Unruly Matter: Masculine Consumption in English Restoration Literature

Shawn Watkins

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UNRULY MATTER: MASCULINE CONSUMPTION IN ENGLISH RESTORATION LITERATURE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Shawn J. Watkins

August 2019
UNRULY MATTER: MASCULINE CONSUMPTION IN ENGLISH RESTORATION LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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August 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Laura Engel

Over the past several decades, literary scholars working within the “Long 18th Century” have identified many ways in which material culture – dress, accessories, household goods, fashion, etc. – shaped early modern English identities. A significant cultural trope – the “woman as consummate consumer” – developed during this period, and, as scholars have pointed out, women became an ideological nodal point that registered new enthusiasm for emerging economic dynamics (mercantilism, nascent capitalism, etc.) while also expressing masculine anxieties about consumerism, the role of goods in English society, and men’s prerogative in relation to the material world. Although many scholars have noted that men functioned symbolically and ideologically as English society’s primary consumers of material goods in the later 17th century, there is, to my knowledge, no scholarly work that aims to describe the shift in English literature from a preoccupation with masculine consumption to an anxiety-
ridden focus on the woman-as-consummate-consumer. My own study of early-modern consumption focuses on the years 1660-1734, in which the gendered shift in consumption mentioned above plays out in English poetry and drama.

I contend that in the early years of the Restoration, both on the page and on the stage, English writers deployed the figure of the failed masculine consumer in order to articulate social and cultural anxieties over a range of topics including but not limited to: the mid-century trauma of the English Civil War and Interregnum; the failure of masculine, penis-centered sexuality; the recognition of gender as a precarious form of sensory interaction with the material world; and the ability of women to transcend, and thus subvert, their own culturally-sanctioned status as object. As the Restoration gives way to the early-18th century, the figure of the overly successful woman-as-consummate-consumer emerges to register masculine anxieties over changing economic structures, new legal and financial agencies available to women, and the failure of masculine poetics within the hyperabundance environment of emergent capitalism.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Trudi Watkins, who fostered my love of language, stories, and books from an early age. Thank you for reading to me every night as a child, and for not panicking (too much) when I decided to declare a major in English.
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Before reading this introduction, look at the image of King Charles II above. Painted by Godfrey Kneller in 1685, right before the King’s death, the image presents a form of masculinity marked by fashion, opulence, and magnificence. What stands out is not so much the king’s body, with the exception of his face, hands, and tightly clothed leg, but the conglomeration of fabrics, precious metals, and fabulous accessories that make up Charles’s kingly “look.” This portrait brings to mind Joseph Roach’s claim that:

posterity interprets the lives of notables in the long eighteenth century in many different and sometimes contentious ways, but everyone can agree they wore fabulous clothes. Men shared fully in the glamorous bounty, for most of the period falls before the full imposition of what one influential fashion historian has called ‘the Great Masculine Renunciation.’ Among other abjurations, they bid adieu to embroidered waistcoats, lace jabots, and exciting colors. (82)

This study of Restoration and early 18th-century literature revisits a time when men were still the consummate consumers in English society, though their status as such was changing. From
roughly 1660 to 1734, English men slowly relinquished this title to English women. Far from a benign passing of the torch, this transition registered widespread anxieties about sovereignty, class/status structure, the role of women within the household, emergent mercantilism, and the growth of luxury consumption, just to name a few issues.

Many scholars have already produced outstanding work interpreting and describing the material culture of the English early-modern period, including the Restoration and the “Long Eighteenth Century.” As I will address below, focusing on the role of consumption (economic, social, cultural, etc.), as opposed to production has allowed scholars to reconstruct and understand how early-modern individuals and groups navigated their social environments and constructed their identities through their interactions with various objects, accessories, and spaces. Gender has emerged as a significant aspect of the cultural narratives scholars have woven around early-modern consumption. There is, however, no scholarly work that examines the widespread transition in English culture from a preoccupation with masculine consumption to an anxiety-ridden focus on (one might say obsession with) feminine consumption. Ironically, by not placing emphasis on men’s consumption, scholars of early-modern literature seem to, however unwittingly, reproduce a patriarchal paradigm that has been critiqued and deconstructed by writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “man” is the universal, while “women” are the particular; men are the subject of discourse, while women are the object; men oversee the economy, women make particular purchases – men produce, women consume.

My investigation of this cultural shift will focus on how this transition, from a focus on masculine consumption to a preoccupation with feminine consumption, played out in various written texts from this period. Where my methodology differs from previous scholarship in this
area is my insistence that we take seriously the role of *nonhuman actors* in representations of gendered consumption. To return to the Kneller portrait above, although the “subject” of the image is clearly Charles II, the role of “object” is important to note as well. Would we, for example, even recognize Charles without the full-bottomed periwig, his silk clothes, or lace cravat? Despite the fact that they receive very little credit, these objects exert their own quiet agency over the representation of the king. In a very real way they allow him to perform his identity as king. Their very material presence – their dense, undeniable physicality – turns the otherwise unattractive Charles into the embodiment of kingship.

In this study of late 17th and early 18th century English literature, I will show how English writers wove together images of agency, gender, and materiality in order to articulate changing conceptions of consumption as a relationship between humans and nonhumans. English literature produced in the early decades of the Restoration displays a marked preoccupation with an ontologically fractured male consumer. As he recedes behind the English cultural horizon, the feminine consumer emerges as a representational vehicle to articulate early modern anxieties over changing conceptions of human interaction with the nonhuman, material world.

**Early-Modern Consumption and Gender**

For the better part of the modern era, scholars have privileged “production” over “consumption” as a heuristic for examining cultural and social phenomena. The influence of Marx and Marxism, which I will discuss later in this this introduction, granted production (economic, social, cultural, etc.) pride of place in conceptual models used by sociologists, historians, literary critics, and other scholars working within disciplinary fields usually lumped together under the “humanities and social sciences” banner. Early attempts to synthesize gender and properly “economic” matters usually treat consumption - usually conceived of as the
purchase and acquisition of material goods and services - as a nonessential, trivial, or less important than production. In some instances, consumption becomes a mechanism of women’s oppression. As Mary Wollstonecraft writes in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published over half a century before the majority of Marx’s own work:

I once knew a woman of fashion, who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a distinguished taste and puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly . . . is it possible that a human creature could have become such a weak and depraved being, if, like the Sybarites, dissolved in luxury, everything like virtue had not been worn away, or never impressed on the mind, though it serves as a fence against vice. (37).

In Wollstonecraft’s text, one of the earliest feminist works in Western history, “fashion,” “taste,” and “luxury” are coded as both mechanisms and effects of women’s oppression. Over 100 years later, Charlotte Perkins Gilman asks the rhetorical question in *Women and Economics*, “women consume economic goods. What economic product do they give in exchange for what they consume?” (572). Gilman goes on to claim that this unrequited consumption “creates a market for sensuous decoration and personal ornament . . . which operates as a most deadly check to true industry and true art” (585). In both texts, women’s oppression is bound up with their roles as pure consumers, and it is consumption that keeps women from entering the masculine sphere of production, whether it be the production of virtuous subjectivities (Wollstonecraft) or “true art and true industry” (Gilman). This production/consumption binary, which favors production over consumption, would haunt feminist discourse well into the 20th century.

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1 For example, feminist scholars who attempted to synthesize the explanatory power of Marxism with feminism’s insistence on interrogating patriarchal power mechanisms also focused exclusively on “production” and “re-production” as fundamental determining social forces while ignoring consumption. See, for example, Heidi Hartmann’s “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” and Linda Nicolson’s “Feminism and Marx.”
Material culture studies, which emerged in the late 20th century, attempted to engage and ultimately deconstruct this production/consumption binary, if only by framing consumption as a legitimate object of study. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb’s work *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* stands as one of the first major contributions to the historical study of consumption. The authors begin this seminal work with the claim, “There was a consumer revolution in eighteenth-century England. More men and women than ever before in human history enjoyed the experience of acquiring material possessions” (1). Over the course of this collection of essays, the authors show how the intellectual origins of this “revolution” emerged in the 1690s, and found widespread acceptance in English though and practice over the course of the 18th century (13). McKendrick notes the habit of 20th-century scholars to ignore consumption as an object of study:

> With so much evidence and so many arguments in favor of a consumer revolution and the role of commercialization in producing it, one has to ask why so many historians have been so reluctant to proclaim their importance. The simple answer is that “economic history is a supply-side subject” which takes market expansion to be a straightforward reflection of, and automatic response to, increased supply. (30)

*Birth of a Consumer Society* stands as an important historical investigation of consumption and as a founding text of material culture studies, as is acknowledged in various articles, books and anthologies, but there are at least two aspects of consumption this study ignores. Firstly, the definition of consumption that McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb assume is relatively narrow: it is synonymous with the emulative purchase of “luxury” items (10), rather than the complex, embodied process that I will outline later in this introduction. Secondly, the authors at times

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seem to accept the ideological narratives 18th century writers wove around emerging conceptions of consumption. Consider the following section of McKendrick’s introduction:

Where once material possessions were prized for their durability, they were now: increasingly prized for their fashionability. Where once a fashion might last a lifetime, now it might barely last a year. Where once women had merely dreamed of following the prevailing London fashions, they could now follow them daily in the advertisements in the provincial press, and actually buy them from the ever-increasing number of commercial outlets dedicated to satisfying their wants and needs. (1)

Though the authors, including McKendrick, claim to concentrate largely on luxury consumption, and this with a focus on emulation and class dynamics, McKendrick’s singling out of “women [who] had merely dreamed of following the prevailing London fashions” reveals how ideological assumptions about consumption inform the study as a whole, even though gender is not an explicit focus of the majority of Birth of a Consumer Society. McKendrick uncritically accepts the role traditionally relegated to women: the consummate consumer who acts as a social barometer of taste and luxury. As subsequent work on material culture has shown, this assumption emerged in the very society McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb examine, eighteenth-century England.

