes against the state and the king, personally. As an emblem, Gloster’s body represents the bodies of all the nation’s subjects and the horrible cruelties that they, too, will suffer if Goneril and Regan are not overthrown.

Too late, Goneril recognizes the efficacy of Gloster’s pathetic figure: she laments, “It was great Ignorance Gloster’s Eyes being out / To let him live, where he arrives he moves / All Hearts against us” (44). And again in act 5, an officer acknowledges Gloster’s rhetorical value. He says that “Old Gloster” was

(a moving Spectacle) led through their Ranks,
Whose pow’rfull Tongue, and more prevailing Wrongs,
Have so enrag’d their rustick Spirits, that with
Th’approaching Dawn we must expect their Battle. (55)

Gloster’s speech may be persuasive; but his body, which has been marked with his “more prevailing Wrongs,” is his most powerful instrument of persuasion as he stirs the people to
action. Gloster turns his own body into a prop, a piece of political propaganda, by circulating his image and his story amongst the people.

Although Tate’s *Lear* ends with the reunification of the nation and the restoration of the legitimate heirs, the Gloster plot and the blindness theme undermine the play’s happy ending. Tate may ultimately reveal a Tory sentiment, but his play demonstrates an anxiety regarding a government that is figuratively blind. Although the play’s most overt political concerns are succession, legitimacy, and civil war, and thereby the Exclusion Crisis, *Lear* also critiques both the government’s and parliament’s handling of the Popish Plot, which instigated the attempts of the Shaftesbury-led faction of parliament to exclude James from the succession. By March of 1681, the plot was already on the wane, prisoners wrongfully incriminated in the plot were being released, and the government would soon turn on Oates. Lear’s figurative blindness to Cordelia’s love and his inability to recognize Regan’s and Goneril’s lies are echoed in the Gloucester subplot. In this paradigm, Edmund becomes an Oates-like figure: he fabricates a plot in which his half-brother, the legitimate heir, is to attempt an overthrow of their father. In Shakespeare’s *Lear*, the final lines of Edmund’s soliloquy are heavily weighted toward the question of “legitimacy”:

Well then,

Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.

Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund

As to th’ legitimate. Fine word, “legitimate”!

Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed

And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall [top] the’ legitimate. I grow, I prosper:

Now, gods, stand up for bastards! (1.2.15-22)27

Five times Edmund says “legitimate,” and only in one instance does the word specifically connected to Edgar’s name. Tate’s play only uses “legitimate” twice, and each time it modifies Edgar’s name.28 Shakespeare’s version emphasizes the question of legitimacy over a description of the plot itself, which is relegated to a brief eight words (“if this letter speed, / And my invention thrive”). The adaptation, on the other hand, focuses more attention on the plot:

with success

I’ve practis’d yet on both their easie Natures [Edgar’s and Gloster’s]:

Here comes the old Man chaf’t with th’Information

Which last I forg’d against my Brother Edgar,

A Tale so plausible, so boldly utter’d

And heighted by such lucky Accidents,

That now the slightest circumstance confirms him,

And Base-born Edmund spight of Law inherits. (1-2)

Like the original, the adaptation questions the difference between custom and nature. At least to a certain extent, it also calls into question inheritance laws and the categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy.29 Yet the complexity of Edmund’s character in the original is

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27 All references to Shakespeare’s plays are from The Riverside Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997).
28 This alteration to the play could also be attributed to the “cleaning up” of the play’s language. The balancing of the lines “Well, legitimate Edgar, to thy right / Of Law I will oppose a Bastard’s Cunning./ Our Father’s Love is to the Bastard Edmund / As to Legitimate Edgar . . . .” (1) creates an antimetabolic structure that opposes the legitimate and illegitimate through the reverse-repetition of “legitimate Edgar . . . Bastard.” Rather than elide differences or level them, it heightens the distinctions between the brothers, pointing up Edgar’s goodness over against Edmund’s villainy.
29 His argument echoes proto-feminist authors who question the assumption of the “natural” inferiority, and the man-made (thus unnatural) categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy (see, e.g., my discussion of Behn’s deconstruction of the virgin-whore dichotomy in chapter three).
attenuated in the adaptation, which emphasizes Edmund’s crimes against not only his brother but also his father and, even worse, the law itself. Edmund will “oppose” with his “Cunning” Edgar’s “right / Of Law.” Edmund’s crimes are not only against his family, the play suggests, but they are also crimes against the state, and by association the sovereign. Through Edmund, the play comments on and critiques the events of the Popish Plot. Like Oates’s plot, the results of which could, perhaps, have been avoided had it not been for two unexpected events—the discovery of incriminating papers in the possession of Edward Coleman, the queen’s secretary, and the murder of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey—Edmund’s plot has also been “heightened by such lucky Accidents” so that “now the slightest circumstances confirms” his brother’s supposed plotting.

Tate’s critique of, and his commentary on, the issues of succession, legitimacy, and plotting are made visible on Gloster’s body. Gloster’s and Lear’s figurative and literal blindness take on special significance within this paradigm. Gloster first refuses to accept that Edmund lies to him; his blindness becomes literal when Cornwall cuts out his eyes. Lear likewise refuses to “see” that Cordelia, his faithful daughter, loves him and that Goneril and Regan, his false daughters, lie to him for personal gain. Only when both men are divested of their faculties and their property, respectively, are they able to recognize their mistakes. Each must lose something in order to acknowledge the illegitimacy of their villainous children’s claims and the legitimacy of those children that they have banished. Gloster’s perception is most clear when he is physically blinded. Although the play ultimately suggests that the legitimate will prevail and that the government will regain its “sight,” it is not uncritical of the government’s obtuse handling of the original charges in the first place. The rest of the play marks out the devastating events that

30 Foucault argues that any crime “attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically since the force of the law is the force of the prince (Discipline and Punish, 47).
occur because of the failure to substantiate fully Oates’s, William Bedloe’s, and Stephen Dugdale’s incriminations before arresting and prosecuting many innocent people. Much as Gloster’s body becomes a piece of “Rhetorick” that he uses to “[e]nflame [the people] to Revenge” (39), so too is it a rhetorical device used to suggest the results of plotting and the government’s clumsiness in handling such plots.

In the Shakespearean adaptations, bodies become a means to explore national identity. The redactors exploit bodies in much the same manner as Charles did with the bodies of the regicides, and they did so in order to achieve similar ends: to establish and stabilize an increasingly tense and precarious monarchical, and thus national, ideology. In these plays, human bodies are objects through which the playwrights investigate what it means to be British. Although the bodies of villainous characters often become props—for example, Chiron and Demetrius in Ravenscroft’s Titus and Suffolk in Crowne’s Henry VI, the First Part—these plays more often define the nation and the monarchy not against the mutilated bodies of the antagonists but through the threatened and mutilated bodies of the virtuous characters. The subject’s body stands in for the state. A threat to the subject is also a threat to the nation. The omission of the King of France’s character and the emphasis on civil war as opposed to foreign invasion already provides Tate’s Lear with a more domestic focus; it also more broadly investigates national identity than its original. Through Gloster’s body, Tate’s play suggests that the legitimacy of the monarchy is at all times tied to the legitimacy of the people and the meaning of Britishness.

The title of Crowne’s Henry VI, the First Part. With the Murder of Humphrey Duke of Glocester acknowledges the increased violence of this play. The additional scene allows the playwright to illustrate Glocester’s “true” British values while differentiating them from those of
his oppressors. Although both the original play and the adaptation include Warwick’s examination of Glocester’s body, only the adaptation shows the actual murder.\(^{31}\) The innocent and virtuous Glocester is set in opposition to Henry’s other advisors, including Queen Margaret and the Cardinal, who are self-serving and politically ambitious and, significantly, Catholic. The king’s only loyal advisor, Glocester is concerned primarily with state’s best interests. The scene of his murder emphasizes these character traits. While the Duke reads quietly in his prison chamber (a room in the Cardinal’s house), the Cardinal and three murderers enter. The Cardinal begins directing the murder. He tells the murderers, “you two go hold him / And get him down, whilst the other strangles him” (5.1.156-57).\(^{32}\) He then instructs the murderers, “get behind him now whilst he is musing.” The scene thus presents Glocester, unarmed, with the murderers looming behind him, the virtuous overshadowed by the vicious. A particularly forceful staging would have the Duke offering his “musings” on his knees, as these are prayers. Crowne emphasizes Glocester’s goodness:

If e’re my Person, Greatness, or Authority,
Did inure any one, forgive the fault,
And in the bosome of the injur’d person,
pour down a thousand blessings.—Above all things
Preserve the King from all his Enemies.
If I by Wickedness and Falshood perish,
Oh! give my bloody Enemies repentance,
And let my Death be an occasion

\(^{31}\) Colley Cibber’s adaptation of *Richard III* (1701) similarly stages the murder of the princes in the Tower.

Of good to them, but ruine to their wickedness. (5.1.181-89)

Glocester shows himself more concerned with the king’s and the state’s welfare, and he even offers forgiveness for his murderers, if not for their “wickedness.” Glocester becomes martyr for his state, his “innocent Death” the means to “procure a Blessing / To my good King, my Country, and all my Enemies” (5.1.297-98).

In this moment, the play visually delineates the perilous effects of plotting and the dangerous consequences of entrusting the state to self-serving advisors, especially Catholic ones. It also establishes those qualities that define Britishness: virtue, piety, and the selfless support of state and government. The threat to Glocester’s body is consequently also a threat to these nationalist ideals. After killing Glocester, the murderers amplify the prop-like nature of his body. Where in the original Glocester’s body is brought on stage on a bed, in the adaptation, the murdered Duke is more visible, both directly after his murder and during the examination scene. The Cardinal tells the murderers to “Place the Body some way as may give least suspicion,” so they “place the Body in a Chair” (5.1.219). As the last visual tableau of act 5, scene 1, this ominous tableau forebodes the impending murder of the king.33 In the following scene, in which Warwick examines the body and declares that the Duke was strangled, the body is visible for approximately 110 lines. The emphasis in the adaptation on Glocester’s strangling, moreover, while it does link this murder to the murder of Berry, also implies a “strangling” of the nation, the suffocation of those good qualities by illegitimate, self-serving Catholics (the Cardinal and Margaret), foreigners (Margaret), and usurpers (Suffolk’s affair with the queen makes him a usurper of the king’s bed, which is tied directly to his desire to usurp the throne through Margaret.). As Wikander observes, Crowne literalizes the comment in Shakespeare’s version that

33 This, of course, does not occur until part three of the Henry VI trilogy, which Crowne had previously adapted as The Misery of Civil-War.
“Virtue is choked with foul ambition” (*II Henry VI*, 3.1.143). Glocester’s body stands in for the bodies of the people, who will ultimately suffer during the impending civil war. This “massacre of an innocent” foreshadows the massacre of the innocent and virtuous people of England exemplified in the “Orchard for the Devil.”

The redactors also explore national identity by clearly distinguishing between good and bad characters, and British and non-British attributes. The desire for poetic justice evident in the adaptations through linguistic changes and visual display also occurs at the level of characterization. Much as the language of the plays is made less ambiguous in the process of adaptation, so, too, are the characters. For example, Crowne’s emphasis on Henry’s piety and his desire for the success of his country in both *Henry VI* adaptations heightens the audience’s sympathy for the king. Henry’s victimization, like Glocester’s, is accentuated and in turn accentuates the viciousness of his abusers. Even Tate’s Gloster, for all his inability to see through Edmund’s crimes, is acquitted by the increased emphasis on Edmund’s (and Goneril’s and Regan’s) villainy: Edmund is not only a usurper in Tate’s play; he is a potential rapist. His political ambition is aligned with sexual aggression, his usurpation of his brother’s and (he hopes) his father’s places is akin to his usurpation of the husband’s right in his affairs with Goneril and Regan and in his attempted rape of Cordelia.

Tate’s *Ingratitude* also moderates Martius’s complexity for political effect. While *Ingratitude* does not efface Coriolanus’s classism and his contempt for the common people, the play does attempt to justify this point of view by exaggerating the people’s ingratitude and lack of courage. The title suggests that Coriolanus’s fall results in part because of the people’s

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36 See also John Ripley, who argues, “Martius had to be written up and the plebeians and tribunes written down. While Tate allows Martius a want of political sensitivity, he takes particular pains to purge the character of outright
ingratitude. The people are hungry, and they want access to grain at a cheaper price. For this, the people threaten violence: “Let ’um feel our Swords, that take away the Use of our Knives.” Yet when given the opportunity to earn their grain by fighting for and protecting the country, “The Citizens Steal away severally” (6). The first citizen exemplifies the people’s fickleness and ignorance. After the scene in which Martius asks for the people’s voices, Martius exits while Brutus and Sicinius remain onstage with the plebeians. The first citizen initially insists that Martius treated the people well: “I say He call’d me Sir, and Carry’d himself Like a most Civil Gentleman” (23). And although he vehemently insists that Martius showed the crowd his wounds, two lines later, the citizen has changed his mind. Instead of praising Martius, he defames Martius as “the dullest Rogue in Rome” (24).

Coriolanus’s roles as father and husband further accentuate his goodness and the people’s lack of gratitude. Tate’s adaptation domesticates Coriolanus. Tate sets out in his version to create a character worthy of pity by accentuating the wrongs against Coriolanus and establishing him as a good man who loves his family well. On his return after the victory at Corioles, Coriolanus greets his wife more lovingly than in the original. “Oh my tender Dove!” he begins,

My gentle Silence hail; What Means this Dew?

Woul’dst thou have Laugh’d, had I come Coffin’d Home,

That Weep’st to see me Tryumph: Ah! My Love,

antidemocratic sentiment. . . . Tate set himself to denigrate the character and behavior of the plebeians so that Martius’ disdain for them seems less a political act than a civilized response to barbarity” (“Coriolanus as Tory Propaganda,” in Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence, ed. Edward Pechter [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996], 106-7).

37 Nahum Tate, The Ingratitude of a Common-Wealth: Or, the Fall of Caius Marius Coriolanus (1682). All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. Both Thomas G. Olsen and John Ripley explore the political implications of Tate’s Ingratitude. See Olsen, “Apolitical Shakespear: Or, the Restoration Coriolanus” (SEL 38 [1998]: 411-525), and Ripley, “Coriolanus as Tory Propaganda,”102-123. Ripley argues, “However carefully Tate might ameliorate Martius’ antipopulist views, it was impossible to purge his radical elitism entirely without doing serious injustice to the historical character or destroying the energy and tension as the heart of Shakespeare’s play” (107).
Such Eyes the Widdows in Corioles Wear,
And Mothers that lack Sons” (15)

Tate’s version presents a tender tableau between husband and wife and establishes more fully Coriolanus’s domestic role. When Volumnia and Virgilia visit Coriolanus in his tent, he briefly rejects his assertion, “Mother, Wife, Child, I know not.” Instead, he enjoys a loving moment with his family, calling particular attention to his “little Darling” son. Tate creates an endearing scene reminiscent of Hector’s brief visit to Andromache before he returns to battle. Although wife and son come to the warrior, the reunion offers the audience a moment of reflection on the familial tableau before Coriolanus turns to include his mother in the reunion:

Life of my Life, Fly to me? O a Kiss,
Long as my Exile, Sweet as my Revenge;
And thou my Turtle, Nest Thee in my Heart . . . . (47-48)

In his following line, Coriolanus asks his mother’s forgiveness for not greeting her, which implies a prolonged moment between father, mother, and son.

Tate’s adaptation establishes and enhances the importance of the domestic realm to demonstrate the ways in which political factions detrimentally impact the nation. Ingratitude expresses a fear of factional politics, the results of which, the play suggests, lead to the incitement of mobs and eventually to sedition. The play takes up the subjects of banishment and ingratitude to political leaders as a means to investigate the consequences of the extratheatrical attempts by the Whigs to undermine the legitimate government, which, the play implies, will ultimately lead to national disorder. Robert B. Shoemaker notes that mob “was first used to denote rioters in London during the Exclusion Crisis.”

unemployment in London increased, leaving more people idle and discontented, and thus more likely to riot. Tate labels as seditious activities like the Whig attempts to exclude James from the throne, an attempt that would deny Charles the right as ruler to choose his own successor.

Tate admits the political implications of his play: “Upon a close view of this Story, there appear’d in some Passages, no small Resemblance with the busie Faction of our own time.” He wants to “Stygmatis[e]on the Stage, those Troublers of the State, that out of private Interest or Malice, Seduce the Multitude to Ingratitude, against Persons that are not only plac’t in Rightful Power above them; but also the Heroes and Defenders of their Country.” His play promotes an absolutist ideology: “The Moral . . . of these Scenes being to Recommend Submission and Adherence to Establisht Lawful Power, which in a word, is Loyalty” (A2v). Ingratitude echoes Filmer’s absolutist philosophy in Patriarcha. The play simultaneously encourages the importance of loyalty to the defenders and rulers of state and expresses deep-felt anxieties regarding the power of the populous. Tate intends to show that “there is no Tyranny to be compared to the Tyranny of a Multitude.”

Martius is not entirely innocent—he does attack his own city—but the series of events that lead to his defection to Aufidius’s camp are a result of Brutus and Sicinius’s instigation. They are “Faction-Mongers,” the “Spawn of Sedition, and the Spawners of it,” who use the “Multitudinous Tongue” to promote their own interests at the detriment of the state (27, 26). The plebeians’ “Plot / To Curb the Pow’r of the Nobility,” Martius argues, “Nourish[es] ’gainst the Senate / Sedition and Rebellion” (25-26). These plots are meant to justify Coriolanus’s elitism and his negative attitude toward the people.

Brutus and Sicinius’s rabble-rousing both prompts the loss of a national hero and leads to the annihilation of one of Rome’s noble families. Tate uses Martius’s family to emphasize the disastrous effects of faction and plotting. The play implies that the best citizens are also good

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39 Robert Filmer, Patriarcha; or the Natural Power of Kings (1680), 70.
family men. Domestic bliss makes not only for happy subjects but also fruitful ones. Tate takes pains to establish the chain of events that lead to the bloodbath of the final scene in which bodies again become political props. Both the original and the adaptation emphasize Martius’s body, specifically in their focus on his wounds and his refusal to display those wounds—that is, in his refusal to turn his body into a rhetorical tool of persuasion. The repeated references to his wounds in both plays force the attention of both spectators and characters to the body that he refuses to reveal. In both versions, showing his wounds is still “a Part, that [Coriolanus] shall Blush in Acting,” yet in the adaptation, Tate omits Coriolanus’s blatant refusal: “I will not seal your knowledge with showing them” (2.3.107). His offer to show his wounds in private is left open-ended (21).

Martius’s body is significant in the play; but as a rhetorical device, it is ultimately secondary to the bodies of his wife and child. In the adaptation, Virgilia’s and young Martius’s bodies are the visual focus of the closing scene. They overshadow Martius’s body. The final scene recreates in macabre fashion the familial tableau of act 4 as it systematically emphasizes the death of each family member and the violence meted to each body. Aufidius, who has been seduced to betray Martius by Nigridius, a character of Tate’s creation, has taken Virgilia and the rest of the family captive. As Martius lays wounded and dying, Aufidius, who is also wounded, has Virgilia brought on stage. He tells Martius,

I charge thee Dye not yet, till thou hast seen
Our Scene of Pleasures; to thy Face I’ll Force her;
Glut my last Minuits with a double Ryot;

And in Revenges Sweets and Loves, Expire. (60)

Aufidius calls attention to Virgilia’s body even before her entrance. She then enters, wounded by her own hand: “My Noble Martius,” she tells her husband, “’tis a Roman Wound,”

Giv’n by Virgilia’s Hand, that rather chose
To sink this Vessel in a Sea of Blood,
Than suffer its chast Treasure, to become
Th’unhallowed Pyrates Prize: but Oh the Gods . . . . (61)

Virgilia wounds her own body rather than suffer the indignity of rape. With her final words, she directs Martius how to hold her body, doubly emphasizing with dialogue and spectacle the intimacy she shares with her husband. Volumnia completes the familial tableau when she enters with the “Mangled, Gash’t, Rack’t Distorted” body of young Martius (61). Negridius has severely mutilated the young boy’s body. More than any other characters’ body in the play, young Martius’s body, “with Limbs all broke,” is emblematic of the destructive ends of plotting. The most innocent of all the characters in the play, he suffers the greatest degree of mutilation. Tate indicates that plotting is a threat to even the most innocent members of society; it is a cannibalistic activity in which the members of a nation “feed” on their fellow people. “How then didst thou dispose him?” Martius asks Negridius before he sees his boy, “Didst eat him?” (61). The increased violence to the mother’s and son’s bodies heightens Ingratitude’s affective potential. Their mutilation represents the potential mutilation of the nation.