Scholars working under the umbrella of material culture studies have detailed how, during the course of the later 17th and 18th centuries, the ideological figure of the woman-as-consummate-consumer emerged amidst a flurry of clothes, accessories, and new fashions. One relatively early example of this is Beth Kowaleski Wallace’s work on china, which I will reference in Chapter 2, “Waste Matter and Feminine Consumption in Hannah Woolley and Jonathan Swift.” Based on her reading of several literary texts produced in the Long 18th Century, Kowaleski-Wallace claims that “we can see how the female as an object of male desire became, over the course of the long eighteenth century, the female as desiring subject” (155). Kowaleski-Wallace claims that because women were more visually associated with china
consumption that they “became associated with china’s consumption, as well as the target of anti-mercantilist discourse” (159), even though men in fact shopped and spent more on luxury items. Furthermore, Kowelski-Wallace ties this ideological phenomenon to the emergence of a trope central to my own argument: the female as consummate consumer (154). Although English men, in fact, spent and collected more china, women were made to “carry the weight for cultural ambivalence about the meaning of consumption” (165). For scholars, then, “china allows for social exploration about what consumption means” (165).

Claire Walsh makes similar claims in her article “Shops, Shopping, and the Art of decision making in Eighteenth-Century England.” Noting that men’s purchases seem to have been “more frequently pleasurable than women’s” (166), Walsh claims that “the criteria theorists have used to condemn women’s consumerism - fantasy, identity building, individual-based shopping, and voyeurism - might, in fact, be seen to be better ascribed to men” (164). Nonetheless, she recognizes that “the question of gender has always been a central issue in the study of shopping, because of the long-standing association of women with fashion and with purchases for the home” (152). In the introduction to the anthology Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North American, 1700-1830, John Styles and Amanda Vickery claim that “History has had it in for the female consumer . . . More recently, these misogynistic anxieties about female materialism have focused on shopping. A frivolous desire to ‘shop till you drop’ has been seen as a particularly feminine vice. Shopping is considered both a woman’s therapy and women’s addictive disease” (2). Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan in another anthology introduction, claim “the reflex of negative association of women with consumption and fashion, an eighteenth-century discourse that was itself a consumable, as contributors show, has a long tail that still wags today” (4).
The ideological construction of the “female as consummate consumer” is now a recognizable ideological phenomenon for scholars of early-modern culture. Scholars such as Walsh and Kowaleski-Wallace have examined how women became ideologically tied to ideas about consumption and how representations of women as consumers engaged widespread anxieties about emerging consumerism. Kowaleski-Wallace glosses these anxieties nicely in her book-length study Consuming Subjects:

Society assumed that she could be controlled through disciplinary practices, and it also saw her as threatening male power. She suggested, through the semblance of good behavior, perfect control, yet she also embodied rampant unruliness. Yet these tensions in the female consumer tell us more about the contradictory understanding of emerging consumer behaviors than they do about women themselves. This is a book, then, about how British culture projected onto the female subject both its fondest wishes for the transforming power of consumerism and its deepest anxieties about the corrupting power of goods. (5)

To reiterate Walsh’s comments about shopping, mentioned above, the actual shopping habits of men and women did not conform to the models found in satire, novels, plays, and other cultural representations of consumption. As widespread as images of unruly feminine consumption may have been in late 17th and early 18th century England, these gendered representations were far from accurate portrayals of how early modern English people consumed the increasing number of goods available to them. And this focus on the women consumer has also occluded the significant amount of contemporary discourse that focused on men’s consumption. Many writers did, in fact, display a preoccupation with how men consumed, though their consumption was admittedly framed differently than women’s. As Styles and Vickery claim, “it could be fairly argued that the recent fascination of historians with women and the world of goods has overshadowed the role of eighteenth-century men . . . It is not our intention in this volume to reinforce the old myth that men produce and women consume” (4). My own study of Restoration and early 18th century literature seeks to address this imbalance by focusing on how masculine
consumption was articulated in literary texts at the time that the feminine consumer appeared on England’s cultural horizon.

Performing Masculine Consumption in The Restoration

One obvious starting point to investigating Restoration masculine consumption is the proliferation of male “types” found in the period. For example, during the Restoration and early 18th century the figures of the fop and the rake were used to express English culture’s understanding of how men interacted with the world of material objects and goods, using them to establish and prop up their identities. Perhaps the most well known representation of masculine consumption in these earlier years is Sir George Etherege’s The Man of Mode; or, Sir Flutter Foppling. The play can be read as a menagerie of male “types” and an exploration of competing masculine consumption styles. Dormant, the leading man inspired by the offstage rake John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester openly acknowledges his affinity for fashionable presentation via the consumption of luxury goods. Early in the play he admits “I love to be well-dressed sir, and think it no scandal to my understanding” (Etherege 1.1.362-363); he will later claim that “I would fain wear in fashion as long as I can, sir. ‘Tis a thing to be valued in men as well as baubles” (3.2.163-164). Dorimant’s foil, the eponymous Sir Flutter Foppling, is a travesty of male overconsumption: he is effeminate, dull, and, unlike Dorimant, focuses on conspicuous consumption to the point of ignoring the heterosexual social dynamics that structure the upper-class Restoration society of which he wants to be a part. This is emphasized most clearly in Act III, in which Foppling is blazoned by the assembled characters, who ironically compliment his various accessories (3.2.210-245). The main difference between Dormiant and Foppling resides in their respective attitudes towards the luxury commodities that they use to represent themselves.
to the world as fashionable gentlemen. Foppling focuses solely on the finery he wears and displays, while Dorimant views them as only one aspect of his personality.

For all Dorimant’s finery, the audience is well aware that what makes him a desirable male figure is not only his attire, but his ability to consume women’s bodies as well, something to which Foppling is poorly suited. In *Man of Mode*, male consumption and male sexual potency intermingle in a cultural nexus that determines desirability and the achievement of “true” masculinity. Dorimant makes this difference in consumption styles explicit when he tells Lady Woodvill, “The women, indeed, are little beholding to the young men of this age. They’re generally only dull admirers of themselves and make their court to nothing but their perriwigs and their cravats” (3.3.19-22). In this line, which is partially an attempt to needle his love interest Harriet, Dorimant frames an overemphasis on fashionable consumption as that which disrupts ideal heterosexual relations; he may as well be speaking of Foppling’s attitude rather than that of young fashionable women. For Dorimant, who embodies masculinity as it is valorized in both the play and in the libertine circle of which Etherege was a part, fashionable consumption is only one part of what makes men desirable, and an overemphasis on this aspect empties men of their social and sexual prowess.

Throughout the play, Dorimant successfully performs his masculinity by balancing sexual potency and fashionable consumption. This notion of success - something Jeremy Collier would rail against in his infamous 1698 *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* - is determined by the fact that at the end of the play, as so often in comedy, the leading man marries the woman he desires. It is this metric of successful-versus-unsuccessful performance that structures my own readings of Restoration poetry and drama in this study. As Judith Butler points out in *Gender Trouble*, the performance of gender is often framed in terms
of achievement: “the experience of a gendered psychic disposition or cultural identity is considered an achievement . . . This achievement requires a differentiation from the opposite gender. Hence, one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair” (Butler 30). As performed in Restoration literary texts, masculinity is often portrayed as an achievement, but it is an achievement that remains a goal and not an actuality. For every Dorimant, who successfully consumes objects and women’s bodies, there is a masculine actor who fails to perform his part correctly. As I will show in my readings of English texts produced from 1660 to 1734, masculine consumption is figured as a set of performances in which men attempt, but often fail to establish relationships with the physical world. If the woman-as-consumer emerges during this time, then her appearance is simultaneous with and related to the death throes of the ideologically constructed male consumer.

*From Alienation to Creative Engagement: Defining “Consumption”*

What does it mean to consume? If etymology is any guide, to consume means to destroy, to use up, to spend wastefully, to evaporate, or to kill. Despite these definitions, which stretch back hundreds if not thousands of years, consumption can also be an active, creative process through which humans establish their identities and navigate their material and social environments. In this section I will outline the critical history of consumption as heuristic concept as it emerged from a critique of the Marxist tradition. Marxism has taught scholars to be sensitive to how properly “economic matters” (class conflict, material production, emergent capitalism, etc.) influence the ideological and cultural works produced in this period (how, for example, is *Pamela* a response to an emerging middle class?), but, as I will show in this section, this heuristic, though powerful, cannot account for a wide swath of human behavior.
Like the feminist writers mentioned earlier, thinkers as diverse as early Christian church leaders, Karl Marx, and 20th-century economists have occluded the more positive aspects of consumption, vilifying it as sinful, or dismissing it as the poor cousin of production. Marx relegates consumption outside of the proper sphere of economic activity. In the *Grundrisse*, he outlines how economists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries schematized economic activity:

Production thus appears as the starting point; consumption the final end; and distribution and exchange as the middle; the later has a double aspect, distribution being defined as a process carried on by society, exchange as one proceeding from the individual. The person is objectified in production; the material thing is subjectified in the person. In distribution, society assumes the par of go-between for production and consumption in the form of generally prevailing rules; in exchange this is accomplished by the accidental make-up of the person (384).

This schema presents a teleological vision of economic activity: goods are produced, then circulated throughout society, until they finally are consumed by an individual actor.

Consumption is the end point, or goal, of human productive activity, a point of contact between person and commodity which, like a snake swallowing its own tail, merely serves as a beginning and end point for productive cycles: “the final act of consumption, which is considered not only as a final purpose but also as a final aim, falls properly outside the scope of economics, except insofar as it reacts on the starting-point and causes the entire process to begin all over again” (385). Marx challenges this traditional schema, but does so by absorbing the other aspects of economic activity under the aegis of production: “production predominates not only over production itself in the opposite sense of that term, but over the other elements as well. With production the process starts constantly starts over again. That exchange and consumption cannot be the predominate elements is self-evident” (385). For Marx, “production” is both production in the sense of making or constructing goods, but it is also the base upon which all other
activities rest³. “A definite form of production,” Marx writes, “determines the forms of consumption, distribution, exchange, and also the mutual relations between these various elements” (385). Consumption is simply one facet of the singular yet totalizing phenomenon of production and, as such, does not deserve critical attention in its own right. Consumption, for Marx, is a momentary confrontation between alienated subject and the commodity, or reified labor.

In the 1980s anthropologists launched a critique of Marx that did not focus heavily on issues of gender, but nonetheless expanded the notion of consumption beyond a mechanism of oppression and alienation. Arjun Appadurai and Daniel Miller, two pioneers of material culture studies, formulated the study of material objects and consumption by critiquing the Marxian notions of the commodity and objectification, respectively. Appadurai reformulates the notion of commodity in his seminal The Social Life of Things, and proposes that scholars “approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives” (13). Such a view of what Appadurai calls the “commodity situation” requires “breaking significantly with the production-dominated Marxian view of the commodity and focusing on its total trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption,” given the fact that objects and things can move in and out of a commodity situation (13). This reformulation of a key Marxist concept, the commodity, allows for a sustained engagement with matters of consumption. “Demand,” a term Appadurai uses interchangeably with consumption, “emerges as a function of a variety of social practices

³ In the tradition base/superstructure paradigm used by early Marxist critics, production corresponds to the economic, ultimately determining “base” of society, while consumption is an activity associated with the “superstructure.” Raymond Williams gives an overview of this model in Marxism and Literature (1977).
and classifications, rather than a mysterious emanation of human needs, a mechanical response to social manipulation . . . Or the narrowing down of a universal and voracious desire for objects to whatever happens to be available” (29). By focusing on the actual movement of specific objects or classes of objects - how they move in and out of commodity situations - we can view consumption with all of the methodological rigor previously held for production. According to this more dynamic, positive model of consumption, “demand is thus the economic expression of the political logic of consumption and thus its basis must be sought in that logic” (31). For Appadurai, then consumption is just as saturated with power dynamics, tensions, and ideology as production is for the Marxist tradition, rather than a private activity that does not affect the make-up of society and culture: “consumption is eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic, or passive” (31)

Daniel Miller’s book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* is one of the first serious anthropological considerations of consumption in and of itself. Pushing back against what he sees as “an overwhelming concentration on the area of production as the key generative arena for the emergence of the dominant social relations in contemporary societies, and a comparative neglect of consumption” (3), Miller deploys the Hegelian concept of objectification, on which Marx based his own economic philosophy, to define consumption as “a process that has the potential to produce an inalienable culture” (17). Miller glosses Hegel’s concept of objectification, abstracted from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, as follows:

The Hegelian subject at each stage is carried forward by a sequence of processes in which it first extends itself through creation, and then becomes aware of that created “something” which appears as outside of itself. This continues until the consciousness of the external becomes a dissatisfaction with the state of separation from that which is properly part of the subject. This dissatisfaction, however, is the motor force which allows for the recognition and then the reincorporation of the external into the subject; now at one with that part of itself which it had externalized as its creation, and the subject is transformed by virtue of this incorporation into itself. (21)
Furthermore, objectification is “never static, but always a process of becoming, which cannot be reduced to either of its two component parts: subject and object” (33). The Marxist conception of objectification, a necessary result of Marxist preoccupation with production, turns objectification into “a theory of rupture,” in which “creating an object, is seen as preventing rather than enabling the development of human social and material relations” (41). In other words, Marxist theory holds that the more that is created under capitalism, the more alienated and reified social relations become. Miller sees this view as problematic, because it precludes our ability to fully understand social and individual activity: “all [Marxist] social analysis takes place under conditions of such extreme rupture that this is all that can be concentrated upon, and objectification and rupture gradually come to be seen as identical” (45). It is only by (re)introducing consumption that the analyst can move beyond a seemingly endless process of increasing alienation and rupture.

By theoretically reintroducing the “positive” side of Hegel’s theory of objectification (appropriation of a created externality by the subject) and examining ethnographic studies, Miller attempts to reformulate social analysis in terms of consumption. He claims that consumption is a process that counters the alienating forces of production that Marx outlines. For example, in an ethnographic study of 1980s London, he claims that “a blouse which is purchased from a shop as an alienable commodity may then become so intimately associated with a particular individual that is may not even be borrowed by a sibling. After some time, however, the object may lose this close association, becoming, as jumble, an alienable commodity once more” (126). Like Appadurai, Miller conceives the commodity as a situation in which objects and enter and leave, and he extends the definition of consumption beyond the moment of purchase or exchange,
reformulating it as a *process* whereby human subjects incorporate material artifacts into their individual and social identities.

For Miller, consumption is activity or work that, rather than alienating consumers from society, more fully incorporates subjects within the social and cultural milieu: “consumption as work may be defined as that which translates the object from an alienable to an inalienable condition; that is, from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artifact invested with particular inseparable conditions” (190). Miller’s definition of consumption *per se* incorporates the material activity involved in both acquiring and actively using created material artifacts as they pass from their status as commodities to their appropriation by the consuming subject. “Work in this sense,” Miller writes, “does not necessarily mean the physical labor of transforming the object; it may signify the time of possession, a particular context of presentation as ritual gift or memorabilia, or the incorporation of a single object into a stylistic array which is used to express the creator’s place in relation to peers engaged in similar activities” (191). In Miller’s formulation, consumption is a complex, contextual, and dynamic relationship between a human subject and material object; it is a relationship that stretches beyond the point of acquisition and is defined by the material labor by which the subject incorporates the material artifact into his or her social life, thus transforming or consolidating (however slightly) his or her social identity. In the space opened up by Miller, between acquisition and whenever the human subject ends his or her relationship with the material good(s) in question, consumption presents itself as a complex performance in which humans attempt to construct their social identities. It is in this space that my own investigation of Restoration and early 18th-century texts is located.
Consumption as Performance and the Agency of Matter