The pathos of Ingratitude and the play’s domestic emphasis also appear in other Shakespearean adaptations of the Exclusion Crisis era. These aspects of the plays, moreover, frequently focus on the female characters and female bodies. Like the male characters, Shakespeare’s female characters are made less complex in the adaptations. The introduction of
actresses to the British stage with the reopening of the playhouses, another innovation that affected both new plays and adaptations of pre-Interregnum drama, led to the expansion of roles for women. As Marsden notes, however, “the nature of these roles was constricted, an outgrowth of social as well as theatrical change. Drama devoted new attention to the subjects of family, love and marriage, a development closely linked to the definition of women as inhabitants of the private or domestic sphere and their exclusion from the public world of politics and commerce.” In other words, female characters, like masculine characters, are also “flattened.”

For example, Tate’s alterations to Lear give Cordelia a plausible excuse for the apparent coldness with which she treats her father. She is not “indifferent,” to use Tate’s term; she is merely in love. Tate establishes a love match between Edgar and Cordelia, who do not even speak to each other in the original, before Lear questions his daughters and parcels out his kingdom. Cordelia justifies her harsh words:

Now comes my Trial, how am I distrest,
That must with cold speech tempt the chol’rick King
Rather to leave me Dowerless, than condemn me
To loath’d embraces. (4)

Cordelia would rather lose her portion of the kingdom than marry a man, Burgundy, whom she cannot love. The “Love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia, that never chang’d word with each other in the Original,” Tate argues, “renders Cordelia’s Indifference and her Father’s Passion in the first Scene probable” (A2v). She may, from her father’s point of view, overstep the bounds of daughterly decorum, but she does so only to ensure that she can fulfill in the future the proper domestic role of loving, virtuous wife. The play insists upon filial duty and analogizes filial

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41 Marsden, Re-Imagined Text, 30.
42 Marsden, Re-Imagined Text, 35.
disobedience to the father to disobedience to the sovereign. Yet Lear subordinates Cordelia’s filial duty to Lear to the domestic relationship between husband and wife and Cordelia’s duty to her future husband: the success and succession of the state depends on the endurance and success of this spousal relationship. Tate promotes the domestic relationship between husband and wife as a nationalist cause.

In the adaptation of Titus, as in the adaptations of Coriolanus and Lear, the fate of the family parallels the fate of the nation, an extension of the politics that the plays espouse and defend.43 Asserting an absolutist politics in the vein of Filmer’s Patriarcha and James I’s The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598) and Basilikon Doron (1603), the plays analogize the rule of the father with the rule of the sovereign. The state is figured as a “national family” whose success depends upon the success of the domestic family.44 The Exclusion Crisis was itself a response to Charles and Catherine of Braganza’s inability to produce an heir. The anxieties regarding monarchical succession during this time were exacerbated by the state’s low birth rates and high death rates, which led to surmounting anxieties regarding the preservation of Britain, as a nation and as a culture—the weaker the nation, the more threatened are British ideals—and consequently the growing imperative to procreate. Any interruption of or interference with the family’s natural succession—via banishment, exclusion, or theft—threatens the success, and succession, of the state. The emergence of the public and private as separate spheres might occur during the late seventeenth century, but the connection between public and private in these adaptations is enhanced as playwrights and state propagandists resort to the domestic as a means to investigate the troubling issues of state succession. They tie together domestic and national

43 See, for example, Ripley, who argues that in Ingratitude, “Factionalism . . . is an inevitable prologue to disaster in the national family, and emblematically portrayed at curtain-fall by the dead Martius with his lifeless wife and child on either arm.” “The matrons’ suit” to Martius, he notes later, is the “appeal by an individual family on behalf of the national family” (“Coriolanus as Tory Propaganda,” 109, 111).
issues, putting the domestic at the service of nationalist rhetoric. Each is paradigmatic of the other; the domestic realm is still a very public entity.\footnote{Jürgen Habermas discusses the emergence in the eighteenth century of a “public sphere,” as separate from the “private sphere” of the home. See \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Ideology}, trans. by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962).}

Apprehension over familial and state succession is represented by female characters’ performance of proper gender roles. In the process of flattening the female characters, the plays create two competing categories of women and, in so doing, increase the importance placed on the domestic sphere. Women are defined largely by their ability to fulfill the role of “household doves,” to borrow a phrase from Dryden’s Cleopatra. As good women become even better and villainous women become more evil, their goodness and villainy are measured by the degree to which they fulfill the roles of daughter, wife, and mother. Tamora is even more malicious in Ravenscroft’s \textit{Titus}, her wickedness exacerbated by the murder of her own son. She feigns motherly affection, telling Marcus,

\begin{quote}
I have now no other Son, and shou’d

Be kind to it in Death, let it approach me then,

That I may leave with it in my parting Kiss.—
\end{quote}

The “\textit{Child is brought to the Empress},” as the stage direction reads, but “\textit{she Stabs it}” in revenge to Aron, who has begged for the child’s life: “Dye thou off-spring of that Blab-tongu’d Moor” (55). She has carved up her own child, whose remains Aron says he will eat. Infanticide becomes here a kind of cannibalism, one that Tamora, this time, willingly carries out.

The female body is a target and tool of the playwrights’ nationalist rhetoric. Those female characters who use their bodies improperly—that is, those women who engage in extramarital affairs—are represented as parasites who potentially pollute their societies and destroy legitimate subjects. These women, like Tamora, threaten the state through the death and mutilation of other
characters. Tamora condones Lavinia’s rape and, in the adaptation, even holds Lavinia while her sons taunt the young woman. Goneril and Regan desire their husbands’ deaths and have no remorse over Gloster’s mutilation.

Queen Margaret, in *Henry VI, the First Part*, instigates Glocester’s death. After Glocester’s arrest, which the king compares to the unnatural separation of suckling babe from mother by an “inhumane Souldier,” the Queen is the first to speak. In lines that closely follow those of the original play, she says,

> Believe me, Lords, were none more wise than I,
> And I believe my self not dull in this,
> This Glocester shou’d be quickly rid of the World,
> To free the King from danger, us from fear. (4.1.356-59)

Margaret instigates the murder. Her treachery is compounded in *Misery of Civil-War*. Warwick specifically blames Margaret, who essentially leads Henry’s army, for the spectacle of burning towns, hanged men and women, and impaled children: “The Queen is planting in your Fathers Lands,” he says, “An Orchard for the Devil” (3.3.89). Margaret has decimated her own population. Her political ambition, her failure as the nation’s mother, results in the destruction of the nation’s families and the ruination of England’s future generations. In the following act, Henry watches as a “Son bearing his Father,” whom he has killed, laments his “unnatural Crime,” which is followed quickly by a father who carries on stage the son whom he has killed (this is retained from *3 Henry VI*, act 2, scene 5). The nation’s civil and political disorder, the

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46 Although the plays demonstrate an anxiety about the political ambition of both male and female characters, the politically ambitious women are shown to be especially dangerous, their trespassing of gender boundaries more anxiety inducing. Margaret tells her son, “My Son, he shall not disinherit thee. / I have men here to guard me from these Rebels, / And Troops else-where to conquer ’em, and punish ’em.” She also says to Henry, “I will be harsher in my deeds than words. / For from this moment I divorce my self / For ever from thy Bed, thou art no King, / And thou shalt have no Sons of me to ruine; / I scorn to be the Mother of a Slave” (2.3.162-64, 185-790).
effects of civil war, is inscribed on the bodies of the nation’s subjects. Tate blames the Plantagenet’s for their failure of loyalty to the king, but he suggests that Margaret is equally culpable. Her soldiers loot the countrymen’s cottages in act 3; her soldiers rape their daughters.

The disarray and destruction of domestic life mimics the state’s disarray and destruction. *Misery of Civil-War* and the other adaptations vilify as unnatural those female characters who exhibit political ambition, for example Tamora, Margaret, Goneril, and Regan. Politically ambitious men are also sources of anxiety and threats to the state. Edmund, Brutus and Sicinius, Aron, the Cardinal, and Suffolk, among others, are all implicated as instigators of political and civil turmoil. But the ambitious women’s failure to conform to supposedly natural gender roles makes them even more “unnatural” than their masculine counterparts. Their ambition is joined with concupiscence, making them doubly monstrous in their appetites. They overstep the bounds of decorum in their admitted sexual desire. In this and in their political ambitions they exceed the boundaries of proper femininity. Like Edmund, whose sexual threat to Cordelia exacerbates his villainy, they doubly threaten the legitimate or natural succession. The bodies of ambitious, wicked women are poisonous to the state. In the case of Tamora and Margaret, they are also foreign bodies that invade and infect the nation, polluting the natural (Roman and British) succession.

The villainous women in the adaptations oppose British ideals and values; the good women embody them. The emphasis on Tamora’s and Margaret’s national otherness further demonstrates their lack of British virtues and ideals. A foil to the sexually available, politically

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47 Both of Crowne’s Henry plays complicate the seemingly clear-cut discrepancies between good and evil by repeatedly calling attention to the fact that neither Henry nor the Cardinal nor Margaret was born into the roles best suited for them. Both Henry and the Cardinal repeatedly assert that they would be better suited for the others’ profession. And Margaret, evil though she may be, exhibits the leadership skills that her husband lacks. She heads her husband’s army, yet her gender prohibits her from asserting her authority legitimately. For two plays that overtly support absolutism and submission at all times to the king, they also, implicitly, question the rigidness of gender roles and leave open-ended the problems that arise when a ruler is unfit for rule.
ambitious woman who exceeds the boundaries placed upon her, the good woman in these plays exhibits proper femininity, which has been consolidated into an ever-narrowing definition of the domestic roles of daughter, wife, and mother. The plays’ “Good women,” Marsden notes, “are excluded from the public world of politics and government.” Where many of Shakespeare’s heroines are often assertive, their revised counterparts are meek, “one-dimensional icons of virtue who, not surprisingly, share many characteristics with the idealized women described in conduct books.”

Even Volumnia is more loving and motherly in the adaptation. The plays prize female passivity and piety; the passive, virtuous women in these plays most exemplify the principles of British identity.

Cordelia no longer leads the French invasion. She instead waits submissively while the men engage in battle. She laments,

That I cou’d shift my Sex, and die me deep
In his Opposer’s Blood, but as I may
With womens weapons, Piety and Pry’rs,
I’ll aid his Cause . . . .

She may wish to join the battle and fight, but her adherence to her feminine role bars her from doing so. Instead, she uses her “womens weapons”—her tears and prayers—to call for “Thunder on [Lear’s] Foes” (53).

Lavinia, too, is more passive in her revised role. She no longer antagonizes Tamora about the queen’s “goodly gift in horning,” nor does she threaten Tamora by seconding Bassianus’s assertion, “the king my brother shall have note of this.” (Shakespeare, 2.3.67) Instead, Lavinia urges Bassianus to leave: “Come, my Lord, she is angry, let us leave her / To enjoy her Raven-colour’d Love” (20-21). Ravenscroft’s Lavinia is less coarse than her original;

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48 Marsden, Re-Imagined Text, 32, 35.
she speaks little, and when she does, she avoids sexual innuendo. She exhibits a greater innocence and naïveté.

Where the bodies of wicked women threaten the nation, the bodies of virtuous women correspond to the state and its success. Virgilia’s “treasure,” to return to a previous example, is the state’s treasure. Her death speech equates her body with the ends of empire. She is a merchant’s vessel full of treasure that would enrich the nation. She takes her own life because the “chast Treasure” of her body, and her womb specifically, is too valuable and precious “to become / The unhallowed Pyrates Prize.”

The violence meted to suffering female bodies is frequently figured as violence to the state in the Shakespearean adaptations produced during the Exclusion Crisis. The female body stands in for the nation, geographically and geologically. Any threat to the female body is a threat to the state itself. For example, the potential rape of Clarina, a new character in Thomas D’Urfey’s The Injured Princess, or the Fatal Wager (1682), an adaptation of Cymbeline, precedes the invasion of England’s borders by the Romans. The Queen, who is more malicious in the adaptation, discovers Clarina’s attempts to help Eugenia (Imogen in the original) escape. She, like Tamora, offers up another woman for rape:

I have consider’d now she shall not die so well,

But banish’d, live to prolong her misery,

And none shall help her, upon pain of Death.

My Lord Jachimo, to you I give the Wretch,

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49 To protect and prove her chastity and thus defend her reputation, Cressida, too, reverts to suicide. Only by wounding herself physically can Cressida prove Diomedes’s wound to her reputation. Troilus’s disbelief in her loyalty mimics the disbelieving people of Troy who ignore the prophecies that “mad Cassandra,” now only mentioned in the play, proclaims in the city’s streets (Dryden, Troilus and Cressida, or, Truth Found Too Late [1679], 59). Cressida’s death forebodes the death of the Trojans and the beginning of Troy’s destruction.
Clarina, like Virgilia, would rather die than live with the stigma of rape. She begs the queen, “Nay, kill me know, and I will think you kind; / Let me not be prey to his wild lust” (4.1.23-24).

Moments after Jachimo “Drags [Clarina] out,” a Captain enters “to inform” the Queen “that the Beacons near to Milford-Haven are fired; and the Post just come declares, the Roman Army’s landed there, led on by Gaius Lucius” (4.1.38, 49-51). The impending violation of Clarina’s body corresponds to the breaching of England’s borders by the Romans. Both are ultimately subverted. Pisano saves his daughter, and the Romans are defeated, the purity of woman and nation ultimately secured.

The fourth act highlights at least momentarily the close association between female bodies and England. Shatillion’s violation and invasion of Eugenia’s bedroom also corresponds to the invasion of England. The penetration of her private quarters is a metaphorical rape and a plundering of her reputation and purity, which is figured most prominently in the theft of her bracelet. Shatillion (a Frenchman, no less) imagines himself a rapist: “Lewd Tarquin thus / Did softly tread and tremble, ere he wak’ned / The Chastity he wounded” (2.4.17-19). For Clarina and Eugenia, the presumed purity or impurity of their bodies symbolizes the purity or impurity of the nation. Ursaces envisions the supposedly unchaste Eugenia as a “vile Spring,” a “chrystal Current [turned] into Mud” (5.1.144-45). Only with the restoration of Eugenia’s and Clarina’s reputations can the legitimate succession of England prevail.

That the violation of the female body figures less as a violation of these women and more as a violation and theft of masculine property intensifies existing anxieties regarding the control

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of succession. In *Misery of Civil-War*, the plundering of the countrymen’s wealth, which the second countryman has buried underneath his hearth and the first cottager in his “Cow-house Under the Dung,” parallels the plundering of the countrymen’s other property, their daughters. The state’s success relies just as much on legitimate succession as it does on the legitimate inheritance of property.

The title to Ravenscroft’s *Titus Andronicus, or The Rape of Lavinia* emphasizes Lavinia’s rape; by doing so, it suggests that Lavinia’s rape is Titus’s tragedy. Rape becomes a crime of national proportions because it removes women from the marriage market and prohibits the production of legitimate heirs. The raped woman is damaged property that can no longer be passed from one man to another in order to form exogamic, homosocial familial structures. Where Shakespeare’s *Titus* acknowledges the crime against Lavinia, even as her male family members interpret the crime against her as one against themselves, Ravenscroft’s adaptation displaces Lavinia’s victimization onto her family. Titus ponders the ways in which their bodies, too, could bear the marks of the crime against her: “shall we cut away our Hands like thine? / Or tear our Tongues out by the Roots, and in dumb shows / Pass the remainder of our hatefull days?” (30-31). 51

The correlation between Lavinia’s body and the state in Ravenscroft’s *Titus* demonstrates the connection between state succession and familial succession. Ravenscroft’s Lavinia is a weaker character than her original. In the sixteenth-century *Titus*, Lavinia regains a kind of agency in the scene in which she crawls across the stage with Titus’s hand in her mouth. Katherine Rowe argues,

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51 Lavinia is absent during the removal of Titus’s hand, which focuses all attention on Titus, instead of dividing it between him and the spectacle of his mangled daughter. Liz Oakley-Brown also notes that “the play shifts attention to the male figures even more swiftly than in the sixteenth-century *Titus*” (“*Titus Andronicus* and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England,” *Renaissance Studies* 19 (2005): 345).
[Lavinia] redefines her mouth as an acting part in a way that complicates its early identification with the passive bubbling fountain and the “Cocytus’ mouth” of the scene of rape. Taking up the dead hand as a supplement to her lost tongue, she exemplifies the conversion of a figure of dismemberment into a figure of agency. . . . In taking up Titus’s hand, she assumes the iconography of agency to herself.\(^{52}\)

In the adaptation, however, Titus excludes Lavinia from the removal of the dismembered body parts. He says,

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come Brother take a Head,
And in this hand the other I will bear:
And Junius too, share in this Ceremony,
Bring thou that hand—and help thy handless Aunt. (38)
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Lavinia neither takes part in the bearing away of the body parts, nor is she allowed the dignity of exiting the stage unaided. She is rather more object than subject, a limb, so to speak, of the family that has been lopped off like her hands and tongue, another fragment that also must be borne offstage by the men.

Lavinia is also less instrumental in the revelation of the rape than she is in original play. Instead, Titus assumes that she has been raped: “By the disorder of thy dress, I fear / Thou wert i’th’ Salvage hands of Ravishers” (35). In Shakespeare’s play, Titus only makes this assumption after Lavinia has pointed to the story of Philemela in her nephew’s copy of Ovid. In the adaptation, Titus, with the help of Junius, instructs Lavinia to write her rapists’ names in the dirt after he has himself written the word “rape” on the ground. Lavinia is a cipher almost from the beginning of the play. She is silent where her original is vocal. She is from the beginning an

object of interpretation, a piece of male property who has no say in marriage. Lavinia is not asked as she is in Shakespeare’s play if she is “displeased” with the match to Saturninus. She is the “Trophee of the day” (9), a prize over whom the men fight. As Liz Oakley-Brown shows, “What is most striking about Ravenscroft’s adaptation . . . is that even before she has her tongue cut out, the men read Lavinia’s body instead of allowing her to speak.”

That Lavinia’s body is property, and prop-like in its circulation, is evident from the adaptation’s beginning.

The scenes surrounding Lavinia’s rape underscore the association between female bodies and property, especially land. The rending of Lavinia’s body parallels the rending of the Andronicii (the family and other family members) and the nation more broadly. Much as in Misery of Civil-War, her rape is juxtaposed against moments of actual digging in the earth. Chiron and Demetrius “ransack fair Lavinia’s treasury”; “Aron Digs a hole in the Earth with his Sword, & bury his bag of Money” that he will later “discover” as a means to indict Lavinia’s brothers in Bassianus’s murder. Both earth and body are tainted. Aron says,

Lye there Sweet Gold, thou poys’ner of Virtue,
Thou powerful destroyer of all good,
And glittering Seed of Mischief:—
When e’re thou dost appear to Eyes again,
Sprout up a plentiful harvest of Ills,
With Blood thou shalt be water’d, Humane blood
Shall fatten the Soil, and men shall reap the crop
In Penitence and Sorrow. (19)

As the effects of Aron’s plotting and perjury are inscribed on Lavinia’s body, so too are they inscribed on the nation’s soil. The threats to Rome are envisioned as a dual plundering as Aron’s

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invasive actions are mapped onto Lavinia’s body. Though the line is omitted from the adaptation, Lavinia is, as Titus calls her in the original, a “map of woe” (3.2.12).  

In their use of female bodies as props, the adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays produced during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis years of 1678-82 demonstrate the increasing importance of women, and female bodies, in the construction and dissemination of national identity. Although these adaptations present predominantly Tory attitudes—absolute submission to the sovereign and a distrust of republicanism, for example—at stake in these plays is a construction of woman that is appealing to both Tory and Whig alike. The purity of England, the plays suggest, depends upon the purity of female bodies, the only means through which families and the nation could ensure legitimate succession and inheritance. Woman is valuable to the state in that she increases its value through the production of legitimate heirs. Her womb, her body, is indeed a “treasure” or “treasury” on which the nation’s wealth and success depends.  

Yet the importance of women in the construction of national identity is paradoxical. While it elevates women as national icons, it also leads to greater surveillance and stricter regimes of control over the female body and the performance of femininity. Those bodies that are impure must be removed. Thus the good women often suffer the same fate as the wicked. Even Cressida, in Dryden’s adaptation, must kill herself in order to prove her purity. In putting female bodies to the service of a nationalist rhetoric, these male playwrights reinforce the patriarchal control of female representation and, consequently, the control of female sexuality. This control did not go unquestioned, however. As I will show in the following chapter, some

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54 The concerns over succession are also demonstrated in the scenes that include children, all of which, in the adaptations, are male. Junius (young Lucius in the original) is cast as a more childlike figure in the adaptation. He, like his aunt, is portrayed as exceedingly innocent. Junius does not read Ovid in the adaptation. The play suggests that he lacks the capacity to do so as he is just learning his letters.
playwrights, such as Aphra Behn, critiqued the limited roles available to women by demonstrating their constrictive and potentially destructive nature.
CHAPTER 4

MOVING MINIATURES AND CIRCULATING BODIES IN APHRA BEHN’S THE ROVER

Most criticism on Aphra Behn’s The Rover (1677) at least mentions the “sign of Angellica,” the large portrait that hangs below Angellica Bianca’s house. Indeed, Behn also refers to the portrait in her postscript to the play. Quibbling over the extent of her debt to Thomas Killigrew’s Thomaso (1654), from which she borrows more than she is willing to acknowledge, Behn says, “had I had the Dexterity of some Poets, who are not more Expert in stealing than in the Art of Concealing, and who even that way out-do the Spartan-Boyes. I might have appropriated all to my self, but I, vainly proud of my Judgment, hang out the Sign of Angellica, (the only stoln Objects) to give Notice where a great part of the Wit dwelt (85).” Behn’s suggests that by borrowing “only” this one part of Killigrew’s play, she demonstrates her own authorial “dexterity” and keen critical insight. In other words, Behn uses the sign of Angellica to define herself and her poetic abilities.

How fitting, then, that Behn’s use of miniature portraits as stage props becomes the means through which she explores identity and self-expression in the play. She criticizes the commodification of women by linking the movement of her props to the movement of the bodies of her female characters. The men in The Rover control the movement of female bodies; they also control the movement of miniatures that depict those bodies. Behn demonstrates how the

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2 Janet Todd’s argues that Aphra Behn’s “professional literary concern is with the portrait, with the social construction of woman, the woman in business, in activity, in story, and in history, the female persona not the unknowable person” (The Sign of Angellica [New York: Columbia University Press, 1989], 1).
men—especially Wilmore—deny Angellica and Florinda ownership of their pictures and, more importantly, of themselves once they make their pictures public. Behn employs the miniatures to criticize the use of women as props and property, both in and out of the marriage market.

Behn furthers her critique with the example of her heroine Hellena by suggesting that women can maintain some autonomy even within the confines of marriage by controlling the movement of their images and their bodies. Hellena has no miniature to represent her, and she monitors who can and cannot see her. She can choose to move where and when she wants. Moreover, much as the men move women, Hellena sees Willmore and, at least metaphorically, controls the movement of his body, making him her prop. Behn spoofs Restoration comic convention by inverting the process through which men move women.

As works of art, miniature portraits figuratively miniaturize the objects that they depict. Yet these “portraits in little” are often big with meaning. Susan Stewart suggests the presence of an inverse relationship between a miniature’s size and its significance:

Minute description reduces the object to its signifying properties, and this reduction of physical dimensions results in a multiplication of ideological properties. The minute depiction of the object in painting . . . reduces the tactile and olfactory dimensions of the object and at the same time increases the significance of the object within the system of signs.³

Behn exploits the relationship between literal size and figurative meaning in The Rover by emphasizing the relationship between the painted object and its original. Angellica’s and Florinda’s miniatures substitute in diminished form for the bodies that they depict. What happens to their pictures also happens to their bodies. Behn’s stage directions are of special importance in

this regard. Willmore does not just “look” at the pictures of Angellica. He “gazes on the Picture” (18); he “[t]urns from the Picture” (19); and then “having gaz’d all this while on the Picture, pulls down a little one” (22). According to Richard Brilliant, “Portraits can elicit responsive behaviour from viewers as if the art works presented themselves in the form of a proposition, ‘This is so and so’, and the viewers then behaved accordingly.”4 While Blunt, Belvile, and Frederick discuss the picture, Willmore reacts to it because the miniature induces in him a series of physical and emotional responses, from awed silence to frustration and anger. After more silent gazing, Willmore claims ownership of the picture. He explains his reactions to Angellica when he meets her in person: “I saw your Charming Picture and was wounded; quite through my Soul each pointed Beauty ran; and wanting a Thousand Crowns to procure my remedy—I laid this little Picture to my Bosom” (23). Willmore’s statement reveals the miniature’s affective potential and heightens the association between the subject and object, or, put another, between the object and the object of his desire.

Willmore’s conflation of Angellica with her portrait is most pronounced when Willmore transfers his actions from Angellica’s picture to her body. He mimics his interactions with the miniature when he meets Angellica: he “[h]olds her, looks on her, and pawses and sighs”; he “[t]urns her away from him”; he “turn[s] from her in Rage”; and then “he holds her” again (26-28). In both instances, Willmore controls the movement of both Angellica’s miniature and her body; his doubled actions emphasize the connection between Angellica’s representation and her body. If miniatures are “a stage on which we project . . . a deliberately framed series of actions,” as Stewart argues, then Angellica, like her miniature, becomes a stage on which Willmore reprojects a series of actions.5

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5 Stewart, On Longing, 54.
Blunt’s proposal that the men take down the large portrait of Angellica corresponds to similar threats against her body. Blunt says, “we’ll have the great one too; ’tis ours by Conquest.—prithee help me up and I’ll pull it down” (23). Moving the picture—now the spoils of the Englishmen’s battle with the Spaniards—becomes a violent group enterprise. In the next scene, Willmore repeats the threat by insinuating that the group might take Angellica’s body. Lacking the money to buy Angellica for the month, Willmore says that he and his friends can “put in for a Share, we cannot lose much by it, and what we have no use for, we’ll sell upon the Frydays mart at—Who gives more?” (26). Willmore implies that each of the men will first have his turn with Angellica (much like the later attempted gang-rape of Florinda), and then they will sell her to the highest bidder. Angellica would again lose the ability to move herself because the men would be in charge of selling her and of moving her from man to man and customer to customer.

At stake here are more than Angellica’s portraits. By merging subject with object, Willmore (and Blunt), in effect, denies Angellica agency. Willmore insists that he is the miniature’s, not Angellica’s, victim. Willmore may act the aggressor with his theft, yet he would have Angellica believe that the picture has ravished him. The result, he suggests, is an emotional incontinence, the effects of which he is not accountable for. In fact, implicit in his language is that Angellica is beholden to him because her picture has “wounded” him. The replicated stage directions demonstrate, moreover, the cycle of consumption that Cynthia Lowenthal details in her discussion of rape “not as sexual desire but a compulsive search for ‘novelty.’” Willmore moves from attraction (“[h]olds her, looks on her, and pawses and sighs”) to violence (he “[t]urns her away from him”) to repulsion (he “[t]urn[s] from her in Rage”) and then to new

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attraction ("he holds her"). The progress from miniature to woman reveals Willmore’s search for “new novelty” (which he again seeks when he moves from Angellica to Florinda and, to a lesser extent, to Hellena). The miniature becomes an effigy on which Willmore enacts the violent taking he attempts throughout the play. Its theft anticipates both the physical and emotional violence that Willmore later perpetrates against Angellica (and Florinda).

The correlation between moving miniatures and circulating bodies in The Rover suggests that once a woman makes her picture public, she loses her freedom of movement because she, like her picture, becomes a commodity for public consumption. Florinda does not hang her picture from her window in order to attract men as Angellica does; but by putting her miniature into circulation, she often encounters analogous obstacles. When Florinda gives her jewel (a miniature in a jeweled case) to Belvile, he shows her picture to Frederick and Willmore (37). Willmore is the first to comment on her picture, and he is also the first to attempt rape. The men reenact in the rape scenes the previous circulation of the miniature.

For almost every movement between actor and prop, Behn creates a similar movement between actor and actress. The actresses’ bodies take on the portable characteristics of stage props during the course of the play as the actors move them for theatrical effect, as if they, too, were inanimate objects. Like props, the women “relate characters to each other, and to larger elements in their dramatic worlds.” Behn’s stage directions again highlight this relationship.

During the scene in which Belvile and Don Pedro fight one another, Belvile “draws [Florinda] aside” (51); Don Pedro “gives him [Belvile] Flor[inda]” (50) and then “takes Flor[inda] from him,” so Willmore suggests that they “fetch” Florinda back (52). The women unwillingly become props that the men use to assert their virility over each other, as the many fights that

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ensue over Angellica and the sword drawing to claim a right in Florinda demonstrate. Florinda can only escape becoming a prop in the rape scenes when she establishes herself as already the property of another. She defines the relationships between Don Pedro and Don Antonio and Don Pedro and Belvile.

The dual circulation of miniatures and bodies in *The Rover* suggests multiple interpretations of Angellica’s and Florinda’s “signs.” Todd contends that “[i]t is the sign of woman, not an essence of womanhood that can be studied, for Angellica, like her author, did not hang out herself, but a sexual, social, historical and artistic artefact.”

Even so, the women make their miniatures public in order to display their self-created identities—in effect, the essence of their selves. Florinda wants Belvile to regard her as a chaste, marriageable woman; Angellica wants the men to think of her as an expensive mistress, attainable only by a very few. Thus she is “not displeas’d with their rallying; their wonder,” she says, “feeds my vanity, and he that wishes but to buy, gives me more Pride, than he that gives my Price, can make my pleasure” (19).

Angellica understands well the effects of mimetic desire in which desire for an object in one person heightens or stimulates desire for the same object in another. She achieves a sense of self in part from the competitive desires of her potential clients who work not only to drive up her price but also to maintain her value. For the women, then, miniatures are the means through which they attempt to achieve agency.

Because miniatures stand not only for the women’s perceptions of themselves but also for how the public sees, or reads, the pictures, they become sites of conflict over which the women’s

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8 Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, 10. Though I apply to the miniatures Todd’s assertions that a woman’s writing reveals the writer’s self, I am wary of the application of this connection to an author and her texts. Todd notes that Behn “would have none of the notion of transcendental art, morally efficacious and untrammeled by its age or the intention and personality of its begetter. . . . She knew that she was up against prejudice when she insisted that her art was not her life, that if her plays followed fashion, her private activities could be perfectly decent” (75). But even if this “was not a view of woman writers that many people held” during Behn’s time, Todd fails to distinguish more subtly between a woman’s texts (often a woman’s attempts at financial and social agency) and her personal life.
understandings of themselves contest the public, specifically male, interpretations projected back onto the miniatures. According to Patricia Fumerton, in a discussion of miniatures and Elizabethan sonnets, the “‘[p]ublication’ of the miniature . . . while creating a sense of inwardness—and thus appearing to respond to a real need for expressing the inner, private self—could only be arrived at through outer, public ‘rooms.’”\(^9\) Angellica and Florinda must display their private selves in public fora in order to make those identities available to others; as a result, the men can construct their own interpretation of the women’s images. For the women in *The Rover*, the need for “publication” leads to a constant deferral of the private self. Because portraits are “denotative,” as Brilliant argues, Angellica and Florinda essentially give the men who view their pictures the power to name (or rename) them, metaphorically speaking.\(^10\) The women represented in the miniatures forfeit the ability to name or define themselves once they present themselves publicly. The contested interpretations result in the ensuing crises of self and physical violence that the women undergo.

When Angellica would have Willmore “read” her as a costly courtesan, for example, he does not yield to her as the other men do. He criticizes Angellica’s image and steals her picture:

>This Posture’s loose and negligent,  
The sight on’t wou’d beget a warm desire,  
In Souls whom Impotence and Age had chill’d.  

—This must along with me. (22)

Willmore reads into the picture an illicit sexuality that a man even as poor as himself can attain. If “violence and aggression” in Restoration drama become the means to “contain female

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\(^10\) Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 46.
identity,” as Lowenthal has argued, then Willmore’s theft, a violence that he enacts on the picture in place of the absent woman, contains both her identity and her sexuality. He reduces perfection to imperfection, the unattainable to the already attained. In the next scene, Willmore suggests that he has removed the picture, so Angellica can no longer “tempt poor Am’rous Mortals” like himself (24). Willmore decreases the number of pictures available for men to view, and, in doing so, he regulates Angellica’s identity by limiting her ability to “beget a warm desire” in those who view her. He suppresses her ability to portray her interpretation of herself.

Willmore transfers his interpretation of Angellica’s miniature to her body when they meet face-to-face, making her body, like her miniature, an object of contention. Anita Pacheco argues that the images hanging below Angellica’s balcony become “rather than her body . . . the site of conflict” for which Don Pedro, Don Antonio, and the Englishmen fight for Angellica. Yet Pacheco’s focus on the male conflict ignores the more tenuous relationship between the women’s self-authorizing intentions and the men’s resistance to those intentions. Whereas Angellica sees herself as a unified, inviolable whole, Willmore implies that she is divisible, that her body can be sold part by part; he suggests that she overestimates her value. Willmore asks Moretta, “pray how much may come to my Share for a Pistole.—Bawd take your black Lead and Sum it up, that I may have a Pistoles worth of this vain gay [thing]” (25). Although Willmore’s “pistoles worth” may very well refer to the amount of time he could spend with Angellica, underlying his demand is the assumption that Angellica is a petty “thing” that he can buy by the pound. He ascribes to her the status not of kept mistress but that of a commonplace prostitute, an object that the men can “sell upon the Frydays mart.” Willmore threatens to “contain” Angellica’s sexuality and her identity when he insinuates that the men will buy and sell her piecemeal because they would also

11 Lowenthal, *Performing Identities*, 30. Lowenthal relates her discussion of violence to the figure of the monster.
12 Anita Pacheco, “Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover,*” *English Literary History* 65 (1998): 399.
take away her power to sell her own body. The imagined fragmentation of Angellica’s body into parts that can be hawked like cheap goods at the local market—goods that people, the common rabble no less, barter for—is emblematic of the fragmentation of Angellica’s identity. Willmore suggests that, like her price that others determine for her, Angellica’s identity is negotiable and ultimately determined not by Angellica but by those who purchase her.

Readers should not take too seriously Willmore's boastful assertions in this scene. He has no direct authority over Angellica. By the end of the play, she still represents for other men, especially Antonio, the elusive prize that she did at the play's beginning. In fact, Willmore's braggadocio, his hypermasculinity, could very well be the result of what Helen Burke argues is Behn's satirization of cavalier masculinity. Willmore, like Blunt, “demonstrates the classic boastfulness of the mock-chivalric or false knight” by insisting upon his imagined authority over Angellica and her body.  

Behn suggests that this new type of masculinity that Willmore represents—the rake hero who is peculiar to Restoration drama—is for all his apparent sexiness, dangerous to women, men, and the functioning social order. The threat that Willmore poses is, fundamentally, a national one: Behn aligns him, formally speaking, with the senex character (and thus with Don Pedro); he becomes an obstacle to a legitimate, reproductive couple, narrowly, a threat to England, more broadly. The distinctions between Willmore's and Belvile's characters are useful here. Belvile is a hero much more in keeping with traditional comic plots in which the

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14 See Burke, who argues that Behn “succeeds in transforming the cavalier from an object of admiration into an object of derision and scorn” (“The Cavalier Myth in the Rover,” 121). She continues later, “In giving the rape attempt [on Florinda] to Willmore, . . . Behn implicitly suggests that the cavalier and the aristocratic system he represents pose as great a threat to the safety of the nation as the rebellious country gentry, and this point is further driven home by the parallelism created between Willmore and Blunt” (124). I suggest that Behn's critique is, perhaps, not quite this extreme. Willmore is a likeable or, at the very least, an alluring, character. An extravagant rake, per Robert Hume's definition, he is not without his faults, which Behn uses to the advantage of her social critique; but he is not the vicious rake of other Restoration plays, maliciously seeking to harm others (see Hume, “The Myth of the Rake in ‘Restoration’ Comedy,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 10 (1977): 25-55).
hero “must undertake a journey through . . . the male homosocial order where the obstacles to his happiness lie.” The greatest obstacle that Belvile must overcome is not Don Pedro's acceptance, as Rosenthal would have it, but Willmore’s continual frustration of Belvile's attempts to save Florinda from her brother.

Behn calls into question all types of masculinity and the ways in which men use their positions of power to classify women; she exposes the artificiality and danger of these constructions. Most threatening to Angellica are not Willmore’s “mock-chivalric” boasts but his distancing of Angellica from her interpretation of herself when he turns her into a lover, a would-be wife. By falling in love with Willmore, Angellica contradicts her resolution “that nothing but Gold, shall charm [her] heart” (20). Instead, Willmore ends up with the un-charmed heart; his jingling gold is a dowry without the baggage. He has, as he says, “All the honey of Matrimony, but none of the sting” (32). And when he roves after Hellena, Willmore eventually turns Angellica into a lover scorned. This, the courtesan argues, makes her most vulnerable. She insists that falling in love made her a slave to men (75)—a position of ultimate abjection—which threatens her reputation and could ultimately jeopardize her trade (76). He demonstrates the ways in which men assume control over women and their identities, disallowing them the right of autonomous subjectivity.

The “sign of Angellica” and Florinda’s jewel signify both the characters—Angellica and Florinda—and the “characters” of Angellica and Florinda, that is, their reputations. Just as miniatures are props that actresses held and actors acted upon during a production of the play, the reputations that the miniatures symbolize, Behn intimates, are also “props” that women carry with them. The women’s reputations are no longer theirs to control once they offer them up for

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public scrutiny. Angellica’s grand entrance on the balcony when she “throws open the Curtains” (21) suggests both her awareness of the process of social inscription and her desire to suppress possible distortions of her public persona. She engages in “self-specularization” according to Lowenthal’s extended definition of Simon During’s term: “self-specularization . . . include[s] not only those moments when individuals chose to make themselves appear ‘exotic,’ in seventeenth-century terms, but also those moments when individuals began to regulate, control, and police their own images: when individuals became self-conscious about their own bodies as objects of speculation liable to manipulation on the surface.”