The complex, elongated processes that constitute consumption often take the form of social performances, as I have hinted at in my discussion of Etherege’s *Man of Mode*. My use of the term “performance” is informed by multiple sources and traditions, which are, broadly speaking, represented here by the psychoanalytic-feminist tradition *a la* Butler, the sociological-anthropological tradition such as that associated with figures such as Pierre Bourdeau and Richard Schnechner, and the New Materialist tradition, which I will discuss later in this section. I have already alluded to Butler’s influence, in my discussion of performance, especially as it relates to gender. Butler’s work forces us to recognize the performance of gender as an achievement, something that can potentially fail. The sociological-anthropological tradition, of which I will (somewhat arbitrarily) take Richard Schechner as representative illuminates the effective or “practical” nature of performance. In *Performance Theory*, Schechner pushes back against anthropologists’ assumption that there lies as strict demarcation between “everyday” ritual and performance in the theater. He claims that

> efficacy and entertainment are not so much opposed to each other; rather they form the poles of continuum . . . The basic polarity is between efficacy and entertainment, not ritual and theater . . . No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment. The matter is complicated because one can look at specific performances from several vantages; changing perspective changes classifications. (130)

Schechner’s discussion of what he terms the “efficacy-entertainment braid” opens up a way to see performance as both entertaining and active, as something that captivates an audience, while also performing work. Interestingly enough, his discussion of specific historical examples of “when efficacy and entertainment are both present in nearly equal degrees” touches on Restoration theater which “combined the acting of plays with the play of rakes, libertines, and prostitutes” (134-135). The acting inside the playhouse did the same social and ideological work
as the gendered figures most closely associated with the restored Stuart monarchy. Furthermore, for Schechner, performance is a term associated with the perspective of the analyst or observer; his work allows us to ask not what constitutes a performance, but rather how does any given phenomenon displays performative qualities. Though Schechner’s work focuses heavily on the most traditional realms of performance – i.e. conscious performance in the theater – his claims about performance can potentially be applied to “performances” found in diaries, poetry, periodicals and other textual phenomena.

To frame consumption, gendered or otherwise, in terms of performance raises the question of exactly who is acting in any given instance of consumption. If Butler outlines the psychic stakes involved in gendered performances, while Schechne draws our attention to how performances function, then the New Materialist tradition presents a radical reconsideration of who count as actors in a performance. In this I will suggest that instead of only asking who the actors are, we also ask what actors make up a consumption performance. To phrase it another way, I ask not only which humans are involved in a consumption performance, but which nonhumans are active as well. Recent work by scholars working under the umbrella of New Materialism have put forth poignant critiques of the “subject” or “human” centered heuristic models that have dominated analyses of culture and society. By bringing the “object” or “nonhuman” into our conceptions of performance, we are forced to reconfigure consumption as a complex, performative interaction between humans and nonhumans, both of which exert agency over any given course of events. If this interaction is competitive or agonistic, there is not guarantee that the “human” actor will succeed in fixing this human-nonhuman relationship; as a result of this failure, human actors cannot successfully perform their social identities.
Over the past few decades, scholars from various disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, political science, and science studies (just to name a few) have attempted to correct what they perceive as an anthropocentric bias in the analysis of human history, culture, and society. For several of these scholars, the recent fascination with material culture is a step in this direction, though such work often falls short of its potential. For example, in *Material Cultures, Material Minds*, archaeologist Nicole Boivin argues that

Despite all of this new interest in material culture, however, there is in much of this work, commendable as it is in spirit, a very serious flaw: it often continues to overlook the actual materiality of the material world. What we frequently find instead is a far from novel emphasis on ideas, on human thought, and on representation. What we often find is a model, either implicit or explicit, of material culture as a text or language, as something that represents something else, and that is there to be interpreted. (20)

Boivin’s claims echo a critique of material culture studies raised by Styles and Vickery: “it is a shortcoming of recent studies by social and economic historians of eighteenth-century consumption, especially in Britain, that they give relatively little consideration to the materiality of the artifacts they address” (Styles & Vickery 21). For Boivin, human actions, intentions, representation, etc. are valid objects of study, but by focusing exclusively on these phenomena, scholars have failed to address how the physical, material world impinges on human development and society. Because “the physicality of the material world continues to be ignored, as does the way that engagement with that materiality is at the crux of the human enterprise” (20), scholarship has falsely split reality between “symbolic” and “material” (a term Boivin uses interchangeably with physical) realms. This seemingly deep-seated divide has affected the way that we view the role objects play in the course of human events: objects become mere reflections of human intentions, meanings, or ideologies; and agency, the ability to cause action, is attributed to human actors only.
The notion of agency, which New Materialist scholars insist on extending to the world of objects and things, forms the crux of my definition of consumption-as-performance. Discussing what she deems the controversial subject of the agency of matter and the nature/culture binary that structures traditional Western thought, Boivin argues that “human history is . . . a process not only of human decisions, choices, and ideas, but also of the material forces with which humans engage. If matter is alive only because humans interact with it, it is also true that humans are alive only because they have material to engage with” (Boivin 138). Reflecting on the scholarly treatment of the material world, she claims that “in denying things anything but derived agency, scholars provide perhaps unwitting support to the very questionable notion that humans are master of nature and matter.” Her words bear a resemblance to Bill Brown’s thoughts on what he terms “things,” which is worth quoting at length:

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (Brown 4)

Work such as Boivin and Brown’s forces us to recognize the agency that the nonhuman world exerts on human affairs. This is not a projected or symbolic agency, but a very real force in and off itself, which can be easily ignored, yet, at times thrusts itself into our human awareness.

Difficult to conceptualize and write about, the agency of things, objects, and nonhumans exerts a very real influence. Political scientist Jane Bennett acknowledges this fraught, yet important project of speaking about things in her discussion of what she terms “thing power”: pushing back against a subject-centered ontology, she asserts that “the notion of thing-power aims instead to attend to the it as actant; I will try, impossibly, to name the moment of
independence (from subjectivity) possessed by things, a moment of independence, a moment that must be there, since things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power” (3). A crucial component of Bennett’s conception of nonhuman agency is its *distributive* character. Bennett claims that “while the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, conatus or *clinamen*, an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (21). Recognizing this aspect of nonhuman, material things in turn forces us to revise the notion of agency: “the efficacy or effectivity with which this term [agency] has traditionally referred becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts” (23). Agency then, is a phenomenon that emerges from various actors – human and nonhuman – as well as from the collectives formed by these actors.

I am not the first to figure the relationship between humans and nonhumans in terms of performance. Bruno Latour’s recent work on actor-network-theory, which also seeks to challenge the subject/object binary by granting agency to the latter term, makes this figuration explicit. Much like Bennett, Latour claims that scholars⁴ need to extend their notion of “actor” to include nonhumans and objects, claiming that “we have to accept that the continuity of any course of action will rarely consist of human-to-human connections (for which basic social skills would be enough anyways) or of object-object connections, but will probably zigzag from one to the other” (75); furthermore “any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor” (71). For Latour, as for the other scholars mentioned above, an actor can be a person,

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⁴ Latour is speaking mainly of sociologists, but his claims extend to others working within the humanities and social sciences.
an animal, a teapot, an article of clothing, or what have you. In his discussion of actors, Latour adopts the language of the stage in order to frame this human-nonhuman-subject-object interaction as performance: “To use the word ‘actor’ means that its never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor onstage is never alone in acting. Play-acting thus puts us immediately into a thick imbraglio where the question of who is carrying out the action has become unfathomable . . . By definition action is dislocated” (46). For Latour, then, agency is a performative phenomenon that emerges when various humans and nonhumans unite in a course of action. Although he is not referring to consumption (or production, or any other “economic” matter), Latour’s insights, along with those of the other New Materialist thinkers discussed in this section, allow us to expand the notion of consumption beyond the mere will and intent of the human subject.

We must resist seeing instances of consumption as the activity of a human subject performed on or through nonhuman objects and things, but rather a performance enabled by the co-presence of ontologically different actors who engage in the elongated, complex processes defined by Miller and Appadurai. If, according to the findings of material culture scholars, consumption is part of the project of the self, the subject’s willed attempt at establishing relationships with objects, then we must also consider how consumption involves other agencies, which may be divorced from any sense of intentionality. I propose, then, that consumption be defined as a ritualistic, performative attempt by humans to establish widely-recognized relationships with nonhumans in order to establish their social identities. Because consumption, as an event, requires the complex interaction of agentic humans and nonhumans, there is no guarantee that the subject/human’s intentions will guide the performance he or she wishes to
enact via objects. When this happens, the subject experiences a deferral of the self, that is, their failure to successfully perform a widely recognized identity.

**Examining Consumption Performances in Restoration Texts**

Why, then, apply the seemingly ahistorical definition of consumption that I have outlined above, to texts produced in England from 1660 to the 1730s? What “payback” do we get? I will claim that, in doing so, we reveal how writers during this historical moment, implicitly or explicitly recognized the insights that New Materialists are now (re)presenting via the academy. Like scholars such as Bennett, Boivin, and Latour, Restoration and early-eighteenth century writers acknowledged, to various degrees, how nonhuman agency shapes human endeavors and identities, though they frames these insights via “literary” rather than “scientific” or “scholarly” discourses. This period of literary output displays not only a significant preoccupation with the failure of the masculine consumer, but also recognizes the role that the material world, through its nonhuman agency, plays in this failure.

Though we often view literary or “imaginative” texts as the preoccupied with “human” or “subjective” affairs, they possess the ability to allow objects to speak, however infected through anthropomorphic frames of reference\(^5\). In many situations, modern individuals only notice the agency of nonhumans in exceptional circumstances, for example when they break or do not function properly (see Brown’s comments on “things” above), or when they threaten human lives

\(^5\) Using texts as human artifacts to detect and examine nonhuman agency may smack of “anthropocentrism” – imposing human qualities on nonhuman entities – but as Jane Bennett acknowledges, a kind of strategic anthropocentrism in fact “works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman ‘environment’” (Bennett 120).
and livelihoods in the manner of pollution or natural disasters. In his most recent anthology aptly titled *Materiality*, Daniel Miller reiterates a claim made in his earlier work on material culture about how the material world often operates outside of human perception: “the surprising conclusion is that objects are important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not ‘see’ them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge” (Miller *Materiality* 5).

Like Miller, Latour recognizes the ubiquitous invisibility of the nonhuman world and, faced with this recognition, offers a task for scholars who wish to take seriously the role of nonhumans: “objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans, quickly shift from being mediators to intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no matter how internally complicated they might be. This is why specific tricks have to be invented to make them talk, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others — humans or nonhuman — do” (79). For Latour an intermediary is any thing that acts as a neutral go-between for two or more social actors, whereas a mediator actively changes the relationship between actors and, in doing so, exerts agency on the surrounding actors. Because these objects quickly slip back into silence (as intermediaries), the scholar’s role is to create or stage situations in which objects reassert themselves again. Texts act as technologies that make objects, things,

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6 Bennet discusses the political relevance of this New Materialist tenet in the final chapter of *Vibrant Matter*, “Vitality and Self-Interest.” By recognizing the radical otherness and agency of nonhumans, Bennet asks what a radical ethical consideration of the agency of matter would entail in terms of policy and social programs.

7 John Robb, who I will discuss at length in Chapter 4, “Courtship by Design: Behn, Centlivre, and the Emergence of the Feminine Subject” also touches on the invisibility of objects in his article “What Do Things Want? Object Design as Middle Range Theory of Material Culture” (2015).
and various other species of nonhumans reassert themselves for the human subject, whether it be the ethnographic studies, material culture anthologies, or lab reports that describe the behavior of scientific objects.

Specifically literary, or “imaginative” texts constitute a particularly effective technology that allows humans to see how nonhumans impinge on what might otherwise be considered primarily “human” affairs. Latour specifically mentions imaginative literature - which he glosses as “fiction” - as one method of making nonhumans assert themselves: “finally, when everything else has failed, the resource of fiction can bring — through the use of counterfactual history, thought experiments, and ‘scientification’ — the solid objects of today into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense” (82). Like a laboratory or clinic, the fictitious imaginative texts creates a controlled, arbitrary environment in which nonhumans can freely exert their own agency, and in which this agency’s effects upon human subjects can be exaggerated, or magnified in order for the observer to witness how it functions. Eschewing the rough distinction between representation and “reality,” Latour claims that “even as textual entities, objects overflow their makers, intermediaries become mediators” (85). Following this assertion by Latour, the study of consumption as portrayed in poetic and dramatic texts can be viewed as attempts by various writers to not only make nonhumans speak but also as attempts to articulate, support, or complicate widely-recognized consumption styles that determine the relationships between humans and nonhumans. As technologies used to observe and determine these relationships, imaginative texts become windows through which to describe historically specific controversies over the meaning of consumption.

Like my definition of consumption, the above claims about texts as technologies for observing nonhumans threaten to swell to near useless, ahistorical proportions. Worse still, they
flatten out the stunning variety of written material produced in any period, let alone the Restoration into the simple category of “imaginative text,” a definition with which the writers of said texts may not even agree. My intent in providing this description of texts is not to flatten out the various objects of this study (poems, plays, treatises etc.) in order to make them fit a particular theoretical frame. Neither is it my intention to explain these performances as simply reflections of dominant ideologies, embodiments of preexisting social forces, or expressions of overarching patriarchal or nascent capitalist relations. The vocabulary of power, domination, and ideology is certainly relevant here, but I do not take these phenomena as given or fully determinative of how actors behave. Instead, I wish to trace the movement of actors as they entered into consumption performances, describe where human and nonhumans met and conflicted on the page and on the stage, and how consumption and gender took on historically specific, and often troubling forms amidst this flurry of movement, meeting, and conflict. Any framing, dominating, transgressing, etc. will come from the actors themselves.

The Restoration and early 18th-century provides a particularly fruitful ground in which to plant these descriptive terms because of the very real investment English writers had in articulating gendered consumption through men and women’s interaction with the physical world. Restoration writers, implicitly or explicitly, recognized the agency of matter at a time when the modern “subject/object” binary was beginning to emerge. With a stunning degree of consciousness, these texts address the tensions between the project of the self/subject and the agency the material world exerts over human actors. The definitions of text and consumption that

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8 For a more detailed discussion of the emergence of “subject” and “object” as modern epistemological categories see Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). In his second chapter, “Constitution” Latour places this emergence squarely in the mid-17th century, and bases his claims on readings of English writers Sir Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes.
I wish to mobilize in this study are descriptive mechanisms used to trace the various actors that constitute early modern attempts to define consumption and gender. By viewing consumption as a performative relationship between humans and nonhumans, and texts as attempts to fix or script these relationships, we can describe the movement of gendered actors as they attempt (and rarely succeed) to consume the physical world. By doing so we find that the fractured male consumer and the emergent female consumer did not act alone - many actors joined them in their performances, and these latter did not play mere supporting roles.

Considering the roles played by nonhumans allows us to revisit anew the critical narrative woven around this period of literary output, and each of the chapter in this study seeks to revise (though not fully refute) our understandings of gender and consumption within this period. To reiterate the main thesis of this study: the 17th-century male consumer, as portrayed in poetry and drama, was marked by an ontological fracturing that precluded his ability to successfully consume the material world and thus perform his masculine identity; associated with the male consumer’s failure, the feminine consumer emerged to register news anxieties over the meaning of consumption. I will show how this movement, or double movement - the male consumer’s retreat and the female consumers emergence - played out in various ways, through various media, genres, and ideological domains. Each chapter, therefore, treats different aspects of this movement by focusing on different actors, not only different writers, but also the various human and nonhuman actors they wish to deploy and make perform.

Chapter Descriptions

The chapters in this study focus predominantly on poetry and drama produced during the Restoration and early-18th century. I have chosen to focus so heavily on these genres for two reasons. The first reason is, admittedly, a reflection of my own training as a scholar, which has
focused predominantly on poetry and drama more than prose genres. This is not to say that periodicals, early novels, diary entries, treatises, narratives, or other genres have no bearing on my investigation of early-modern English consumption – in fact, I will incorporate these and similar sources throughout the study as a whole – but rather that I have, practically speaking, chosen to focus more on what I am familiar with. Secondly, I have chosen to focus on poetry and drama because of the larger narratives that each genre appears to tell about consumption. In poetry, I have detected a narrative about gendered consumption that moves from a focus on material scarcity to what I term hyperabundance; the dramatic texts, all comedies, tell a narrative about how the senses, particular vision, influence the ways in which the fall of the masculine consumer and the rise of the feminine consumer played out on the English stage. This is not to say that there is a strict demarcation between poetry and drama in terms of the stories they tell of gendered consumption, nor am I claiming that I have exhausted the heuristic I have outlined above in examining what is, admittedly, a small portion of the texts produced in this period. Instead, I view these chapters as the beginning of a larger research program that seeks to tell the story of early-modern consumption and gender as determined by human/nonhuman interactions.

In my first chapter, “Milton, Rochester, and Other Libertines: Material Scarcity and Masculine Consumption,” I bring together two of most religiously, ethically, and politically different poets of the Restoration, John Milton and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, to show how they articulate post-Civil War masculinities. Tracking the presence of the libertine through their poetic works reveals how post-Civil War masculinities are increasingly defined in terms of material scarcity: in a world where consumable matter is scarce, masculinity is marked by an ontological fracturing that emerges from he conflict between masculine desire and the material world’s ability to thwart that desire. This phenomenon, as articulated in Milton’s Paradise Lost,
and in several poems of Rochester’s corpus, rests on an understanding of scarcity that emerges from mid-century political discourse, most notably Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, and stands in contrast to an earlier seventeenth-century masculinity defined by material abundance in estate poems by figures such as Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew, and Richard Lovelace. By the end of the century, English poetry displays a preoccupation with the failed masculine consumer, who attempts to dominate matter in order to perform his masculine identity, but ultimately fails because of the agency that matter exerts on him.