The triangulation of Don Pedro, Don Antonio, and Angellica reinforces Angellica’s preferred interpretation of her portraits. She stands above the male characters, literally out of their reach, commanding their attention and forcing them to look up at her. Their lines of sight distinguish Angellica as the visual focus of this scene. She performs, in some ways, like a pontiff come to address her subjects. Through her performance, Angellica creates a direct visual and interpretive link between her paintings and her person. The portraits in triplicate serve to replicate and reinforce the impression she creates when she so dramatically makes her presence known. As Willmore’s “misreading” of Angellica and her portrait make clear, though, the very mechanisms of interpretive control that Angellica must use leave her vulnerable to reinterpretation. Her public portraits are at odds with her desire to control the portraits’ meaning.

Florinda surrenders her reputation when she gifts her picture to Belvile, and he then shows it to his friends. In each attempted rape scene, the men read her not as a gentlewoman but as, to employ the language used on one of these occasions, “an Errant Harlot” (44). Willmore’s defense to Belvile when chastised for not “see[ing] something about her Face and Person, to

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16 Lowenthal, Performing Identities, 22; see also 21 and 218, n. 18; Simon During, “Rousseau’s Patrimony: Primitivism, Romance, and Becoming Other,” in Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 60-61.
strike an awful Reverence into [his] Soul” is telling: “I consider’d her,” he says, “as meer a Woman as I cou’d wish” (44). The word “meer” indicates a reduction in size and significance. Much as the women’s portraits miniaturize their bodies for male consumption, the men’s readings of the pictures metaphorically miniaturize the women’s interpretations of themselves. By suggesting that Florinda is a “meer” woman, Willmore implies that she—and how she perceives herself—is irrelevant, that she lacks significance beyond what Willmore allows her because she is “only” a woman. On the one hand, then, Willmore does away with types of women. For him, all women are equal. On the other hand, all women, to Willmore, are equally devalued. Florinda’s resistance and her complaints that she deserves better treatment because of her social position do not matter. Willmore’s reply also suggests that how the men want to use the women affects their interpretation of the women. Behn’s critique of Willmore’s cavalier masculinity is strongest here when he all but admits that he cannot (or, more likely, will not) differentiate between a prostitute and a woman of quality. He uses masculine constructions of femininity only when they are convenient for him. This moment brings Willmore into close alignment with Blunt who, throughout the play, fails to distinguish between types of women—thus satirizing Willmore all the more.17 This and the other attempted rapes of Florinda—the violent movements of her body or, seen another way, the inhibition of her movement—parallels the violent repression, or containment, of her identity.

For Behn, interpretation of public display will always supersede private meaning. Seeing therefore becomes the means through which the men, or more specifically Willmore, commandeer the women’s images and bodies—hence Willmore’s belief that he has a right “of Possession” (22) after he has gazed upon Angellica’s picture. By looking at the women, the men

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can reinterpret, redefine, and rename them. This pattern helps explain *The Rover’s* obsession with seeing and being seen. Behn uses a form of the verb “to see” approximately eighty-six times in the play. Blunt’s coercion of Florinda reveals the power of sight: not only does he threaten to “kiss and beat thee all over,” but he also says that he will “kiss, and see thee all over” (65). Seeing Florinda, not only her face but “all over,” gives Blunt the power of ownership: he can define her as a prostitute and then treat her as such (even though he ultimately fails to follow through with his threats).

Act 5, scene 1, in which Angellica confronts Willmore with a pistol, exemplifies this process. Angellica arrives in order to take her revenge on Willmore for his unfaithfulness to her. It appears that Angellica directs Willmore’s movement because she “follows him with the Pistol to his Breast” (74, 75). She forces him to move backward away from her. Yet the moment Angellica “Pulls off her Vizard” (74), she begins to lose control over Willmore. Willmore’s gaze functions according to Kevin J. Gardner’s definition in his discussion of William Congreve’s *Way of the World* (1700): it “operates as a powerful disciplinary force regulating the conduct and normalizing the behavior of the person who is the object of the gaze, pinning him or her down for a scrutiny which will compare, differentiate, hierarchize, and exclude.”

When Angellica removes her mask, she allows Willmore to “normalize” her behavior, to manipulate both her and her identity. With Angellica’s unmasking, Willmore gains not only control of the courtesan, but he also gains control of the scene. Although Angellica had previously been resolved “[b]y all [her] hopes to kill” Willmore, when he sees her and names her, Angellica’s determination wavers. He further diminishishes Angellica’s worth by condescendingly calling attention to her monstrosity: “Hold, dear Virago!” he tells her (74, emphasis added). Willmore then patronizes

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her when he offers her sex in order to placate her. Unmasked and open to interpretation, Angellica’s resolve diminishes: she says, “Oh, if I take not heed, my coward heart will leave me to his mercy.” Angellica might have the pistol, but Willmore restrains her with his words by telling her that she is no better than he is. As she says, Willmore “destroy[s] [her] fancy’d pow’r” (76).

Because the corresponding movement of miniatures and women in *The Rover* is in keeping with other Restoration plays, Angellica’s and Florinda’s frustrated attempts at autonomy draw attention to Behn’s critique of women as property. In William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675) and Delarivier Manley’s *The Royal Mischief* (1696), as in *The Way of the World*, women circulate their miniatures in anticipation of sexual satisfaction. Wycherley’s Mrs. Squeamish allows Old Lady Squeamish to give Horner her miniature (which Lady Squeamish had previously shown him). She wants Horner to claim her body so that she, too, can have some of his “china” (59). Although brief, this scene underscores the larger scopic issues within *The Country Wife*, a play obsessed with looking. Throughout the play, Horner’s greatest pleasure in women comes not when he interacts with them alone on stage but when he performs for other men, for example when he kisses Margery, who is dressed in her boy’s clothes, in front of Pinchwife. On multiple occasions, he positions Quack behind a screen, so the doctor can watch as he seduces other men’s wives (sometimes while the husbands look on). Mrs. Squeamish’s circulation of her portrait parallels Horner’s circulation, through Quack, of his rumored impotence. Horner draws attention to himself with his rumor, freeing the women from continued surveillance by the men, which then allows them a greater freedom of movement and the ability to fulfill their sexual desires. He creates a space for the women in which they can become the

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subjects of desire, a freedom they lack within their own marriages. Wycherley is not unlike Behn, then, in critiquing a repressive patriarchal construction of marriage that does not allow for female sexual desire.\textsuperscript{20}

Being looked at, for Mrs. Squeamish and for Horner, is an empowering source of sexual pleasure. Homais, in \textit{The Royal Mischief}, also positions herself as a sexual object in a power play that sets in motion the overarching action of the play. Imprisoned, cut off from society by her impotent husband, Homais cannot fulfill the desires that a life-size portrait of Levan Dadian, her husband’s nephew, arouses. The erotic pleasure she derives from looking is, for all its intensity, incapable of effecting her sexual fulfillment. Understanding well the power of spectacle, Homais has Acmat, her eunuch, show Levan a miniature of herself. As Lowenthal also notes, Acmat’s ekphrasis enhances Levan’s desire for the princess (132).\textsuperscript{21} Manley creates what Jennifer Airey calls in her discussion of \textit{The Country Wife}, “concentric circles of viewership” (2): Levan Dadian watches Homais watch him. That is, Acmat deliberately turns the act of Homais’s gazing at the portrait into a spectacle, devaluing her placement as an agent within the play’s scopic economy. Like Levan’s large picture, which overwhelms Homais’s smaller pictorial representation, his gaze also encloses hers (another parallel to her physical confinement). Manley’s and Behn’s plays emphasizes that when a playwright uses pictures to represent characters, size does matter. For all the power ascribed to Homais’s eyes throughout the play, they are most powerful when fetishized as gazing objects within masculine discourse. Like Angellica, Homais’s means of acquiring power are also the means through which she is circumscribed within the scopic

\textsuperscript{20} Wycherley creates a similar “reduction” of Horner and Pinchwife with the china and penknife that he uses to denote these characters. The association is made more apparent by the auricular similarities of the objects and the men’s names.

\textsuperscript{21} Delarivier Manley, \textit{The Royal Mischief} (1696). All references to the play are cited parenthetically. For a reading of female desire and interiority in \textit{The Royal Mischief}, see Lowenthal, chapter 4. Lowenthal argues that “Manley makes visible the mediating force the theater exerts in the production and erasure of female interiority as it is represented as female desire (124).
economy, when, in Lowenthal’s terms, “the princess is finally positioned as the delimited object of view.” Homais’s objectification through visual and discursive representation serves as counterpart to her death at the end of the play: the driving force throughout the play, her plotting effects her own demise. Manley critiques, like Behn, the destructive consequences that occur when female desire lacks a space in which to circulate.

Congreve’s Lady Wishfort also circulates a miniature in the hope that its movement will lead to the movement of her body. The miniature might be part of Mirabell’s ruse; but Lady Wishfort’s assent to its use as a means to persuade Sir Rowland to court her suggests that she wants men, specifically Sir Rowland, to view her body as a commodity. She circulates her miniature as the means through which she can put herself back into circulation on the marriage market. Lady Wishfort establishes herself as an object of sexual availability by marketing herself as a potential wife—and as a result, potential male property, the anxiety that drives Fainall’s counterplot. She views marriage as a source of power, the means through which she will disinherit Mirabell. As a result, however, she willingly concedes the agency that she already has as a widow, a woman with the legal right to own property. Her drive to fulfill her desires at the cost of her independence opposes the very lack of desire in Widow Blackacre in Wycherley’s The Plain Dealer (1677). The only desire that the Widow Blackacre exhibits is the desire to sue in her own name. She takes full advantage of her legal enfranchisement and her freedom from the confines of marriage. For the widow, covert-baron offers not the protection of a husband but the imprisonment of a wife. Given the choice of marriage or imprisonment, she says that it is but “a removal from one prison to another” (5.2.564-66). Rather than lose the freedom that she has gained as a widow, the Widow Blackacre signs over £400 a year to Freeman and promises to

22 Lowenthal, Performing Identities, 133.
cover his debts. That she “would rather be deprived of life” (5.2.574) than marry underscores the very real loss of autonomy and identity that women experience within the institution of marriage; her anxiety suggests that, for women, marriage is a kind of death by disallowing women the realization of their full potential as individuals.

Although both Lady Wishfort and the Widow Blackacre are foolish figures in these plays, Wycherley gives Widow Blackacre a poignancy that Congreve does not bestow on Lady Wishfort. Lady Wishfort’s frequent iterations of “as I am a person” are a case in point. Eight times she uses this, or a similar construction, not as a meaningful gesture of selfhood but, instead, as a turn of phrase, an expression that becomes more cliché with each utterance. She undermines the significance of the phrase by the frequency with which she uses it. Thus her last lines before her exit in the final scene lack the seriousness that they deserve. She says, “As I am a person, I can hold out no longer. I have wasted my spirits so today already that I am ready to sink under the fatigue, and I cannot but have some fears upon me yet that my son Fainall will pursue some desperate course” (318). Her anxiety here is no laughing matter, yet she undermines the significance of her statement by diminishing the connection between her selfhood and Fainall’s potential infringement on the boundaries of her self with his “desperate course.”

Lady Wishfort is, perhaps, all the more the foolish for her willingness to relinquish her power as a free woman. She gives up what Angellica, Florinda, and Hellena seek. Lady Wishfort deliberately turns herself into an object when she paints herself to resemble her picture. Whereas miniatures usually act as stand-ins for absent bodies, Lady Wishfort becomes the stand-in for her miniature. Just as she once sat for her picture, her “picture must sit for” her (280). She—not her miniature—becomes the painted object on display. When she decides to receive Sir

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Rowland *en tableau*, Lady Wishfort emphasizes her painted-ness and her self-objectification: she says, “I’ll lie—aye, I’ll lie down—I’ll receive him in my little dressing-room; there’s a couch—yes, yes, I’ll give the first impression on a couch. I won’t lie neither, but loll and lean upon one elbow, with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way . . .” (292). She will briefly hold the pose of a reclining woman in a pretty disorder, a pose not uncommon in early modern painting. This “loose and negligent” posture is supposed to be alluring—the kind that Willmore proposes can “beget a warm desire, / In Souls whom Impotence and Age had chill’d” (22). Lady Wishfort wants to seduce Sir Rowland by allowing him a glimpse of her stretched-out, open, and inviting body (and thoughtful foot). She turns herself into a picture in order to further Sir Rowland’s interpretation of her as an object that can inspire and gratify his sexual desires. Through her bodily reproduction of her picture, Lady Wishfort, like her picture, becomes an object available for Sir Rowland’s “possession” (302). She consequently has no complaints when Foible tells her that Sir Rowland has “worshipped” her miniature and kissed it so much that Foible returns to Lady Wishfort “all that is not kissed away” (279). These kisses are the prelude to those she hopes to receive from him in person. Not only does Lady Wishfort want to marry Sir Rowland to revenge herself on Mirabell, but she is also interested in the match for the sexual pleasure that it promises to bring her.

Like Mrs. Squeamish and Homais in Wycherley’s and Manley’s plays, Lady Wishfort circulates her miniature specifically for her own sexual gratification. Furthermore, these three women agree with the men’s interpretations of the miniatures. They want to be and are seen as

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25 See, for example, Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538) and Rubens’s *Angellica and the Hermit* (1630). Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) is a modern realization of this motif.

26 See also Lowenthal’s reading of this passage as a moment of self-specularization: “These moments combine to demonstrate Lady Wishfort’s sophisticated understanding that she is performing, even in the privacy of her own dressing room, an activity that demands that she turn her own body into an object of scrutiny in the same way her ‘audience’ would” (*Performing Identities*, 23).
women with sexual desires. Except in the case of Lady Wishfort (who does not live up to her miniature and becomes, ironically, “the antidote to desire” [304] in her pretended-suitor’s mordant reckoning), these women achieve the sexual satisfaction for which they circulated their miniatures. Like Behn’s male characters, these women believe that women take pleasure in becoming objects for male use.

Wycherley’s, Manley’s, and Congreve’s characters “enjoy” objectification. Behn’s women, however, assert a right to intellectual authority and property for themselves. Although Wycherley and Manley present more nuanced versions of the paradigm of circulating miniatures, their focus on female desire as a driving force distances them from Behn’s insistence that female identity extends beyond mere desire. The Widow Blackacre again stands as counterpoint here: her lack of sexual desire aligns her with Florinda and Angellica, who seek a fully realized subjectivity outside of the realm of their sexuality. Behn problematizes the assumption that women desire to be men’s property, hence Willmore’s assertion during the first rape scene that Florinda is “oblig’d in Conscience to deny [him] nothing.” He insinuates that though she says “no” now, she will thank him for his attention later. Because Florinda is in the garden at night by herself, she must, according to Willmore’s logic, want him to use her against her will, for “there will be no sin in’t, because ’twas neither design’d nor premeditated” (42). Willmore implies that he is the one doing Florinda a favor.

The men’s and women’s conflicting readings in Behn’s play expose a cultural disparity between male and female interpretations of women as property. The disparity arises when men, those with the legal right to own property, read women as potential property. Laura Brace remarks that “property and self-ownership are about the capacity to exclude others, or to exercise

27 We could argue, however, that Mrs. Squeamish turns Horner into an object for her own use.
28 See also 4.3: “she looks back as she were willing to be boarded” (63).
a kind of mastery over ourselves”; the men’s declarations of property in the women trump or “exclude” the women’s right to “mastery over” themselves. Pacheco and Julie Nash, among others, have argued that Angellica—like Mrs. Squeamish, Homais, and Lady Wishfort—enjoys her own objectification (she says as much to Moretta). But she only does so in those moments when the men’s interpretations of her—Don Pedro’s and Don Antonio’s, for example—match her interpretation of herself. This gives her the power in their interactions, allowing her to order the men to do her bidding. For example, Antonio tells Angellica, “When I refuse obedience to your Will, / May you destroy me with your Mortal hate” (77). Angellica may be objectified, but she owns the object in question: her reputation. As a self-employed prostitute, she also owns her body and leases it out to men at her discretion. Only when Willmore superimposes his reading of Angellica onto her must she fight to retain ownership of herself.

Behn characterizes as rape the loss of a self-created identity through visual and physical appropriation. Blunt’s assertion that he wants to “see [Florinda] all over” conflates the act of appropriation by sight with physical appropriation through rape. They are equally invasive and equally dispossessing. Angellica’s fate, Behn suggests, is just as traumatic and violent as rape. Willmore may not rape Angellica in a literal, physical sense, but Angellica’s victimization and her emotional accusation of Willmore in act 5 evoke the traumatizing effects and psychic violence that result from the masculine control over women’s identities. Within Lowenthal’s paradigm of the cycle of consumption, Angellica’s denunciation exhibits her “explosive, if short-lived, compulsion . . . to speak her trauma, to articulate a wounded interiority, a subjectivity that

30 See Pacheco, “Rape and the Female Subject,” 336; and see also Julie Nash, “‘The sight on’t would beget a warm desire’: Visual Pleasure in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover,*” *Restoration* 18 (1994): 80.
31 This theme is in keeping with Behn’s amatory fiction in which she equates rape and a man’s or a woman’s inability to choose his or her spouse. See *The History of the Nun* (1689) and *The Fair Jilt* (1688) for two examples.
insists on a female identity that exceeds the surfaces of her body.”\(^{32}\) (156). Angellica becomes “monstrous” in her need to exert control over her identity; in other words, she becomes monstrous as a result of masculine violence. Her suffering is all the more resonant because of her absence from the end of the play. Lowenthal argues that the cycle of consumption “produces waste in the form of the discarded bodies of the rapist’s victims”; Angellica’s traumatic experience leads to her complete erasure. Angellica is very much like the raped women whom Lowenthal discusses: she “dies” in her eradication from the play’s end. Her loss of self is matched by her loss of a physical presence on stage.\(^{33}\)

For all the similarities in the circulation of Florinda’s and Angellica’s miniatures, audiences should not overlook the very real differences between them. Each woman chooses to put her own image into circulation; yet Florinda, unlike Angellica, means for Belvile alone to see her picture in hopes of a greater degree of privacy and anonymity. Perhaps we could consider the differences in the circulation of their miniatures similar to the differences between the publication of literary works and the circulation of manuscripts within a coterie. The former potentially allows anyone access to a work, but fewer people have access to works within the latter, allowing an author more control in the dissemination of his or her text. Angellica has less ability to regulate who sees her portraits because anyone walking by her house has the opportunity to view them, which only increases her fame. Florinda’s more discrete circulation, though it is not without its dangers, is less threatening. She eventually overcomes her obstacles unscathed while the too-promiscuous Angellica suffers the indignity of being written out of the

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\(^{32}\) Lowenthal, *Performing Identities*, 156.

\(^{33}\) Angellica’s similarity to powerful women such as Homais in Manley’s *The Royal Mischief* and Millwood in Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731) further accentuates her tragic fate.
Through the plights of these women, Behn condemns the state of selflessness for all women. In doing so, she illustrates for the audience and reader how women—those on the marriage market, “the mistress market,” or any market in between—become props and property. She creates a unified category of woman, “making a case,” as John Francesschina says, “for the value of woman as woman.” Though we should not forget the ambiguity of Angellica’s absence at the end of the play, at least while Angellica is a lover and Florinda a whore, Behn collapses the distinctions between the male-enforced binaries.

At the play’s end, prostitutes disappear, and virgins become wives. Behn observes comic convention and in so doing acknowledges the resilience of the social conventions that continued to define women in Restoration society. This is not to suggest, however, that she sees Angellica’s and Florinda’s struggles as unnecessary. Rather, Behn indicates that there may be more effective ways for women to seek agency. In order to demonstrate the different ways a woman can successfully assert authority over herself, Behn created in Hellena a character in some ways very similar to Angellica and Florinda. Hellena is aware of her own self worth, both physically and monetarily. She tells Florinda and Valeria,

> prithee tell me, what dost thou see about me that is unfit for Love—have I not a World of Youth? a humour gay? a Beauty passable? a Vigour desirable? well Shap’t? clean limb’d? sweet breath’d? and sense enough to know how all these ought to be employ’d to the best advantage; yes I do and will, therefore lay aside your hopes of my Fortune by my being a Devote . . . . (2)

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34 Todd argues, “Angellica Bianca is denied the hero: the message of her portrait is too frank, too crude. Had she worn it close to her face as a mask, matters might have been different, but instead she chose to distance it and to draw attention to its construction. The action was conscious, blatant, unfeminine and professional” (The Sign of Angelica, 1).


Hellena recognizes that she has the qualities to attract a man, both in her person and in her fortune. She understands, as her sister and Angellica do, her value as a commodity. Also like them, she wants to “realize the benefits of [her] own circulation.”

“I don’t intend,” she says to her sister and cousin, “every he that likes me shall have me, but he that I like; I shou’d have staid in the Nunnery still, if I had lik’d my Lady Abbess as well as she lik’d me—no, I came thence not (as my wise Brother imagines) to take an Eternal Farewell of the World, but to Love and to be belov’d; and I will be belov’d, or I’ll get one of your Men, so I will” (30). Hellena implies that because her opinion matters more than a man’s, she will take upon herself the right of choice in a mate and provide herself with a man.

Rather than settle for the limits placed upon her, Hellena plays with the signs that confine her. She understands the consequences of seeing and being seen, and she uses this to her advantage by controlling at all times who can and cannot see her. Hellena does not rely on mediating texts; she circulates no miniature. Although she demonstrates a wariness of showing herself too much in public from the outset of the play, Hellena’s discretion does not stop her from going into public. She instead creates signs out of costumes that hide her “true” self, ensuring that no men are able to discover her real identity. She might be a gypsy or a page, but she is never just Hellena. As a result, Hellena goes where she wants when she wants without the threat of sexual violation. Hellena preserves her freedom of movement while avoiding the loss of her private identity. Angellica and Florinda, on the other hand, make themselves known, even if covertly as in Florinda’s case.

Maintaining control over her image allows Hellena to maintain control over her body. She willingly subjects herself to Willmore’s gaze, but only at her discretion, and only in person.

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Not until her second meeting with Willmore does she reveal herself. Willmore asks to see her face; and Hellena at first refuses, simultaneously heightening his desire and asserting her command of the action. Only when Willmore ceases asking does she remove her vizard and show him her “desperate . . . lying look.” After Willmore praises her beauty, Hellena replaces her mask, and according to the stage directions, Willmore “seems to court her to pull off her Vizar: she refuses” (34). Willmore can physically act on Angellica and Florinda, but he has no power over Hellena. Willmore’s confusion when he fails to expose Hellena in their conversation with Angellica illustrates the accomplishment of her objective: only Willmore sees her; only Willmore “owns” her reputation. By withholding herself from Willmore’s gaze, moreover, Hellena eroticizes herself and entices Willmore all the more. She engages in an erotic love play that sustains Willmore’s desire for her and curiosity about her. She thus gains control of their relationship.

At times, Florinda enjoys the same freedom of movement as Hellena, such as when she enters the carnival in costume with her sister and cousin. Sometimes, she even has power over men’s movement. In the scene on the Molo, Florinda breaks up the fight between Belvile and Pedro. “She holds [Belvile],” impeding his movement. Yet the men’s ability to contain Florinda’s movements inevitably subsumes her attempts to move men. Not ten lines later, Pedro “gives” (50) Florinda to Belvile, who later “[d]raws her aside” (51). The difference between the women’s success in their attempts to move freely in public spaces, and direct men’s movements, stems from Hellena’s acute awareness and manipulation of the differences between the gender roles. Threats to Florinda occur when she goes out alone either without a costume (the garden rape scene) or dressed as a courtesan (when she walks away from Valeria, and Willmore pursues her). When Hellena is in public alone, however, she dresses as a boy. Another important
distinction between Hellena’s success and Florinda’s many obstacles are the reasons that they enter public places. Florinda does so in an attempt to elope with Belvile; Hellena does so to gain power. She wants a lover so that she will “have [her] Beauty prais’d, [her] Wit admir’d, . . . and have the vanity and pow’r to know that [she is] desirable” (31, emphasis added). Both women want to fulfill their desires, yet Hellena has the foresight to recognize that these desires are ultimately tied to power dynamics between men and women.

By creating a female character who understands the power of sight and the need visually to repress herself in public, Behn transfers to Hellena the men’s ability to move women. Hellena is able to pursue Willmore and control his movements because she has seen him. Not once during the play does Willmore hide himself with either a mask or a costume. He always wears his captain’s uniform, making himself at all times identifiable. In act 2, scene 1, Willmore asks Belvile why he and Frederick are “thus disguis’d and muzzel’d.” Though he says that he “shou’d have chang’d [his] Eternal Buffe,” Willmore decides that he is glad he did not because otherwise his “little Gipsie wou’d not have found [him] out then” (16). He fails to recognize his own vulnerability that his visibility creates. When Willmore is about to follow Don Pedro and Belvile offstage, Hellena enters, “as before in Boys Clothes, and pulls him back” (79). She stops him from leaving in order to engage him in conversation.

Hellena also moves Willmore metaphorically. As she moves on stage (seeing Willmore but remaining unseen), Hellena corrals Willmore and entices him into marrying her. In some ways, she, just as much as Willmore, plays the man’s part. She does to Willmore what he and the other men have done to Angellica and Florinda. Hellena treats men as interchangeable commodities. Much as Willmore roves in search of any willing (or unwilling) woman he can
find, Hellena goes “a Captain-hunting” (59). At the beginning of the play, she has no specific man in mind; she only hopes that Belvile “has some mad Companion or other, that will spoil [her] devotion” (2)—any willing man who suits her fancy will do. Once she chooses Willmore, she pursues him with the confidence that Willmore pursues Angellica. That she uses the phrase “a Captain-hunting” is also significant because it implies a violent chase, which parallels the violent movement of Florinda’s and Angellica’s bodies. Hellena reverses the powerful male trope of love poetry in which men chase unattainable women. She, not the man, is the hunter. Hellena’s use of the trope is more powerful, though, because her prey is not unattainable: she eventually catches Willmore in marriage.

Hellena parodies both the accepted masculine and feminine roles. She mocks a woman’s role in a courtship: “‘Tis true,” she tells Florinda, “I never was a Lover yet—but I begin to have a shrew’d guess, what ’tis to be so, and fancy it very pretty to sigh, and sing, and blush, and wish, and dream and wish, and long and wish to see the Man; and when I do, look pale and tremble” (1). Nowhere in the play does she sigh and blush and wish and dream and tremble. Perhaps the only truth in this statement is Hellena’s desire to “see the Man.” While she might be very interested in love like “all living Creatures of [her] Age” (81), Hellena’s insistence that Willmore’s offer of a single kiss is a “sneaking sum” (80) suggests that she is perhaps more interested in physical pleasure. As she tells Florinda, “but since you have set my heart a wishing—I am resolv’d to know for what, I will not dye of the Pip, so I will not” (30). Hellena recognizes that the only way she can achieve her sexual desires is within marriage.

In some ways, then, Hellena is like Harriet from Etherege’s The Man of Mode (1676). Robert Markley argues that Harriet, like Dorimant,
is an accomplished parodist, who “Acts him” (stage directions) to his face. . . . Her mimicking of Dorimant is both a pleasure and a form of control; it reflects both her struggle to master her attraction to him and her desire to outwit and out-perform him. By playing the part of the disdainful beauty, she is able to force Dorimant into the role of the dutiful suitor. . . . [H]er success in winning his love results from outplaying him at his own game . . . .

Hellena acts Willmore by doing to him what he has done to Angellica and Florinda. She sees him and moves him; she gains control over him. After Hellena discovers Willmore’s tryst with Angellica, she tauntingly acts him by turning his words against him: “Ah such a Bona Roba! to be in her Arms is lying in Fresco, all perfum’d Air about me.” Hellena demonstrates her power over Willmore in their conversation by first not allowing him to explain his actions. And when he does tell her that “there are Ladies in the World, that will not be cruel,” she says to him, “And there be Men too, as fine, wild Inconstant Fellowes as yourself, there be, Captain there be, if you go to that now” (36). Hellena is as willing as Willmore to be inconstant. Acting Willmore is for Hellena a form of pleasure and control, though the control is not in an attempt to “master her attraction” but is instead an attempt to master his. Hellena proves herself better than Willmore at playing himself. She is a female rake.

Indeed, Hellena ultimately beats Willmore at his own game of inconstancy. She repeatedly calls herself “inconstant.” She tells Willmore,

I am as inconstant as you, for I have consider’d, Captain, that a handsome Woman has a great deal to do whilst her Face is good, for then is our Harvest time to gather Friends; and should I in these dayes of my Youth, catch a fit of foolish Constancy, I were undone;

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40 See Burke, “The Cavalier Myth in *The Rover*”: “Hellena most closely resembles the cavalier hero” (122).
’tis loitering by day-light in our great Journey: therefore I declare, I’ll allow but one year for Love, one year for indifference, and one year for hate—and then—go hang yourself—for I profess my self the gay, the kind, and the Inconstant—The Devil’s in’t if this won’t please you. (34)

Hellena knows that her professed inconstancy will please Willmore. Much as hiding herself from him emphasizes her body’s erotic potential, playing the inconstant—not Harriet’s “disdainful beauty”—becomes a turn-on for Willmore. This, too, sustains and intensifies his desire for her. It gives Hellena power over Willmore because she withholds the object of his desire. Hellena verbally titillates Willmore in the scene in which she mimics him. She says, “therefore, I’m resolved—”

Will. Oh!—

Hell. To see your Face no more—

Will. Oh!

Hell. Till tomorrow.

Will. Egad you frighted me.

Hell. Nor then neither, unless you’ll swear never to see that Lady more. (36)

Each pause gauges Willmore’s desire for Hellena while simultaneously increasing his desire to see her again. Willmore wants what he cannot have. That Hellena suggests he will not be able to see her—or that she will be inconstant and that he cannot have her body—only makes him want her more.

Hellena “moves” Willmore socially (for example hypermagnetically) by enticing him to marry her. She controls who can and cannot see her (partially by not having a miniature), which allows her to manipulate successfully the categories that men use to contain women. She
presents herself as inconstant and marriageable, an available gypsy and an off-limits virgin. Playing with signs eventually gives Hellena power in the marriage contract just as she has had power in her courtship. In what amounts to a proviso scene, Willmore yields to Hellena’s insistence that they marry before they become more intimate. She makes Willmore tell her his name first—again demonstrating her dominance in their relationship. Hellena can name Willmore before he can name her even though he was the first to suggest that they reveal their names. When Willmore announces himself not as Willmore the Rover but as “Robert the Constant,” he shows how Hellena has been able to reduce and contain him—at least for a little while. And in proclaiming herself “Hellena the Inconstant” (81), Hellena hints at the further power she will have as Willmore’s wife. She alludes to the trouble to come.41

Behn has not written a tidy play: her hero’s treatment of women, whether prostitute or virgin, is troubling. Some critics argue that Willmore chooses Hellena not because he loves her but because of her wealth.42 Yet Willmore’s actions, his failure to make a concerted effort to marry Hellena and secure her fortune, suggest that he is not solely interested in Hellena for her money. He continues roving after other women; and, even at the end of the play, he jeopardizes his access to Hellena’s money by trying once again to sleep with her outside of marriage. When Hellena insists upon marriage, Willmore demurs: “Hold, hold, no Bugg words, Child, Priest and Hymen, prithee add a Hang man to ’em to make up the consort,—no, no, we’l have no Vows but Love, Child, nor witness but the Lover” (80). In fact, it is Hellena’s insistence that ensures and solidifies Willmore’s acquisition of her fortune.

41 Obviously, this reading does not take into account Hellena’s death, which Willmore reports in The Rover, Part II (1681).
42 Rosenthal says that “the discovery of Hellena’s fortune makes her more attractive as a marriage partner” and that Willmore “makes his choice of Hellena . . . only after he learns of her financial value” (“Masculinity in Restoration Drama,” 101).
Audiences consequently should consider the other side of the match. Hellena does not suffer from misapprehensions about marriage: she tells Willmore that she will be “as kind as [he] will . . . whil’st it lasts” (80). Hellena’s marriage to Willmore is no more punishment for her than it is for him: his future wife promises inconstancy. Hellena seeks through marriage the continued freedom of movement that she has enjoyed throughout the play. It appears that Willmore has clearly found his better. Hellena is by no means the weaker partner in this courtship, and though she will legally be the lesser-advantaged partner in their marriage, this does not mean that her agency will diminish. Her social savvy allows her to recognize that marriage to the right partner—to a man who does not seem to mind a rakish wife—will give her the ability to categorize Willmore. When Hellena tells Willmore, “now Captain shew your Love and Courage; stand to your Arms and defend me bravely, or I am lost for Ever” (81), Burke argues that Hellena “directs the audience to forget her cavalier’s demonstrated history of heroic failure and see him only as the traditional knight in shining armour.”43 To read these lines as such, however, would undercut the criticism that Behn has spent the entire play developing. Willmore is not and should not be read as a “knight in shining armour.” Implicit in Burke’s statement is, however, the suggestion that Hellena directs Willmore how to act “the role of the dutiful suitor,”44 which he obediently does. Perhaps this compels Willmore, though he has the last word, to tell Hellena, “Lead on” (83). She moves ahead of Willmore, and he follows. Hellena successfully makes Willmore her prop and her property in marriage.

In a play full of movement—both of bodies and objects—miniatures help Behn demonstrate the ways in which women often lose their freedom of movement and self-expression once they become male property in marriage. She critiques the limited spaces available for

44 Markley, Two-Edg’d Weapons, 133.
women and the constricting roles to which they are limited. With Florinda and Angellica, Behn
commiserates with those who have suffered from the social structures that deny women equal
opportunities of self-expression and self-ownership. But Behn does not suggest an overhaul of
the status quo. Through Hellena, she subtly points out the ways in which women can manipulate
the system to their own benefit. She shows women, to use Stewart’s terminology, how to reduce
men to their signifying properties as well.
CHAPTER 5

CONTAINING IDENTITY IN THREE RESTORATION COMEDIES

In the previous chapter, I observed that Lady Wishfort’s “drive to fulfill her desires at the cost of her independence opposes the very lack of desire in Widow Blackacre in Wycherley’s The Plain Dealer.” Unlike the Widow Blackacre, whose obsession with lawsuits propels The Plain Dealer’s subplot, Lady Wishfort’s hoped-for love suits from Mirabell and “Sir Rowland” result in Lady Wishfort’s marketing of herself as “potential male property.” Where the Widow Blackacre views marriage as debilitating, an encumbrance on her rights of widowhood, Lady Wishfort views marriage as a source of power. She contemplates marriage to Sir Rowland as a means to disinherit Mirabell by marrying his uncle. Though her scheme is thwarted, Lady Wishfort acknowledges the power that the control of property accords individuals. Indeed, faced with the loss of her own estate, her daughter’s estate, and half of her niece’s marriage portion, Lady Wishfort cries, “Must I live to be confiscated at this rebel rate?” (312). Lady Wishfort here elides the distinction between her property and her person. To “confiscate” the former is ultimately a confiscation or deprivation of the latter. Though their views on marriage differ, both characters consider the property and the legal rights of self-sovereignty gained at widowhood as integral to their identities.

The plights of Lady Wishfort and the Widow Blackacre demonstrate the importance of property in the construction and expression of identity; simultaneously, they call attention to the ways in which control over another person’s property affects that person’s sense of self. Through an examination of containers as stage properties in The Plain Dealer, The Way of the World, and

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1 In act 3, Lady Wishfort also acknowledges marriage as a source of power. She says, “I’ll marry a drawer to have him poisoned in his wine” (William Congreve, The Way of the World [1700], in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. Scott McMillin (1973; New York: W. W. Norton, 1997). All references are to this text and will be cited parenthetically.
George Farquhar’s Beaux’ Stratagem (1707), I will investigate the implications of property for a person’s identity. As containers, boxes and cabinets often hold those objects that represent a person’s public or legal identity: their money, their deeds and titles, their marriage licenses, their wills, and even, in the case of the Widow Blackacre, their law suits. The boxes consequently participate in what Margreta de Grazia, Patricia Fumerton, and others have recognized as the direct link between ownership of property and identity.² Often brought on stage during revelatory moments, the containers and their contents not only help resolve the action, but they also help make visible the connections between what one owns and who one is. They delineate the ways in which property negotiates relationships between people through its ability to include or exclude.

The control over another character’s property often accords a person control of the character to whom the property belongs. By following the movement of these containers, readers can trace the ways in which property negotiates relationships of power and subjugation, thereby impacting the construction, expression, and containment of identities.

In this chapter, I will evaluate the relationship among legal documents, property, and identity in three Restoration comedies.³ I will first discuss some representative references to boxes that appear in documents, both private and public, of the late seventeenth century. Samuel Pepys refers to boxes approximately forty-six times in his diary. A slight majority of the references are to boxes at the theater; the remaining instances refer to containers that hold a variety of objects, including tools, linen, gloves, a watch, fowl, “rich jewells,” pamphlets, and, quite horrifically, a “boy” who had “died of a consumption; and being dead” was “dried in an

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³I follow Robert D. Hume’s dates for Restoration drama. He argues, “[t]he period 1660-1710 does make a kind of unit, not self-contained but internally cohesive, even though it comprises some very disparate sorts of plays” (The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976], 10).
In addition to this list of the mundane and the extraordinary, Pepys’s boxes also contain money and personal papers. His entry of 23 March 1660 begins, “Carried my Lord’s will in a black box to Mr. W. Montagu, for him to keep for him.” On 5 March 1662, he purchases a poor box, he says, “to put my forfeits in, upon breach of my late vows.” And in his account of the Great Fire (2 Sept. 1666), Pepys laments that, unable to stay in his home, “we were forced to begin to pack up our own goods, and prepare for their removal . . . and I did remove my money and iron chests into my cellar . . . . And got my bags of gold into my office, ready to carry away, and my chief papers of accounts, also there, and my tallies into a box by themselves.” In each of these examples, the items stored within the boxes, items that often had economic and political significance, most concerns the diarist. He consequently, though perhaps unintentionally, highlights the protective nature of these containers. The boxes by their very nature obstruct access to their contents, thereby keeping secret the objects within them.

Boxes are also prevalent in the public record. In the summer of 1660, the House of Lords issued multiple orders for members of the aristocracy to seize the goods that were confiscated by the Commonwealth government during the Civil Wars. The “Order for the Marq[uis] of Winton to have Leave to search for his Goods,” which reads similarly to the three other Orders issued between 26 and 30 June, begins by emphasizing the unlawful removal of the Marquis’s goods: “Information given this Day to the House, [confirms that] ‘That Bernard Reeves, Edward Acton, and other Persons, in Basingestoke and elsewhere, do retain divers Goods, Household Stuff, Writings, and Plate, belonging to the Lord Marquis of Winchester, which were taken out of

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5 *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Latham and Matthews, I, 80; III, 66; VII, 270.
Because of this illegal confiscation, the Marquis of Winton is granted Liberty, by his Servants and Agents, to make diligent Search, for any of his said Goods. . . [T]he said Parties thus employed by the Lord Marquis, shall and are hereby impowered (upon Resistance made) to break open . . . any Door, Trunk, Chest, or Box, that shall not be opened in Obedience to this Order; and such Goods of the said Marquis's as shall be thus found, to take, bear, and carry away, for his Lordship's Use; any Thing to the contrary in any Wise notwithstanding.

As with the boxes that Pepys’s mentions, the “Trunk, Chest, or Box” indicated in this and the other Orders suggests the secretive and protective function of boxes. The Order also calls attention to the violent nature of confiscation and, in this case, restitution as well. In the event of “Resistance,” the Marquis’s servants have the right to “break open” the containers, that is, to use violent force in the retrieval of the Marquis’s goods.