Published in the early decades of the Stuart Restoration, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* articulates an ontologically fractured masculinity through Satan’s failed performances. Milton’s conception of the universe in *Paradise Lost* is a theologically inflected monism that draws both on Hobbesian and Lucretian thought. This universe, as is made clear by the words of the archangel Raphael, is composed of vibrant, agentic matter that can compromise the actions and intentions of those who do not consume according to the dictates of “reason.” Satan is just such a consumer. Through his initial envy for the Son of God, his subsequent rebellious acts and punishments, Satan inaugurates conditions of scarcity within an abundant pre-lapsarian universe. Adam’s subsequent punishment displays several crucial similarities with Satan’s. Due to his and Eve’s crime of overconsumption, Adam, like Satan, experiences an antagonistic relationship to matter - including that of his own body. Milton’s conception of the fall of man is one in which scarcity becomes an ontological and ethical reality. Human history, which in Milton is overshadowed by midcentury social upheavals, is marked by the presence of scarce matter that compromises any successful enactment of identity, which is predominately gendered masculine.

Writing in the thick of Charles’s restored reign, Jon Wilmot valorizes a radically different version of masculine consumption in his “Satyr against Reason and Mankind.” Similar to Milton,
Rochester is preoccupied with displaying the ontologically fractured masculine consumer, whose intentionality is often at odds with his ability to successfully perform his masculine identity. In the “Satyr,” Rochester valorizes a masculine consumption style that eschews an divine or disembodied mediator (God, reason, etc.) and which embraces direct, sensual engagement with the material world, represented by food, wine, and women’s bodies. In a display of cynicism that differentiates him from Milton, Rochester frames this consumption style as an ever receding ideal and, in both the “Satyr” and poems which compromise what I call a “poetics of penis agency” invests his creative energy in displaying the ultimate failure of masculine consumption. Through a mixture of grotesque imagery, allusions to materialist thinkers such as Hobbes and Lucretius, and political satire, Rochester encapsulates a late seventeenth-century anxiety about masculinity that is not primarily defined in relationship to a gendered other, such as the monstrous women, the effeminate male, etc., but rather in terms of the masculine consumer’s ontological incompleteness and ultimate inability to enact successful consumption performances.

Chapter 2, “Waste Matter and Feminine Consumption in Hannah Woolley and Jonathan Swift” addresses the emergence of the feminine consumer in English culture by focusing on her relationship with waste matter. As the fractured male consumer fades on the English cultural horizon, the female consumer as trope emerged in poetic discourse as a highly charged actor used to express masculine anxieties over changing meanings of consumption. Early Restoration poets such as Rochester articulated anxieties over masculine consumption via representations of women that associated them with the bodily waste they or their male counterparts create. These earlier representations are inflected through a representational constellation of scarcity. The Restoration also witnessed the emergence of a discourse codified in published recipe books that valorized feminine consumption as an antidote to waste matter. Taking Hannah Woolley, a
widely known recipe author active during the first few decades of the Restoration as representative of this discourse, I show how Woolley articulates a feminine consumer who stands as an antidote to waste. Woolley constitutes a significant counterpart to both Rochester and also later poets who would use the waste-ridden figure of the feminine consumer to articulate masculine anxieties over consumption in hyper-abundant environments. Unlike poets such as Rochester, Woolley consciously and carefully articulates the labor involved in feminine consumption, thus rendering it an active, creative method of exerting agency over the material world. Guiding Woolley’s efforts is an imperative to tame and recycle waste matter. Decades later, Jonathan Swift would publish “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” poems which place the feminine consumer and her waste within a hyperabundant environment marked by the over-profusion of commodities. Like the masculine actors in chapter 1, Swift’s narrators and his masculine actor Strephon experience importance in the face of agentic matter, in this case waste matter. In Swift, this phenomenon becomes a comment on the inability of poetry to fully express masculine anxieties over women’s role in hyperabundant environment. Such an environment stands in marked contrast to an earlier poetics of scarcity (see chapter 1)

In my first chapter on dramatic texts, “Groping in the Dark: Masculine Consumption and Hindered Visibility” I examine comedies which place male consumers in dark environments. Restoration drama, long known for its investment in contemporary sexual politics, often frames masculine consumption in terms of men’s consumption of women’s bodies, and have various scholar shave shown, this consumption is in turn framed in terms of vision. The unique visual dynamics that adhere to these scenes - actors and audiences who can see, and male characters who cannot - gives rise to what I refer to as dim matter. In the presence of dim matter, the male
consumer experiences the same kind of ontological fracturing that appears in chapter 1 - that is, his intentionality is at odds with the agency of the nonhuman physical world. In my readings of Aphra Behn’s *The Feign’d Courtezans*, Edward Ravenscroft’s *The London Cuckolds*, and William Burnaby’s *The Modish Husband*, I will describe how these writers stage the performative failure of masculinity by removing men from a sexual economy based on vision. Furthermore, when masculine consumers meet dim matter, they experience a process of radical embodiment, whereby their own bodies become unruly matter. The male characters in these comedies – most of whom are desirable young rakes who adhere to a quasi-Hobbesean ideology based on pleasurable consumption – are thwarted in their efforts to consume women’s bodies. The female characters, played by the first generation of actresses to appear on the English stage, are often more adept at manipulating and navigating the physical world in dim scenes – thus, they are able to perform their identities much more successfully. The comedies discussed in this chapter show how playwrights in a significant strain of Restoration comedy display a preoccupation with the male consumer’s inability to perform his identity within a sexual economy based on vision.

What happens, then, when women characters intentionally manipulate themselves as objects, or quasi-objects within such a sexual economy? In the fourth and final chapter, “Courtship by Design: Behn, Centlivre, and the Emergence of the Feminine Subject,” I take up this question by examining it within the context of the emergent feminine consumer, the role of women within the English theater, and the New Materialist notion of design. By mobilizing he notion of design, as formulated by archaeologist John Robb, I will show how these two playwrights deployed stage props that on the one hand allow characters to perform widely-recognized identities, but, on the other hand, exert their own “agency of how” over the characters
attempting to manipulate them. In Aphra Behn’s most commercially successful play *The Rover*, she uses props to articulate a sexual economy that is based on male consumption of women’s bodies. These consumption dynamics are, like those discussed in chapter three, often based on vision, and they often threaten to turn violent, as is emphasized by the use of sword props by the majority of the male characters. The women in Behn’s play use the ideologically charged mask in order to thwart the performances of men, but this strategy, while offering them mobility and freedom, also exposes them to danger. Writing within a sexual economy based on vision, Behn is able to construct an agentic femininity, but one that relies on the very occularcentric dynamics that frame women primarily as objects for consumption. Years later however, Susanna Centlivre would reformulate these consumption dynamics and, by introducing documents into the plot of her most successful comedy *The Busie Body*, assert a new feminine subjectivity that emerges from and moves beyond the visual dynamics found in *The Rover*. Though this subjectivity does not display the investment in interiority or depth associated with later heroines in the novelistic tradition, it does assert a historically specific form of agency and subjectivity for women not available to earlier Restoration precedents
Chapter 1:

Milton, Rochester, and Other Libertines: Material Scarcity and Masculine Consumption

Introduction: Scarcity and the 1660s Navy Crisis

During the 1660s, the Restoration diarist Samuel Pepys recorded an ongoing struggle to fund the English navy. As early as June 28, 1662, Pepys comments on growing international tensions with the Dutch, as well as England’s unpreparedness to meet the Dutch in naval battle: “Great talk there is of a fear of a war with the Dutch; and we have order to pitch upon twenty ships to be forthwith set out; but I hope it is but a scarecrow to the world, to let them see that we can be ready for them; though, God knows! The King is not able to set out five ships at this present without great difficulty, we neither having money, credit, nor stores” (Pepys 209).

Simmering tensions with the Dutch would boil over into several military conflicts throughout the ensuing years, during which time the Navy office would face serious financial constraints. This early entry not only lays out the stakes of these constraints, but also establishes several trends that will shape Pepys’s subsequent responses to the government’s failure to pay the Navy. Significantly, Pepys frames this financial and military emergency as Charles II’s inability to provide for his own military, i.e “the King is not able to set out five ships” because of his lack of funds. Charles stands at the center of this anxiety, which as the years move on will blossom into a full-blown crisis. Pepys in turn stands as a semi-silent observer of the King, watching Charles perform his duties as King; the Navy crisis, as framed by Pepys, shows that Charles’s performance often threatens to devolve into failure.