A less salacious reference to a box occurs in the Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies. The “Minutes of the Council of Barbadoes” on 13 September 1669 documents that “[a] black box [was] directed from Whitehall the 20th of May last, containing two commissions and other papers relating to St. Christopher’s.” Though included in rather ordinary business proceedings, the box again surfaces as a protective barrier to the contents inside. The box, though seemingly incidental, is in fact consequential to the unimpeded functioning of government business.

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The boxes that appear in government documents were not always objects that expedited government proceedings. In many cases, the contents within the boxes were direct threats to the government because they considered harmful, and even treasonous. On 18 December 1678, in the midst of the Popish Plot, the Lord Archbishop entered into public record “a box . . . in which are many Papers relating to Robert Pugh, a Popish Priest, now in Custody.”

According the Journal of the House of Lords, the box’s contents were to be examined “for Discovery of the horrid Design against His Majesty's Person and Government” in order to make a case against Pugh, who “died, while still incarcerated, on 22 January 1679.”

Yet no box was as famous or as potentially damaging as the black box that was rumored to have contained a marriage license for Charles II and Lucy Walter, his mistress in the late 1640s and mother to his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth. Rumors of the box circulated in print, for example in the anonymous A Full Relation of the Contents of the Black Box (1680). Speculation over the existence of the box and marriage contract ran so high that, in 1680, Charles issued a Declaration To all His Loving Subjects, June Second, 1680 in which he discounts the rumors:

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We cannot but take notice of the great Industry and Malice wherewith some Men of a Seditious and Restless Spirit, do spread abroad a most false and scandalous Report of a Marriage or Contract of Marriage supposed to be and made between Us and one Mrs Walters, . . . aiming thereby to fill the minds of Our Loving Subjects with Doubts and Fears, an if possible, to divide them into Parties and Factions, an as much as in them lies, to bring into Question the clear undoubted Right of Our True and Lawful Heirs and Successors to the Crown. We have therefore thought Our Self obliged to let Our Loving Subjects see what steps We . . . have already made in order to obviate the ill Consequences that so dangerous and malicious a Report may have in future times upon the Peace of Our Kingdoms.\textsuperscript{12}

Although Charles does not mention the black box, he is deeply troubled by its supposed contents. And the marriage contract, perhaps more so than any of the items mentioned above, has serious political and economic implications. Framing his disavowal of the marriage contract in terms of the current political crisis, Charles argues that the rumors are yet another Whig attempt to subvert the legitimate government by intensifying the already tumultuous political climate.\textsuperscript{13}

The box and its contents are an impediment to peaceful rule and national security. Charles suggests that the rumors, if not subdued, could lead to a further rift between government factions. As I noted in chapter 3, the arguments against bipartisan politics during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis often framed fractious politics as a precursor to civil war. Charles’s allegations consequently point to a future of continued political, social, and economic unrest.

\textsuperscript{12} His Majesties Declaration to all His Loving Subjects, June Second, 1680 (1680), 3. For more information on the controversy over the black box, see Michael McKeon, The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 499-503; and see also Greaves, Secrets of the Kingdom, 19-20. Greaves notes that rumors of a marriage between Charles and Lucy Walters began to spread “[a]s early as 1662,” and he offers a more detailed account of the part radical printers took in the dissemination of the rumor (19, 15-20). See also the entry for “Lucy Walters” in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

\textsuperscript{13} Greaves relates the rumors of the box to Whig efforts to prove Monmouth’s legitimacy and exclude James from the succession (Secrets of a Kingdom, 19).
The “secret cabinet,” as Michael McKeon calls the black box, also has repercussions for the identities of the members of the royal family.\textsuperscript{14} By undermining the legitimacy of Charles’s “True and Lawful” successor now, the rumors could potentially threaten a future successor’s claim to the throne. The rumors could resurface, as the king points out, to weaken the legitimacy of a future ruler. Implicit in Charles’s declaration is a relationship between legal documents and identity. The members of royal family now and in the future will be affected by the marriage contract’s existence and the continued circulation of rumors about it. As one of the articles that documents the distribution of property within and between families, moreover, a marriage contract would also affect not only the successor’s political inheritance but also his economic inheritance. With rule comes more property, more money, and the legal control of the state treasury. The contents of the enigmatic black box had the power substantially to alter British national identity.

The containers in \textit{The Plain Dealer}, \textit{The Way of the World}, and \textit{The Beaux’ Stratagem} have much in common with the boxes of historical record. They contain objects that detail what the characters own; in so doing, they also describe the characters’ worth, both literally and metaphorically. With the exception of Manly’s cabinet, which contains cash and jewels, the containers hold those papers that prove ownership of the characters’ estates.\textsuperscript{15} Manly has placed his remaining fortune in a cabinet and given it, before the play begins, to Olivia for safekeeping. Mirabell’s black box contains “a deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella Languish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell” (317). Archer hands Sir Charles Freeman “all the

\textsuperscript{14} McKeon, \textit{Secret History of Domesticity}, 500. McKeon argues, “the token of the black box is a kind of secret cabinet whose potential authenticity is deliberately undermined by the otiose fictionality of its romance roots.”

\textsuperscript{15} Amy Louise Erickson notes that “[l]egal ‘evidences’—deeds, bonds, charters, contracts, wills and so forth—were enormously important at all levels of early modern society.” She continues, “Debts, sales, marriages, gifts of property both pre-and post-mortem, were all transactions to be secured in writing” (\textit{Women and Property in Early Modern England} [London: Routledge, 1993], 22, 23).
writings of [Sullen’s] estate, all the articles of marriage with his lady, bills, bonds, leases, receipts to an infinite value” (5.4.35-18). And as the Widow Blackacre so frantically points out, her lost bags contain “all that concern my Estate, my Jointure, my Husband’s Deed of Gift, my Evidences for all my Suits now depending!” (3.1.563-66). All of these objects, whether implicitly (for example, cash) or explicitly (for example, the marriage contracts and deeds) represent materially the rights that the characters have to their property. In the discussion of the characters’ property that follows, I refer less to those objects that a person owns than to the rights a person has to those objects. As C. B. Macpherson argues, property is not things but rights. . . . [T]o have a property is to have a right in the sense of an enforceable claim to some use or benefit of something, whether it is a right to share in some common resource or an individual right in some particular things. What distinguishes property from mere momentary possession is that property is a claim that will be enforced by society or the state, by custom or convention or law. The prevalence in these plays of written documents supports Macpherson’s claim. The documents make legal and binding the characters’ rights and act as “enforceable claims” to the estates and objects that they enumerated. Without such legal documentation, characters, for example Manly, who has only cash, and the Widow with her forgeries, have no recourse to the law for restitution. Because property is inherently about rights and relationships and the ability to include or exclude, any form of ownership confers a legal identity that, without written evidence, is otherwise impossible to prove.

The objects contained in the characters’ boxes and bags constitute the characters’ public and legal identities. For example, the Sullens’ identities as husband and wife are documented on the marriage contract that Archer hands over to Sir Charles Freeman. The Widow Blackacre’s law suits prove not only her claims to her property but are also evidence of her rights, and identity, as a woman of the law. Even Millamant’s identity is linked to the property that she owns or, rather, the property that she brings to her marriage. Her potential role as Mirabell’s wife is contingent on a £12,000 dowry, not the paltry £6,000 that he would receive if they married without Lady Wishfort’s consent. Wycherley makes clear that his hero and heroine are very much in love, that they respect each other, and that they are a good match. But nowhere in the play is the suggestion that he and Millamant will marry without the money; thus he goes to great lengths to secure the Widow’s approval. In order to be Mrs. Mirabell, Millamant must bring her entire fortune with her.

In many ways, then, the containers and their contents demonstrate the relationship between owning and being. Fumerton’s discussion of “trivial” objects reveals the way in which even the most superfluous items contribute to a person’s sense of self.¹⁹ The “trivial selfhood of the aristocracy in the English Renaissance,” she argues, “was supported and, indeed, constituted by bric-a-brac worlds of decorations, gifts, foodstuffs, small entertainments, and other particles of cultural wealth and show.”²⁰ As de Grazia demonstrates, this paradigm obtains for people of all classes. She argues, “It is the identity not only of those born into kingdoms and earldoms that is contingent upon possessions, but also—quite astonishingly—those born into nothing

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¹⁹ See also de Grazia on King Lear: “Whether on top or at bottom of the social hierarchy, a person must have some extra thing beyond subsistence in order to be more than animal” (“Ideology,” 23).
²⁰ Fumerton, Cultural Aesthetics, 1.
It is thus fitting that the first possessions that Jerry Blackacre purchases with the money that Freeman gives him are “Trinkets” and “Cat-calls.” These frivolous objects highlight Jerry’s frivolous nature, his preference for toys over books and the legal process. The scene in which he enters “without his Bags; but laden with Trinkets, which he endeavors to hide from his Mother” suggests his lack of maturity and a dubious ability to manage on his own the Blackacre estate (3.1.541, stage direction). The Widow is wise, it seems, to withhold money from her son.

Similarly, the legal writings in Widow Blackacre’s possession for half of the play detail the property that she legally owns and, with the evidences, the property that she sues for possession of. The array of legal writings contained in her bags represents her obsession with the law. She says of herself, “I am that Relict and Executrix of known plentiful Assets and Parts, who understand my self and the Law” (2.1.1199-1200). Widow Blackacre “understands [her] self” because her legal knowledge allows her to understands and know her rights regarding her “Assets and Parts.” By knowing the latter, she knows the former. The Widow, like Lady Wishfort, makes no distinction between her property and her person. She is those assets and parts, and her identity cannot be severed from what she owns.

The complications of plot and character that arise in the plays present property and identity as directly proportionate to one another. Threats to a person’s property create potential threats as well to that person’s identity. In her reading of Shakespeare’s King Lear, de Grazia examines the relationship between “being and having.” She says, “removing what a person has simultaneously takes away what a person is . . . [N]or having is tantamount to non-being—to

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21 De Grazia, “Ideology,” 27. De Grazia observes that in King Lear, “[t]he names of all highborn male characters in the play are dropped so that the person and property are synonymous: Gloucester, Albany, Cornwall, France, Burgundy, Kent. The nameless poor are christened in Lear’s apostrophes after both their lack of clothing, ‘Poor Naked Wretches,’ and their lack of estate, ‘You Houseless Poverty.’”
being nothing.” What happens to these boxes has direct implications on what happens to the characters and the ways in which they construct their identities. Fainall’s threat to his wife before the revelation of the box is an apt example. He tells her, “You thing, that was a wife, shall smart for this! I will not leave thee wherewithal to hide thy shame; your body shall be as naked as your reputation” (316). Here Fainall touches on two aspects of property. First, by being forced to sign over the rest of her separate estate to Fainall, Mrs. Fainall loses any separate means of even the most basic aspects of self-preservation. Without access to money, Mrs. Fainall loses access as well to shelter, clothing, and food. She is at her husband’s mercy to provide these items. Second, Fainall makes a connection between her naked body and her naked reputation. Without her money, Mrs. Fainall lacks the means as well to safeguard her public identity.

The loss of Manly’s property corresponds to a simultaneous undermining of his identity as a plain dealer. If the play does not, per se, present the loss of property and identity as causational, it does at least draw attention to their interdependence. Early in first act, we discover that Manly has divested himself of a substantial portion of his property. The sailors are quick to point out that Manly has sunk his ship to protect the goods on board, “not only that the Dutch might not have her, but that the Courtiers, who laugh at wooden Legs, might not make her Prize” (1.1.122-26). The first sailor estimates Manly’s loss at “the value of five or six thousand pound of his own, with which he was to settle himself somewhere in the Indies” (1.1.140-42). More broadly, Manly’s actions have national implications: he protects goods meant for use by the English. Rather than allow the Dutch, whom he has just returned from fighting, to benefit from the goods on board his ship, he destroys them. On the one hand, this suggests a sort of nationalistic impulse in Manly, who would rather lose the goods outright than hand them over to the enemy. Yet the Sailor’s remark immediately following Manly’s rationale for protecting the

goods from the Dutch undermines this idea. By sinking the ship, Manly has also withheld the goods from circulation in the English economy. From the outset, the play sets up a contradiction in Manly’s nature, between a man who is part of a society and a man who would like to withdraw from that society.

Already the play presents a connection between property and identity. Manly loses the means to practice his profession. His loss of capital also prevents him from fulfilling his desire to sever himself from the world and “settle himself somewhere in the Indies,” away from the society of which he is so critical. He cannot fulfill his antisocial instincts without the ready money that would sustain him in his endeavors. That Manly requires money to be antisocial is paradoxical because as an owner of property, be it cash or land or goods, Manly inserts himself within a social network of relations. Richard Kroll argues, “Wycherley seems at some pains to emphasize that the circumstances are perverse, since sinking the ship prevents both the nation at large and Manly personally from benefitting from the war.”23 This “perverse” treatment of his property resurfaces in the tensions that exist throughout the play between Manly’s conception of himself and the realities of his actions and misperceptions. Manly’s inaccurate assessment of his friends is a useful example. Manly believes that he is a good judge of character, but by putting too much stock into his own honesty, he believes himself a better judge than he really is. He undervalues those who truly love him and overvalues those who manipulate him and take advantage of him. He will not accept Freeman’s friendship and considers Fidelia a pest. Yet he thinks Olivia “the onely Woman of Truth and Sincerity in the World” (1.1.672-73), which she contradicts when she betrays his loyalty by marrying his supposed best friend and by refusing to

relinquish Manly’s property to him. As with the goods aboard his ship, Manly shuns the formation of social bonds by discounting the benefits of Freeman’s and Fidelia’s friendships.

The perverse nature of Manly’s divestment is echoed by the devolution of his character as he increasingly adheres to behaviors that throughout the play he considers perverse. The loss of Manly’s ship and goods, along with half his fortune, is exacerbated by the voluntary acquiescence of his property to Olivia. The conversation between Fidelia and Freeman toward the end of the first act mirrors the conversation of the sailors. Fidelia tells Freeman that Manly loves Olivia “so well, that the remainder of his fortune (I hear about five or six thousand pounds) he has left her, in case he had dy’d by the way, or before she cou’d prevail with her Friends to follow him, which he expected she shou’d do; and has left behind him his great bosom friend to be her Convoy to him” (1.1.663-69). Manly’s treatment of his property underscores the ways in which his actions are incongruous with his desires and his definition of himself. Robert Markley argues that “Wycherley relentlessly sets words against actions to undermine comforting notions of linguistic stability”; the tensions between word and action likewise “undermine comforting notions” of a stable identity as Manly becomes increasingly susceptible to dishonesty, hypocrisy, and double dealing.

Manly’s desire to be a “plain dealer” appears in the play’s opening line with his heated disavowal of “Ceremonies” for ceremony’s sake: “Tell me not (my good Lord Plausible) of your Decorums, supercilious Forms, and slavish Ceremonies; your little Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World, do daily over and over, of, and to one another; not out of love or duty, but your servile fear” (1.1.1-6). Manly no doubt does frequently speak his mind to those who confront him throughout the play, but even in the play’s first line his rhetorical choices weaken

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his assertion of forthrightness. However slight, Manly’s parenthetical address to his “good Lord Plausible” is an instance of the very same ceremony that he spends six lines denouncing. In print, the parentheses surrounding this line give readers a visual cue to the discrepancy in what Manly says and how he addresses Plausible. In performance, an actor has the option either to recite the line seriously (that is, Manly genuinely uses the ceremony in acknowledging Lord Plausible) or sarcastically. The first option highlights the incongruity I have just mentioned. Yet even if Manly uses ceremonial address sarcastically, he still belies his own veracity: sarcasm as a rhetorical gesture creates a discrepancy between what Manly says and what he means, thereby detracting yet again from any plain dealing to which he professes. Markley argues that “[t]he society we see in The Plain Dealer is almost as bad as Manly says it is, but his criticism of its faults is qualified by his intolerance, double-dealing, and inability to distinguish his friends from his foes.” Manly’s criticisms, moreover, his “intolerance, double-dealing, and inability to distinguish his friends from his foes” also emphasize the disjunction between self-perception and action, between the plain-dealing he says he adheres to and the hypocrisy of which he, too, is guilty.

As tangible evidence of the characters’ rights to their estates, the documents and their containers materially represent the abstract boundaries of the self. The containers that circulate in these plays consequently help make visual the boundaries that property establishes between people. Implicit in the characters’ rights to property is their right as well to include or exclude others from that property. In each of these plays, those who lose property or fail to deprive others of their property—for example Fainall, Olivia, Vernish, and Sullen—are excluded as well

25 Markley, Two-Edg’d Weapons, 183.
from the dramatic action. In his chapter on property in his *Second Treatise*, Locke makes a connection between subjectivity and ownership, between the boundaries of what one owns and the boundaries of the self. He states, “The Fruit, or Venison, which nourishes the wild Indian, who knows no Inclosure, and is still a Tenant in common, must be his, and so his, *i.e.* a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his Life.” What a person appropriates to himself is “a part of him.” The “Inclosure” of land to which Locke refers here and throughout the fifth chapter of the *Second Treatise* is apt, for the boundaries of property that Locke discusses replicate the boundaries of identity and the enclosure of the self as something that is—or ought to be—barred to others. Locke makes this connection more forcefully in what is perhaps his most famous statement on property: “every Man has a Property in his own Person,” he argues, and “[t]his no Body has any Right to but himself.” And though Locke here refers as much to a person’s physical body, his emphasis on the “Labour” of a person’s body as the legitimating aspect of appropriation suggests that this property in the person is as much, if not more so, about a person’s self-integrity.

The threat to Mrs. Fainall’s reputation—that is, her public identity—leads Lady Wishfort to agree to her son-in-law’s demands. Having sat through Mrs. Marwood’s alarming depiction of divorce proceedings and public humiliation that Mrs. Fainall would suffer, Lady Wishfort says, “I’ll give up all, myself and my all, my niece and her all, anything, everything for composition.”

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27 This paradigm pertains as well in other plays. In Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677), Angellica Bianca gives money to Willmore, who then leaves her; and she too is exiled at the end of *The Rover.*


29 Locke, *Two Treatises*, II, 5, §27.

30 Borrowing from Jeremy Waldron, Donna Dickenson makes a distinction between the physical body and the moral person: “Waldron asserts that what really concerns Locke is not property in the body *per se* but property in the moral person, in one’s self, one’s power of agency” (*Property, Women, and Politics: Subjects or Objects?* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997], 3). Dickenson later expands on this concept, “If there is anything special about my work, it is not that it is the labour of my body, but that it represents my agency, a part of my self, my person. It is intimately linked to my personhood, because a person is defined as a being conscious of free and responsible action. People own their actions; they do not own their bodies” (79).
Rather than see her daughter disgraced by a divorce, Lady Wishfort considers Fainall’s proposition, even if she dislikes it. As a result, however, she would be just as susceptible to Fainall’s control. Lady Wishfort’s singular desire is to reinsert herself back on the marriage market, a desire that Fainall’s nefarious plans would circumvent. The concessions that he insists his mother-in-law make legally binding would put Lady Wishfort in a position not unlike a single woman before marriage. She would lose her right under Fainall’s enforced guardianship to control her estate (though Fainall, at first, tells her that she may “enjoy” her “proper estate during life” [311]). More important for Lady Wishfort, though, would be the loss of her right to choose her own husband. Fainall tells her, “if you are prescribed marriage, you shall be considered; I will only reserve to myself the power to choose for you.” She must also, he tells her, “submit your own estate to my management” (311, 315). The infringement on Lady Wishfort’s right of choice is more alarming to her than the loss of her property. Lady Wishfort’s response to Mr. Fainall when he makes his first set of demands is not to acknowledge the superficial control she would have over her property but to lament the freedoms that she would lose under this compact: “Never to marry?” she says, despondently. This violation, she suggests, is more severe than the loss of property, for it bars access to the means by which Lady Wishfort defines herself. If “expropriation fractures identity” and “identity dissipates with disentitlement,” as de Grazia suggests, it does so in part because it deprives a person of his or her agency and autonomy. Losing control of her property instigates a loss of those rights and freedoms that Lady Wishfort has gained as a widow.