Pepys’s anxiety over the navy reveals an early-modern understanding of scarcity and its relationship to both sovereignty and aristocratic male identity. Satiating the monarch’s appetites has become problematic: if Charles consumes too much, then the nation will not have enough as
a result. There is only so much matter to go around, and what the sovereign consumes for himself is essentially taken from the rest of the Commonwealth. Charles consumes without thought to scarcity, that is, he enters into relationships with matter (clothing, women’s bodies, etc.) in order to bolster his identity as monarch, and is unaware that his overconsumption has deleterious material effects for others. Physical coinage is simply not there to pay the seamen; starving, crying, and begging bodies follow Pepys from his office; Pepys is even forced to move a considerable number of his physical goods from London when it seems like the Dutch will invade England throughout June of 1667. While Charles tries to perform the part of an absolutist monarch through his consumption, he fails in his performance as a flesh and blood king, and this failure is embodied in the unruly matter it creates, matter that is out of place and thus burdensome. As we shall see, Pepys was well aware of how Charles’s overconsumption negatively impacted the very fabric of the newly restored kingdom.

In this chapter, I will examine how the concept of material scarcity informs the work of perhaps the two most dissimilar poets active during first two decades of the Restoration, John Milton and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Rochester and Milton represent a later 17th-century preoccupation with how the male consumer - in this case embodied as libertine - interacts with

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9 This view of matter and wealth is hardly confined to Pepys. As historian Steve Pincus asserts, early-modern mercantilists “believed that they lived in a world of scarcity — because property and value were defined exclusively with reference to land — in which economic life was necessarily one of vicious competition. They believe, most scholars assert confidently, that trade was a zero-sum game” (12). Though Pincus successfully shows that this belief was neither monolithic nor universal in early-modern England, he does show how it was a widespread position in early-modern debates about the nature of wealth and value.

10 Joseph Roach comments on the liminal and, at times, paradoxical position of Charles II in It: discussing the “legal and symbolic truth that the king had not one but two bodies,” Roach claims that “the reign of Charles II straddled these two worlds [the medieval and the modern], the one not yet dead, the other stirring to revolutionary life” (34-35). These “two worlds,” I claim, correspond roughly to two consumptions styles: that associated with a courtly abundance (the medieval) and another associated with an environment marked by scarcity (the modern).
matter in an environment marked by scarcity. In the poetic works I will discuss, matter is unruly because it is scarce; scarce matter destabilizes the identity of the male consumer because it is there, not here - the masculine actor perceives it, but cannot consume it. Scarce matter also exerts a form of agency divorced from the masculine actors own intentionality. Pulled between his will and desire on the one hand, and unruly matter on the other, the libertine is an ontologically fractured masculine actor for whom consumption is a zero-sum competition between himself and the material world. Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost*, and Rochester’s libertine speakers frame masculinity in terms of men’s attempts to fix their relationships to the physical world via performance – these performances, however, rarely succeed in fixing these relationships because unruly matter pushes back, much like a fellow actor who refuses to play his or her part correctly.

I am not the first critic to frame libertinism in terms of performance. Jeremy Webster in *Performing Libertinism in Charles II’s Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* claims that “libertinism is best studied as a series of performances” and that “above all else, the libertines were public performers of private pursuits” (2). Webster’s study of the libertine focuses on late 17th-century drama, rather than poetry, and his libertines are commonly recognized historical figures such as Charles Sedley, Sir George Etherege, and, of course, Rochester. Yet the aspects of libertinism identified by Webster – a series of performances that bring the “private” into the “public” – also apply to the poetic corpus that I will examine here. The private desires of Milton’s Satan and Adam, as well as Rochester’s various unnamed libertine speakers, are thrust to the forefront of the reader’s perception. I will delineate how these performances rest on both ontological and ethical assumptions about matter, how these performances are framed as failures, and how these
failures engage with lingering anxieties about masculinity, sovereignty, and scarcity from the mid-century Civil War and Interregnum.

The connection between scarcity, libertinism, and these mid-century traumas also informs Pepys’s representation of the navy crisis. Pepys makes this connection explicit in a notably lengthy and woe-ridden entry on February 29, 1664, in which he recounts a conversation he held with Sir Phillip Warwick about the state of England: “he showed me every particular sort of payment away of money, since the King’s coming in . . . and in my Lord Treasurer’s letter to the King upon this subject, he tells the King how it was the spending more than the revenue that did give the first occasion of his father’s ruine, and is since to the rebels” (359-360). As presented via the diary, Charles I’s profligate consumption causes the Civil War, and his son’s consumption now causes England’s financial and military troubles of the 1660s. The entries become more frantic as the war with the Dutch heats up: “my Lord did whisper to me alone that things here must break in pieces, nobody minding anything, but every man his owne business of profit or pleasure, and the King some little designs of his owne, and that certainly the kingdom could not stand in this condition long, which I fear and believe is very true” (537). A conversation with Sir Hugh Cholmly on August 9, 1667 reveals that Charles’s failure to perform kingship raises the possibility of a return to a commonwealth: “he doth really declare that he expects that of necessity, this Kingdom will fall back again to a commonwealth . . . people do well remember better things done, and better managed and with much less charge, under a commonwealth than they have been by this King” (816-817 emphasis mine). This failure is also part of a repeated performance: like his father, Charles II is trying to act the part of an absolutist king, and, Pepys and others fear, this performance may end in the ultimate failure, that is, failure of the state.
This failed performance on Charles’s part resembles the many failed performances of the masculine figure most associated with the first two decades of his reign. The libertine, for all his drinking, whoring, dueling, and seemingly unfettered consumption, is a creature born of scarcity, an early modern socio-economic concept most fully codified by Thomas Hobbes in the midst of England’s mid-seventeenth-century turmoil. In *Leviathan*, published two years after the execution of Charles I, Hobbes claims that, in the “natural condition of mankind,” appetite necessarily leads to war: “if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end . . . Endeavor to destroy, or subdue one another” (83). It is only after subjects make a covenant with a sovereign ruler, when men give up some of their rights to ensure others, that anything like ritualistic, performative consumption can arise. For Hobbes, the transition from a state of nature to a commonwealth is also a transition from unfettered appetitive acquisition to consumption proper. In a chapter of *Leviathan* titled “Of the Nutrition, and Procreation of a Commonwealth,” Hobbes lays out the conceptual foundation for this transition by explicitly juxtaposing the manner in which men may satisfy their appetites in a pre- and post-convenant state: “for where there is no commonwealth, there is . . . A perpetual war of every man against his neighbor; and therefore everything is his that getteth it, and keepeth it by force; which is neither propriety, nor community; but uncertainty” (164). Hobbes’s use of the word *uncertainty* frames the “natural” relationship between men and the matter they desire as ambiguous, unknowable, and unreliable. In such a state, it is impossible to fix the relationship between a male consumer, or in this case proto-
consumer, and any non-human object in a widely recognized performance style. It is only the covenant between subjects - read male\textsuperscript{11} subjects - and their sovereign that allows this to happen.

The libertine marks the failure of a smooth transition from a state of nature to a commonwealth. He emerges after the rough mid-century transition from monarchy to Commonwealth and back to a monarchy in 1660, and he serves as a reminder that these transitions are never complete. The trauma associated with the Civil War and its aftermath cannot be forgotten, despite Charles’s best efforts. The kingly prerogative of consumption, associated with a Renaissance patrician masculinity, simply does not work anymore as a legitimate means to establish male identity, because the lie has been given to the notion of an smooth, unproblematic return to the pre-Interregnum past. As he rambles about through the poetry of the early Restoration, the libertine serves as a reminder that scarcity is here to stay.