Property, that is, accords people the resources whereby they can stake a claim for themselves as individuals. Like the revengers of early seventeenth-century revenge tragedy whose attempts at self-expression and differentiation are confounded by the destabilization of the
metaphors of selfhood, the (potentially) disinherited characters in these late seventeenth century comedies are (potentially) denied the resources to articulate their difference when deprived of the economic and legal (and metaphorical) means to assert that difference. Manly, for example, exhibits a desire much like Hamlet’s and Giovanni’s in ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore to make distinctions between himself and his corrupt society. In an attempt to prove his ethical and moral superiority, he says of himself,

    if I wou’d say or do ill to any, it shou’d be to their faces: I wou’d justle a proud, strutting, over-looking Coxcomb at the head of his Sycophants, . . . call a Rascall by no other title, though his Father had left him a Duke’s; laugh at Fools aloud, before their Mistresses: And must desire people to leave me, when their visits grow at last as troublesom, as they were at first impertinent. (1.1.59-75).

Yet Manly is not as forthright as he avows. He is responsible for twenty-three, or approximately twenty-nine percent, of the play’s seventy-eight asides (sometimes labeled as “apart” and “whisper”), that is, those moments when he either fails fully to confront the objects of his scorn or fails to admonish them in front of others. Because asides are generally those moments when characters speak most truthfully, Manly’s failure to speak these lines to the other characters or in open conversation contradicts his boastful assertions that should he “say or do ill” to others, “it shou’d be to [people’s] faces.” For example, when Plausible asks Manly if he has any business to attend to, Manly fails to answer Plausible’s question. He prevaricates, saying instead, “If you have any, wou’d not detain your Lordship” (1.1.86-87). When Plausible tells Manly, “Well, dear Sir, I see you wou’d have me gone,” Manly says in an aside, “But I see you won’t” (1.1.92-94). His response is a manipulative attempt to rid himself of Plausible’s unwanted company, rather than just asking his companion outright to leave.
Manly frustrates his own attempts at differentiation. If “[h]ypocrisy and double-dealing, for Manly, signify the surrender of the individual to a corrupt and corrupting society,” then Manly’s failures as a “plain dealer” and observer of his society are also the very things that mark him as a member of the society from which he throughout the play tries to distance himself. 31 Manly, in other words, consistently fails both at upholding those characteristics that he so highly esteems, and he fails at his efforts of differentiating himself from those around him. In his attempts to purge himself from his society, an inversion of the revenger motif, Manly calls all the more attention to how integrated he is within that society.

The complications of Manly’s character arise in part because his cabinet does not contain any documents. 32 His entire worth is liquid, that is, easily exchangeable and highly vulnerable to theft. Without written proof, Manly has no means to secure his property. In this aspect, Manly has much in common with the women in these plays, whose access to property is likewise tenuous. Although some critics, including Robert F. Bode and Helen Burke, acknowledge the similarities between the main plot and the sub plot of The Plain Dealer, few have called attention to the ways Manly and Widow Blackacre foil each other. 33 Burke argues that the subplot “provides the larger ideological context to the Manly plot.” 34 Yet Burke’s main concern is not the similarities between Manly and the Widow but the similarities between Manly and Jerry. She argues, “The central crisis of the play is the crisis of disappropriation suffered by the male subject, a crisis that unfolds along a double register: the anxiety about male property at the individual psychosexual level is duplicated by an anxiety about property at the broader social and

31 Markley, Two Edg’d Weapons, 184.
economic level.” While Jerry and Manly do face similar predicaments, the comparison is imbalanced. Burke compares the “plights” of a pimply adolescent whose greatest concerns are trinkets and women with a man who is gravely troubled by his corrupt society. What concern Jerry does show for his estate, especially his trees, diminishes as the play progresses. In fact, he only appears threatened by the potential loss of his estate when Freeman begins wooing his mother. After he rebels, Jerry is wasteful; he purchases trinkets and toys. He is satisfied with an allowance “of Forty pounds a Year, and a Nag of Assizes, kept by you, but not upon the Common,” a paltry sum compared to his new guardian’s £400 a year during the widow’s life, in addition to the payment of all of his debt, a sum that depletes the Widow’s estate, and thereby Jerry’s inheritance as well. Jerry is a tool, a means, like the bags that Freeman steals, to obtain access to the Widow’s property. And though Manly cares little for money, or any kind of property for that matter, he does at least recognize its usefulness during the Westminster scenes.

Freeman’s theft of the Widow’s bags, and her son, instigates the play’s crisis of expropriation. Even before he steals the bags, Freeman says that he wants the Widow’s money; and, initially, he intends to obtain it through marriage. Much like Mrs. Fainall who uses the benefits of widowhood to preserve her property, the Widow Blackacre desires most of all to preserve those rights conferred upon her in widowhood. The Widow Blackacre identifies herself specifically by her right to sue, a right available to her only in her widowhood and which, significantly, grants her a visible presence in what is generally a masculine pursuit. She stakes a claim for widows as individuals equal in intelligence and worth with the men who exclude

36 My assumption is that Freeman’s annuity would come directly from the Widow’s jointure, not from the estate. And though her jointure is likely derived from the estate, the Widow’s concern throughout the play with the preservation and enlargement of the Blackacre estate suggests that she would protect this by first supplying Freeman’s required sum from her own accounts. Manly’s and Oldfox’s suggestions that she will ruin the estate by using the money from the estate to subsidize her court costs is unfounded as the likeliest source of payment would be her own jointure.
women from potentially fulfilling roles in business and law. Perhaps more than any of the male characters, the Widow takes seriously the rights and responsibilities allowed her by her access to the law. As Bode points out,

If Wycherley had intended [Widow Blackacre] to be no more than a figure of fun, he could have presented her as such with ease by making her a fool or showing her legal activities to be ineffectual through her deficiencies or even meaningless in themselves. Instead, he has created in the Widow a character who brings into the play an accurate and realistic representation of the contemporary operations of private law and equity in the courts.  

The widow’s insistence on her rights, her fear of marriage, is an insistence as well on her rights to a separate identity from men. Having been deprived once of a legal identity, the Widow is loathe to relinquish that right again. When Freeman tells the widow that he does not want her legal advice but her “consent” for his “little Westminster-Abby business,” she does not take him seriously. Consenting to marriage, the widow later insists, “were but to sue out an Habeas corpus, for a removal from one Prison to another” (5.2.564-66).

As the Widow’s management of the Blackacre estate dramatizes, widowhood also conferred on women rights to property that were also lost during marriage. Though women did have some rights to ownership before, during, and after marriage, those rights were, as Susan Staves, Dickenson, and Erickson have pointed out in their excellent studies on women and property, always limited and contingent. The few rights of a woman as feme sole were denied her upon marriage. Erickson explains, “Under the common law a woman’s legal identity during marriage was eclipsed—literally covered—by her husband. As a ‘feme covert’, she could not

37 Bode, “Try me, At Least,” 2.
38 Dickenson, Property, Women, and Politics, 83.
contract, neither could she sue nor be sued independently of her husband.” While for the Widow Blackacre a loss of property is not her chief concern, to lose her property would result as well in a loss of the income required to pay her court fees. Loss of her property in marriage would deprive her of her legal access to the law in addition to the economic means to pay for her suits.

Because of their frequent appearances on stage, the Widow’s bags, perhaps more than any of the other containers, demonstrate some ways in which property is used as a means to negotiate relationships of power and subjugation. As much as the bags symbolize the Widow’s litigious nature, they also represent the power that she has now that she is no longer confined by coverture. While the bags are in the Widow’s possession, she is able to engage in legitimate legal activity. She is also far less threatened by Freeman’s and Oldfox’s attempts to woo her. She easily evades Freeman’s first attempt at “courtship.” In the second act, when Freeman and Oldfox try to out-woo each other, she calls their attempts “foolish” (2.1.1079, 1218) and then proceeds vehemently to denounce the men. Among other epithets, she calls Oldfox a “senseless, impertinent, quibling, drveling, feeble, paralytic, impotent, fumbling, frigid Nicompoop” (2.1.1101-1103); and Freeman a “foul-mouth’d Boaster of [his] Lust . . . . a worn-out Whoremaster” (2.1.1156, 1164). The widow then asserts her power, telling Freeman, “If I wou’d have marry’d a young Man, ’tis well known, I cou’d have had any young Heir in Norfolk; nay,

39 See Erickson, p. 3; see also Dickenson, Property, Women, and Politics; and Susan Staves, Married Women’s Separate Property in England, 1660-1833 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). Dickenson makes a similar observation and cites William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-69): “The very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under shoe wing, protection and cover, she performs everything; and is called in our law-French a feme covert, faemina viro co-operta; and is said to be covert-baron, or under protection and influence of her husband, her baron, and lord; and her condition during marriage is called coverture” (qtd. in Dickenson, 83). See also Edgar Thomas, The Lawes Resolutions of Women’s Rights; or, The Lawes Provision for Women (1632): “Man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner. When a small brooke or little river incorporateth with Rhodanus, Humber, or the Thames, the poor rivulet looseth its name, it is carried and recarried with the new associate, it beareth no sway, it possesseth nothing during coverture. A woman as soon as she is married, is called covert, in Latin nuptia, that is, veiled, as it were, clouded and overshadowed, she hath lost her stremem . . . . To a married woman her new self is her superior, her companion, her master” (116).
the hopefull’st young Man this day at the *Kings-Bench Bar*” (2.1.1194-1298). She has, among other rights as a widow, the rights of refusal and, significantly, the right of choice. She has sovereignty over her future. Lady Wishfort’s despondency over her potential loss of these same rights under Fainall—her desolate “Never to marry?”—underscores the very real threat posed to women by the institution of marriage. While Lady Wishfort may market herself as a commodity through the play, it is her choice to do so. Deprived of that choice, she is denied, like the Widow Blackacre, a significant amount of personal agency.

The Widow Blackacre’s impassioned profession of her privileges points out all the more the loss of identity for women under coverture. The Widow Blackacre is not so different from Millamant in this respect: both women fear their loss of power. Both women fear, that is, the loss of an ability to make choices for themselves. Their desire for differentiation is no less real than Manly’s, but their ability to make these distinctions is restricted and, upon marriage, denied them. Millamant exhibits a genuine fear at the potential loss of her freedoms:

> My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you then adieu? Ay-h adieu—my morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye *douceurs*, ye *sommeils du matin*, adieu?—I can’t do’t, ’tis more than impossible. (296)

Because Millamant, like the Widow, recognizes her power as a single women, she (like Hellena in Behn’s *The Rover*) holds out as long as possible before consenting to marry Mirabell. She sustains for as long as possible her control over their relationship.

Millamant’s articles in the famous proviso scene demonstrate her desire to maintain some sense of a separate identity from Mirabell, some dominion over a space of her own.\(^{40}\) She tells

\(^{40}\) See also Bacon, “Wives, Widows, and Writings”: “Millamant wishes primarily to preserve her own liberty and an identity separate from her husband. In 1700 it could not be a legal identity, affording her control of property;
Mirabell, “Ah! I’ll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure” (296).
Because she enters the proviso scene as the dominant party—Mirabell has professed his love for her, thereby granting power to her—Millamant is able to negotiate for herself a modicum of liberty in her marriage. Though broached in different terms—Millamant focuses on her freedom of movement about her home and time for contemplation to herself, where the Widow focuses on her public freedoms of the law—both Millamant and the Widow view marriage as a direct threat to their selfhood and autonomy and their ability to differentiate themselves not just from others, but from their own husbands. To voluntarily give up part of herself, Millamant insists, is painful, a choice that is excruciating to make. Indeed, even though she loves Mirabell, she says to Mrs. Fainall, “Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing” (299).

As both Millamant and the Widow point out, the stakes in marriage are much higher for women, the potential losses greater. The language of “dwindling” and “enlargement” that Millamant and Mirabell use in the proviso scene, language that applies as well to the economic aspects of marriage, makes clear the loss of identity and liberties that women experience upon marriage. The Widow likewise acknowledges this threat to identity. She tells Freeman after he offers her the ultimatum of prison or marriage, “O stay, Sir, can you be so cruel as to bring me under Covert Baron again? and put it out of my power to sue in my own name. Matrimony, to a Woman, worse than Excommunication, in depriving her of the benefit of the Law: and I wou’d rather be depriv’d of life” (5.2.569-73). This is no hyperbole: the widow makes a connection between her autonomy and her quality of life. Marriage would be a reversion for the Widow to state of lesser freedoms and fewer liberties. She would experience the same “dwindling” that Millamant so aptly acknowledges.

marriage took that possibility away from the single woman. Congreve, recognizing the extent to which Millamant’s legal status will ‘dwindle’ once she marries, gives her courtship the form of a legal document” (431).
When the Widow loses her bags, she loses her power of negotiation and becomes susceptible to Freeman’s machinations. When Jerry enters the stage with Freeman in act three without the bags, and the Widow is rightly alarmed: “O, Major, I’m undone,” she says, “they are all that concern my Estate, my Jointure, my Husband’s Deed of Gift, my Evidences for all my Suits now depending! What will become of them?” (3.1.563-66). Without her bags, the Widow’s estate and future are at risk; she is at risk. Implicit in the Widow’s question, then, is a correlative concern: “What will become of me?” The Widow recognizes her disadvantage. As she notes, “Take hold of a Maid by her Smock, and a Widow by her Writings, and they cannot get from you” (3.1.621-23).

Determined to protect her rights, the Widow Blackacre will do anything to avoid matrimony. She will, as she says, “play fast and loose” with Freeman. As a result, she impugns her own character. She calls Jerry a “bastard” in the hopes of barring her rebellious son and Freeman from access to her money and the Blackacre estate. “Thou art but my base Child,” she says, “and, according to the Law, canst not inherit it: nay, thou art not so much as Bastard eigne” (4.2.442-44). She believes that by making such a claim and ruining her own reputation, she has evaded Freeman. When Freeman tells her to “have a care what you say,” she responds, “Hang Reputation, Sir, am not I a Widow? Have no Husband, nor intend to have any? Nor wou’d you, I suppose, now have me for a Wife. So, I think now I’m reveng’d on my Son and you without marrying, as I told you” (4.2.452-56). Symbolically and literally, the Widow has lost the items that she needs in order to maintain her advantage in the conflict.

The Widow’s attempts at differentiation, like Manly’s, are confounded by the measures that she must take in order to assert her difference. The Widow resorts to forging copies of the

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41 See also Bacon, who also examines the “importance of [her] documents to her identity” (“Wives, Widows, Writings,” 436). Bacon offers one of the more astute examinations of the Widow’s role in The Plain Dealer.
documents that she has lost, thereby risking her legal and moral character in order to sustain that aspect of her identity that most defines her. As Jon Lance Bacon notes, the Widow’s “suitors force the widow to adopt illegal methods of preserving her independence. Critics who have judged the Widow harshly have failed to mention that she breaks the law only after Freeman instigates the theft of her writings.” In her desire to maintain the boundaries of her selfhood, the Widow engages in activities that undermine that sense of self. Though she terms herself a woman of the law, she must resort to illegitimate means of pursuing the law. Where the bags symbolize the Widow’s legitimacy as an “Executrix” and “Woman of Business,” as she styles herself, the forgeries symbolically mirror the “false” reputation she has created for herself; they represent as well the potential loss of her legitimate legal rights.

Having gained control of the Widow’s bags, Freeman gains control of the Widow as well. The forgeries make the Widow all the more vulnerable to coercion and the loss of freedom that so alarms her. In a scene in which the Widow suffers multiple humiliations, she is tied to a chair and nearly “ravish[ed] . . . through the ear” by Oldfox, who attempts to torment her with his obstreperous verse. She is saved from this mortification only to be caught in another: Freeman, with Jerry, prevents her auricular rape only to force himself, metaphorically speaking, on her. He exposes the Widow’s illegal activity cementing his hold on her and her property. Freeman has “captured” the Widow much as he previously captured her bags.

The Widow’s bags, like Mirabell’s box and Manly’s cabinet, consequently demonstrate the ways in which possession of another person’s property grants the possessor power over the

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42 Bacon, “Wives, Widows, Writings,” 438. While I agree with Bacon in the main, it is important to note that the Knights who forge the documents for the Widow acknowledge that they have counterfeited documents and perjured themselves for her a total of nineteen times previously (see 5.2.473-79). These previous forgeries have little bearing on the action of the play. Moreover, I suggest that they represent less the Widow’s character and more the “contemporary operations of private law and equity in the courts, the corrupt state of which is virtually a byword in Restoration comedy” (Bode, “Try me, at Least,” 2).
person to whom the property belongs. For example, Fainall describes in gruesome detail the ways in which he will control his mother-in-law and wife physically and fiscally after he is in possession of their property. He threatens to shame his wife physically and emotionally by depriving her of the means of subsistence. She will, he says, be “turn’d adrift, like a leaky hulk, to sink or swim, as she and the current of this lewd town can agree” (317). Even Mirabell, though benevolent, has power over Mrs. Fainall, because he could publicly defame her; as executor of her trust, also he controls her property. Access to another’s property consequently accords a person the ability to violate the boundaries of that other person’s self. Mirabell could just as easily as Fainall make Mrs. Fainall “as naked as [her] reputation.”

By withholding another’s means for self-preservation in a physical sense, the characters withhold as well the ability of others to preserve an inviolate sense of integrity because they ultimately revoke that person’s liberty by denying them their basic rights and needs, rights that Mrs. Fainall, before her marriage, took steps to preserve. Mrs. Fainall’s deed of trust, which establishes her separate estate, allows her to escape the full extent of coverture and carve out, however small, a separate legal identity from Fainall. She protects her property by putting it into Mirabell’s management, and by doing so, she protects some of those rights conferred on a woman as feme sole. Mrs. Fainall, the Widow Blackacre, and Millamant share the same drive to defend not only what is rightfully theirs but also to fortify those boundaries of selfhood that separate them from other people. While taking someone else’s property is an infringement on

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43 For coverture and separate estates, see Staves, Married Women’s Separate Property, passim.
44 See also Bacon, who remarks that Widow Blackacre’s “‘energy’ is directed toward self-preservation; her motives are ‘anarchic,’ her ends ‘ignoble,’ only from the viewpoint of someone like Robert Whitehall, writing in defense of domestic patriarchalism. The Widow is not a figure representative of Restoration society, but a figure at odds with that society, whose patriarchal conventions were designed to deny her autonomy” (“Wives, Widows, and Writings,” 436).
the boundaries of selfhood, withholding something of oneself, be it property, space, or even time alone, shores up those boundaries.

Olivia’s betrayal, her withholding of Manly’s money, affects Manly’s character and his actions. The effect of Manly’s loss of property registers in his adoption of the qualities that make him like Olivia. How ironic for Manly that the ways in which he and Olivia are most similar are in their shared hypocrisy—not the honesty and sincerity that he thinks they share. In Westminster Hall, Manly both confesses to and, in a manner, resigns himself to his own hypocritical nature. Twice during this scene, he acknowledges his susceptibility to hypocrisy and his failed attempts at differentiation. In his conversation with Fidelia, he says, “I know not what I did last night; I dissembled last night” (3.1.148-49). And it is his dissembling that repels the Lawyer and Alderman. After trying unsuccessfully to rid himself of the Lawyer, Manly has an epiphany: “Business!—So, I have thought of a sure way” (3.1.823). He then solicits the lawyer to represent “a poor Orphan of a Sea-Officer” of his. Despising the formalities and ceremonies of law, Manly uses it to his benefit, citing Forma Pauperis, pro bono legal representation for the poor, which, of course, sends the lawyer running (3.1.829-37). Manly uncovers the lawyer’s dishonesty at the same time that he stoops to dishonest behavior himself. Although Manly’s need for social ceremonies and deceits does not undermine, per se, his criticism of these ceremonies and deceits, it does weaken his self-righteous claims of ethical and moral integrity, thereby subverting the foundation of his identity.

45 See also Markley, Two-Edg’d Weapons: “When he is accosted by several Westminster hall parasites, he gets rid of them by feigning friendship and then asking them for favours” (184).
46 See also Markley, who argues, “As a satirist, [Manly] succeeds in exposing . . . hypocrisy. . . . [But] the paradoxes he embodies—insight and blindness, wisdom and folly, morality and hypocrisy—undermine his attempts at self-definition. The tensions within his nature render him, as Shakespeare says of Coriolanus, ‘a kind of nothing,’ a figure who empties the world of significance beyond his subjective responses to it (Two Edg’d Weapons, 184-85).
In one of the play’s few passages of blank verse, Manly admits his own use of artifice. Where blank verse aligns Fidelia with the romance genre to which many critics have acknowledged her character is more suited, Manly’s use of blank verse turns the passage into a kind of tragic recognition. He sends Freeman in search of the Widow Blackacre and remains on stage alone. “How hard it is to be an Hypocrite!” he laments, “At least to me, who am but newly so” (3.1.35-36). Blaming his love for Olivia, he continues,

I thought it once a kind of Knavery,  
Nay, Cowardice to hide ones faults; but now  
The common frailty, Love, becomes my shame.  
He must not know I love th’ ungrateful still,  
Lest he contemn me, more than she: for I,  
It seems, can undergo a Womans scorn,  
But not a Mans— (3.1.37-43)

Manly admits to hypocrisy and dissembling, but rather than avoid this behavior, he, like the Widow, makes excuses for his bad behavior. The Widow blames her status for her illegal actions: “Well, these, and many other shifts, poor Widows are put to sometimes; for every body wou’d be riding a Widow, as they say, and breaking into her Jointure” (5.2.510-13). Manly blames his love for Olivia and his fear of condemnation from his masculine peers. He endeavors to hide his love for Olivia from Freeman, an attempt, like the women’s, to protect his integrity. Yet in his efforts to mark out the boundaries between himself and others, Manly only succeeds in blurring those boundaries further. His efforts to distinguish himself from his society point out how very like he is to that society. His attack on Olivia is the most corrupt behavior in the play, seconded only by Vernish’s attempted rape of Fidelia. And though Freeman’s freeloading off of
the Widow Blackacre is indeed a violation of the Widow, and though he like Olivia is cruel, neither he nor Olivia violate the physical boundaries of their victims’ bodies. The play’s other characters may be liars, manipulators, and adolescent twerps, but, perhaps Freeman, Vernish, and Olivia aside, they are harmless pests.

Manly’s rape of Olivia further obscures any differences that exist between himself and others. For most of the play, Manly exists in a state of limbo; he is neither fully of the world nor fully separated from it, neither fully the plain dealer he would like to be nor fully the hypocrite that he despises. His fluctuating participation in the social and financial economies is matched by his ever-unstable identity. Part of what makes *The Plain Dealer* such a complicated play are these uneasy tensions. Much as his desire for differentiation makes Manly like the revengers of the early seventeenth century, especially Hamlet and Vindice, his putting on of another’s persona offers another parallel to these earlier characters. Like Vindice in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, whose fantasy of integrity is belied by the very act of pretending to be someone whom he is not, Manly’s belief in his inviolable self is contradicted when he pretends to be Fidelia. He “forges” an identity much as the Widow Blackacre forges her evidences and deeds. And though the complications of costume and disguise that arise in Middleton’s play do not present themselves in *The Plain Dealer*, or at least they do so much more subtly, Manly, like Vindice, is throughout the play very much his own “foe” (*RT* 5.3.130). In many ways, Manly has more in common with the revengers of early seventeenth century revenge tragedy than he does with Restoration comic heroes: his desire to assert his integrity; his single-minded obsession with revenge; his desire to “purge” his society of that which (or those whom) he sees as poisonous to it; his culpability in the very corruption that he abhors; his evolution into that which he detests; his

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47 I refer here to Vindice’s line, “‘Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes” (Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama*, ed. David Bevington (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002).
isolation from society; his emphasis on intrinsic over extrinsic worth—each of these aligns Manly, and *The Plain Dealer*’s main plot, with the generic conventions of revenge tragedy. The paradoxes that arise with the revengers pertain as well to Manly. Perhaps the interpretive difficulties of the play and Manly’s character result in part because the play presents itself as a revenge tragedy in comic trappings.

But of course *The Plain Dealer* is a comedy, however complicated, and as such culminates in the restitution of the hero’s property and the fortification of the boundaries of his selfhood. For other characters, for example Olivia and Vernish, double-dealing results in their expulsion from the play; but Manly’s worst act of subterfuge ultimately leads to the play’s resolution. His property is restored to him only by accident when Olivia hands him the cabinet thinking that she hands it to Fidelia. Fidelia is twice a conduit through which Manly receives property, both in this instance and when she tells Manly that she is in “possession of Two thousand pounds a Year” (5.3.191-92). Attempting to escape from Vernish with her new lover in tow, Olivia says, “Oh, where are you? What, idle with fear? Come, I’ll tie the Curtains, if you will hold. Here take this Cabinet and Purse, for it is thine, if we escape” (5.3.70-73). Manly then “takes from her the Cabinet and Purse” saying, “‘Tis mine indeed now again, and it shall never escape more from me: to you at least’” (5.1.75). And so begins the play’s rapid untangling of events. Manly bests Vernish and discovers Fidelia’s true gender; Olivia and Vernish are publicly humiliated; Manly and Fidelia are united; and Manly begrudgingly becomes friends with the world, acknowledging, finally, Freeman and Fidelia as people who truly love him. Manly regains a sense of stability only when he regains his property (and Fidelia’s to boot).

For an object that so significantly affects the course of the play’s plot, the cabinet spends very little time on stage. In a way, then, the containers follow a paradigm similar to the
miniatures in which availability leads to vulnerability. Mirabell’s black box and Manly’s cabinet are brought on stage only in the plays’ final moments, and the property within is them returned to the rightful owners; but Widow Blackacre ultimately loses a portion of her property, a consequence of her bags’ omnipresence in those scenes in which she appears. Even the stage directions for her first two entrances call attention to the bags. In the first act, she enters “with a mantle, and a green Bag, and several Papers in the other hand: Jerry Blackacre her Son, in a Gown, laden with green Bags, following her” (1.1.535, stage direction); and in the second act, she is “led in by Major Oldfox, and Jerry Blackacre following, laden with green Bags” (2.1.995 stage direction). In failing to withhold or secret away the objects that she needs to sustain her activities, she fails to protect them and herself from Freeman’s theft and abuse.

Manly’s cabinet is a deus ex machina much like the black box that Mirabell reveals in the final moments of The Way of the World and the papers that Archer delivers to Sir Charles Freeman in The Beaux Stratagem. The restitution of the cabinet begins a chain of events that leads to the play’s romantic resolution. This moment also marks a dynamic shift in Manly’s behavior. For sure, he does not allow Olivia to escape utter humiliation; but when he addresses her, his language lacks its usual ferocity: “No, my dearest, after so much kindness as has past between us, I cannot part with you yet” (5.3.95-97). He is patronizing, but where Manly’s verbosity and volume in the earlier four acts is at times overwhelming, here, he is calm. He does not rail at Olivia. Twice in this scene, Manly is struck “dumb.” He discovers Vernish’s betrayal, and asks Vernish to speak. “Speak, I say,” he implores, “but thy guilty silence tells me all.—Well, I shall not upbraid thee; for my wonder is striking me as dumb, as thy shame has made thee” (5.3.102-105). At a loss for words, Manly declines an opportunity to vent his anger and “upbraid” his enemy. This Manly is not angry. This Manly is caring and compassionate, at least
to Fidelia. Before he discovers that she is a woman, Manly turns to her with concern, “But, what? my little Volunteer hurt, and fainting!” (5.3.105-106). Not once in the previous scenes has Manly exhibited this kind of sincerity when discussing Olivia (before discovering her betrayal) and Vernish. He narcissistically catalogs their “virtues” to show how alike they are to him, and he professes on multiple occasions his love for Olivia, but not once does he support his claims with his actions. After Fidelia professes her love to Manly (again), he tells her, “I know not what to speak to you or how to look upon you” (5.3.135-37).

The restitution of Manly’s property coincides with a radical change in his personality. The insightfulness that he boasts of earlier in the play is finally apparent as he exhibits moderation in words and deeds. He finally is a plain dealer, his assessments of others are finally correct, and his adherence to extremes finally softens into compromise. He may not want to “[make] Friends with the World” (3.5.213); but for Fidelia’s “sake onely,” he “wou’d quit the unknown pleasure of a retirement; and rather stay in this ill World of ours still, tho’ odious to me, than give you more frights again at Sea, and make again too great a venture there, in you alone” (5.3.204-209).

I do not mean to suggest that the ending of The Plain Dealer is tidy. Wycherley offers a simple resolution that leaves many questions unanswered. Even in the play’s final scene, Manly has failed to learn from his previous mistakes regarding his property. He again gives away his money, this time to Fidelia. The impact of this gift is attenuated, however, by the fact that the real possession of the property will remain with Manly upon his marriage to Fidelia. This time, it will not really leave his control, even if he does “[Give] her the cabinet,” as the stage directions read. Both Manly’s money and Fidelia’s £2,000 a year will be his to manage.

48 Of course, some of Manly’s less favorable traits remain. When apologizing to Fidelia for his roughness to her, he does tell her that it was “chiefly [her] own fault” (5.2.138).
Furthermore, Manly’s sudden reversal of fortune coincides with the partial loss of the Widow Blackacre’s jointure. In a move that replicates Manly’s sinking of his ship, the Widow “sinks” her own ship, so to speak, by signing away a portion of her jointure to Freeman in order to preserve her unmarried status, an arrangement that she suggests:

Sir, I am contented you shou’d hold and enjoy my person by Lease or Patent; but not by the spiritual Patent, call’d a Licence; that is, to have the priviledges of a Husband without the dominion; that is Durante beneplacito: in consideration of which, I will, out of my Jointure, secure you an Annuity of Three hundred pounds a Year, and pay your debts.

(5.2.574-81)

Having lost her negotiating advantage with her bags, though, the Widow must take into consideration as well Jerry’s demands and pay Freeman £400 without benefit of “other kind[s] of Consideration[s]” (5.2.612). Though she is able to retain her legal identity, the Widow can only do so at a cost.49

In fact, each of these plays offers an unsatisfactory ending for at least one of their female protagonists, a result in part of comic convention. Mrs. Sullen gets her “divorce,” but nothing about the proceedings are legal. She follows her property from one man’s guardianship to another. And though she may be able to sue for a legal separation, as Dorinda points out to her, she has no legal grounds for a civil divorce (2.1.15).50 Similarly, Mirabell restores Mrs. Fainall’s property to her, thereby prohibiting Fainall from taking advantage of his kinswomen; but his last words before the final four lines of verse suggest a rather ominous future for his former lover.

49 In a way, the Widow also proves herself like the “lazy, good-for-nothing Flirts, who cannot read Law-French” (1.1.556-57), women whom Bacon points out “earn her contempt because they cannot protect their rights” (“Wives, Widows, Writings,” 436). She does manage to protect those rights, but to do so, she must give up something in return.

50 Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume’s offer an excellent reading of the play, especially the concluding scene (“The Beaux’ Stratagem: A Production Analysis,” Theatre Journal 34 [1982]: 77-95). They argue convincingly that “Archer’s character supports a romantic ending with Mrs. Sullen only with difficulty: his philosophy has been and remains to avoid entanglement” (80).
Turning to Mrs. Fainall he says, “In the meantime, madam, let me before these witnesses restore to you this deed of trust; it may be a means, well-managed, to make you live easily together” (318). Yet this is exactly what Mrs. Fainall had hoped to avoid. She tells Foible earlier in the scene, “This is the last day of our living together; that’s my comfort” (307).

Susan Staves points out that Mrs. Fainall’s deed would likely have been overturned in equity courts, acknowledging the tenuous nature of property for women and how the mechanisms meant to protect women’s separate property often failed them. “Fainall,” she says, “would have gotten more sympathy from the equity judges in 1700 than he gets from Congreve” because “Restoration courts held that a widow’s attempts to convey to trustees before marriage were fraud against the marital rights of the husband and void.”

Dickenson likewise supports this claim, noting that “[i]n political and legal theory, as in economic history, the early modern period in England saw a waning in women’s rights at the same time that men’s entitlements were waxing.” The shifting emphasis from real property to personal property, from dower to jointure, the increasingly stringent application of precedent in equity cases, and the unbalanced application of property law in favor of men all worked to exclude women even more from the patriarchal monopoly on the advantages of ownership. In this context, Millamant’s and Mirabell’s use of “dwindling” and “enlargement” to describe the effects of marriage are appropriate as well for describing the shifting dynamics of property and civil law for women’s “dwindling” and men’s “enlarged” rights.

51 Staves, *Married Women’s Separate Property*, 50.
52 Dickenson, *Property, Women, and Politics*, 87. See also, for example, the 1670 Act for the Better Settling of Intestates’ Estates, cited in Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, 230.
53 Though I have quoted Staves sparingly, her discussion of married women’s separate property has greatly informed my reading of the events of these plays. She suggests that that the substitution of jointure for dower and judges’ frequent upholding of the status quo by citing precedent significantly diminished the wealth available to widows upon their husband’s death (see “Dower and the Rule of No Dower of a Trust,” 27-55).
That the property under contestation in these plays is often property owned by women makes visible the limited and contingent nature of female ownership. The implication of de Grazia’s argument regarding the connection between property and identity is all the more resonant for women who are, on the one hand, potential property themselves and are, on the other, generally excluded from the cultural emphasis on the natural right to property. Ownership of property for women accords them rights and responsibilities that they otherwise lack, especially under coverture. Though we may laugh at Widow Blackacre and her many lawsuits, the urgency with which she desires to “sue in her own name,” her fear of being “deprived . . . of the benefit of the Law,” suggests that ownership of property is, for many woman, a realization of their full potential as individuals and as subjects of the nation.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Though often derided in early modern dramatic criticism and often overlooked in contemporary scholarship, the stage properties of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drama are an important and useful interpretive apparatus. These objects convey information about the characters who use them; in doing so, they also call attention to the importance of objects in the processes of identity formation and self-expression. The social, political, and religious changes that occurred in England during the early modern period profoundly altered the ways in which people conceived of body, self, and world. A growing print culture and increased literacy, increased migration to urban centers, the emerging market economy, imperialism, and the institution of constitutional monarchy helped refashion conceptions of selfhood and what was required of a person to be considered a legitimate member of society. As interpretive tools, stage props reveal important information about the characters; they complement and enhance a play’s thematic focus. By tracing the trajectory of stage objects as written in the stage directions and dialogue of plays, I have endeavored to trace as well some ways in which these changing paradigms affected the cultural understanding of individuality.

Stage props highlight the importance of external signifiers in the expression of identity. They underscore as well the complications that these externals create. Props mediate the relationships between people: they represent the identities that characters create for themselves, but they are also the objects by which other characters interpret those identities. They reveal the discrepancies between the identity that a person would like to project and the reputation that a person acquires as a result of his or her participation in society. For all a character’s desire to
make his or her identity known to others, that self—as Hamlet, the protagonist of the great play that bears his name, fears—is always subject to misinterpretation.

Props also emphasize the correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic worth and how the intrinsic is often interpreted by extrinsic markers. The boxes that contain the characters’ property and deeds are also emblematic of the characters’ social “worth” and value to the nation. This correspondence obtains for men as well as women, even though women’s access to property was limited. Donna Dickenson notes the “symbolic significance of dowries” for women of all classes. She argues, “At some level, a bride’s portion was not merely a nest egg for the new household—it was a token of her character and thus of her sexual honour. . . . The connection between moral and material worth is hard to miss.”¹ The consequences of Millamant’s loss of half her dowry were she to have married without Lady Wishfort’s consent is more significant than Congreve lets on. The loss would reflect not only her “bad behavior” in marrying without her aunt’s consent; it would also reflect on her value as a woman: her honor, her chastity, and her contribution to her new family, both economically and morally. These stage props, in other words, are a measure of how well a character performs gender and class rolls. They expose “legitimacy” as a social construction, rather than an as intrinsic marker of a person’s worth.

Objects are rife in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama. Any one play presents a number of objects that deserve critical attention. In *The Country Wife* (1675), Horner’s china and Pinchwife’s penknife offer a different perspective on the play’s gender dynamics. Each of these objects emphasizes how the identities of these men are “contained.” Horner becomes an object of female consumption, a symbol by which the women ultimately acknowledge their inclusion in an exclusive group. The china represents Horner’s emasculation. So, too, does Pinchwife’s penknife. The auricular similarities of the objects and the men’s names heighten the association

between the men and their objects. Fielding’s *The Tragedy of Tragedies; or, the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) conflates subject and object even more; the play’s eponymous hero, who is tragically eaten by a cow at the play’s end, is the object of three much larger women’s affection. His diminutive size highlights the “monstrosity” of the women’s sexual appetites.

Props are also useful in examining the ways in which dramatists represent certain kinds of characters. Though written over forty years apart, Behn’s *Rover* (1677) and George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731) use guns to comment on the disenfranchisement of prostitutes in Restoration and eighteenth-century society. In *The Rover*, Angellica’s miniature is not the only object with which she attempts to assert her power. Enraged by Willmore’s faithlessness, she points a pistol at him; but she cannot shoot him. She says, “my coward heart will leave me to his Mercy” (238).² The pistol belies her powerlessness. Lillo presents a similar scene in *The London Merchant*. Millwood, the play’s antagonist, enters the stage with a pistol, but before she can aim it at her accusers, she is captured. Her attempts to gain power and to protect the boundaries of her selfhood are, like Angellica’s, stifled by masculine characters.

Millwood’s inability to use the gun also foils Barnwell’s use of a gun in the scene in which he murders his uncle. The prodigal nephew draws a pistol, but he is indecisive: “During this speech, Barnwell sometimes presents the pistol, and draws it back again. At last he drops it, at which his uncle starts and draws his sword” (3.7.8, stage direction).³ Barnwell pulls out his poniard and kills his uncle, but only after his uncle has pulled a sword on him. Like much of the play, this scene depicts Barnwell as at least partially a victim of unfortunate circumstances. The

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² Aphra Behn, *The Rover* (1677).
characters’ use of pistols in *The London Merchant* comments on Millwood’s and Barnwell’s roles as villain and hero.

The literature of the Restoration and eighteenth century represents a culture fascinated by objects. Jonathan Swift’s poem “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732) is a catalog of the “litter” that Strephon encounters, much to his dismay, when he invades Celia’s dressing room (l. 8). Belinda’s toilet in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) is cluttered with an array of everyday items and exotic goods. Objects also find a place of prominence in the novel. As Ian Watt notes, the novels of the eighteenth century engaged in a “particularising approach to character”: “the novel is surely distinguished . . . from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment.” Authors are able to create “particular individuals” in part by describing, often in minute detail, the objects that surround their characters. Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and Richardson’s Pamela, in their novels by the same names, habitually list the objects that they collect.

I hope that my examination of some of these objects can help us better understand the role that objects play in the construction of identities, not only for people in the early modern period but also for people of any historical era. The critical examination of subjects and objects over the past few decades has helped bring into focus the importance of objects in the creation of subjects. Much as we give objects meaning in how we use them, objects also reflect meaning back on to us. The stuff of our everyday lives, though sometimes seemingly insignificant, denotes who we are. The objects that we surround ourselves with are a reminder that we, too, are products of our societies.

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