I am not the first to comment on the connection between Hobbesian thought and libertinism in relation to scarcity. Klaas Tindemans views libertinism “as a particular ‘school’ testing the concept of the state of nature” (135), which is based on the modern principle of scarcity as articulated by Hobbes in \textit{Leviathan}. “Modern scarcity,” Tindemans claims,

\begin{quote}
 is a subjective notion and derives its meaning from a difference. Something is scarce when A possesses less than B . . . given a generalized equality between men, even if this is an abstraction, and no social reality at all. This notion of scarcity is the motor of modern society, since it fuels interactions between humans in search of wealth, status, and – before anything else – self-preservation. (136)
\end{quote}

For Tindemans, scarcity, or more appropriately perceived scarcity, is a fundamental condition for modern social thought. While I will not take the time here to question the somewhat problematic

\textsuperscript{11} Hobbes does recognize the possibility of women engaging in civic life, but often frames these as exceptional instances. For more, see \textit{Leviathan}, chapter 20, “Of Dominion, Paternal, and Despotical,” chapter 21, “Of the Liberty of Subjects,” and chapter 22, “Of the Liberty of Subjects.”
move on Tindemans’s part to generalize so heavily about this notion, I would like to point out his
gloss of Hobbes’s political thought as inflected through this notion of scarcity: “Hobbes has a
quite mechanical view of man as such: he considers him a self-moving and self-directing
appetitive machine focused on permanent comparison of his power, richness, knowledge, and
honor with other men. This is no mere abstract comparison, but a capacity to get what he wants
in contrast to the same capacity as other men” (136-137)\textsuperscript{12}. For Hobbes and, as we shall see for
Milton and Rochester, “man” - and I use that moniker deliberately - is a creature of scarcity
whose behavior is ultimately determined by a perceived lack of material resources, whether these
are necessities, luxuries, or anything in between.

\textit{From Abundance to Scarcity: the Emergence of the Libertine}

As Jeremy Webster argues, “the only way to show just how ‘complicated’ Restoration
libertinism truly was is to elaborate fully both its embracing of aristocratic male privilege at the
expense of other classes and women and its radical challenge to the patriarchal system upon
which that privilege is based” (6); I would suggest that in Milton and Rochester’s poetry, the
latter element of libertinism is stronger than the former, or more specifically, the “aristocratic
male privilege” associated with aristocratic abundance becomes, in Milton and Rochester, a
transparent and ever-receding ideal. Both poets launch a radical challenge to “the patriarchal
system on which that system is based” by exploring masculinity through a contemporaneous lens
of material scarcity. This dynamic stands in sharp contrast to an earlier 17th-century poetics of

\textsuperscript{12} The notion of competition for resources as a definitive aspect of libertinism is not new, though
previous studies have focused primarily on the connection between libertinism and the symbolic
circulation of women, which derives from a structuralist work of Claude Levi-Strauss. Examples
of this kind of work include Eve Sedgwick’s seminal \textit{Between Men}, specifically Chapter Three,
\textit{“The Country Wife: Anatomies of Male Homosocial Desire,”} and Duane Coltharp’s \textit{“Rival Fops,
Rambling Rakes, Wild Women: Homosocial Desire and Courtly Crisis in Rochester’s Poetry.”}
abundance, in which the high-status male functions both as consumer and source of material abundance for those surrounding him. In the following section, I will provide an outline of how this poetics of abundance gives way to a poetics of scarcity, and how the male consumer in these poems can be seen as a response to 17th-century historiographic and poetic efforts to codify wide-ranging social tumults, specifically those pertaining to the trauma of the mid-century Civil War and Interregnum.

One of the earliest so-called “estate poems” written in the English language is Ben Jonson’s “To Penhurst,” first published in 1616. In “Penhurst,” Jonson articulates a vision of material abundance that flows from the country house of the Sidney family. Standing at the center of this environment is the male head of house who functions as a source of material plentitude. Jonson’s speaker first mentions the lord of the estate while commenting on the material bounty the lord offers to the lower classes:

Where comes no guest but is allowed to eat
Without his fear, and of thy lord’s own meat;
Where the same beer and bread and self-same wine
That is his lordship’s shall also be mine. (61-64)

Jonson defines the male head of house primarily through his ability to share his material goods and create a trans-class utopia. There is more than enough to go around, and the material world exerts agency in order to provide the estate with resources: “Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish, / Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net” (32-33). This pastoral utopia is also a decidedly masculine environment, with women relegated to the status of accessories or objects, consumable themselves. Among the many foods and drinks catalogued are also the “ripe daughters” of the surrounding neighbors, “whom they would commend / This way to husbands,
and whose baskets bear an emblem of themselves, in plum or pear” (54-56). The final lines of “Penhurst” are devoted to the lady of the estate, propping her up as a mechanism that allows the men of Penhurst - lord or visitor - to consume its bounty:

On thy good lady then! Who therein reaped
The just reward of her high huswifery;

These, Penhursrt, are thy praise, and yet not all.
Thy lady’s noble, fruitful, chaste withal (84-90).

Jonson’s focus on the lady of the house, especially his speaker’s praise for her chastity, evokes Michael McKeon’s claims about the status of seventeenth-century gentlewomen. “It is only in the early modern period,” McKeon claims, “when the genealogical foundation of female chastity becomes more evident, does it also become habitual to designate chastity as the female species of ‘honor,’ and the frequency of that designation seems to increase over the course of the seventeenth century” (157). In response to the wide-spread demographic shifts that left many aristocratic families without direct male heirs, property and rank were increasingly transferred across generations “through the female conduit, but from the male reservoir” (156). Something analogous seems to be happening in “Penhurst” – the male reservoir of material abundance, the owner of Penhurst, allows his bounty to be spread to others through the lady of the house\(^{13}\). Even though the speaker foregrounds the figure of Penhurst’s mistress here, the master is the true subject of the poem as it is his material bounty that makes Penhurst a node of abundant

\(^{13}\) As the 17th century moves on, the female head of house will come to embody particular anxieties over consumption and gender. I will address this issue at length in my readings of Hannah Woolley and Jonathan Swift in Chapter 2.
consumption. And, as Jonson drives home in the final four lines of the poem, the lord of the estate is marked primarily by the way he consumes material resources:

Now, Penhurst, they that will proportion thee
With other edifices, when they see
Those proud, ambitious heaps, and nothing else,
May say, their lords have built, but thy lord dwells (99-102)

Here as in the first few lines of the poem, Jonson contrasts Penhurst with other estates, and the verbs in the final line clearly delineate the lord of Penhurst from other estate owners: the past perfect “have built,” renders the accomplishments of other estate owners ephemeral and passing – their achievements are in the past, noticeable only in the “ambitious heaps” that their wealth has produced. Jonson privileges Penhurst’s lord because he actively “dwells” and exhibits a stable performance style marked by abundance and charity.

Mary McGuire reads Jonson’s poem as a response to the waning privilege of the aristocracy: “intrusion of the profit motive into the established pattern of mutual allegiances between paternalistic landlord and obedient tenant naturally produced social rancor and disrupted community harmony” (Maguire 95). Because of these class shifts, the country estate “became a different kind of status symbol as aristocrats chose to spend their money and to assert their class identities in new ways” (95). Within this context, “Jonson’s poem is a paean to the traditional patterns of estate life which were being threatened” (96). I broadly agree with McGuire’s claims, although I do wish to take issue with just exactly how Jonson articulates this anxiety. I claim that, in addition to, and probably because of the wide-ranging class shifts Maguire outlines, Jonson’s vision of the country estate is based on an awareness of material scarcity, and how this awareness has both social and ontological consequences for how the landed aristocracy interacts
with the nonhuman, material world in order to support their social identities, that is, how they consume.

Something that McGuire does not consider in her examination of Jonson’s poem is the fact that the poem opens with Jonson’s speaker differentiating Penhurst from other contemporary homes:

Thou art not, Penhurst, built to envious show
Of touch, or marble, nor canst boast a row
Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold;
Thou hast no lantern, whereof tales are told,
Or stair, or courts; but stand’st an ancient pile,
And, these grudged at, art reverenced the while. (Jonson 1-6)

Penhurst is not built for grandeur or pomposity, for envious show, which would require the envy of another observer, i.e., an awareness that “A” does not have what “B” has, “B” being the Sidney family. The material makeup of Penhurst is not defined by luxurious or fashionable design, but by its pedigree, it’s status as an “ancient pile” that reminds the reader of a more feudal past in which the country estate both functioned as a society-in-miniature and as a marker of the lord’s hospitality. In order to appreciate the abundance such a space has to offer, one must detach oneself from what is going on elsewhere; in Jonson’s poem, abundance is still possible, but it can only take place in an environment that is removed both spatially from the urban centers of luxury consumption \(^{14}\) and temporally into the past. Jonson’s speaker hints briefly at the

\(^{14}\) For more on the social and economic centrality of London for luxury consumption in 17th-century England see Peck, Chapter 1, “I must have a damasked pair of spurs’: Shopping in Seventeenth-Century London” in Consuming Splendor.
presence of material scarcity elsewhere, but such considerations do not affect the consumption habits of those at Penhurst, who benefit from their lord’s hospitality.

Scarcity in Thomas Carew’s “Saxham,” written in 1620 and published in 1640, is harder to ignore. Throughout the poem, Carew’s speaker raises the specter of scarcity that Jonson brushes away at the beginning of “Penhurst.” As McGuire points out, the winter imagery in “Saxham” is a crucial marker of difference between Carew and Jonson’s vision of the country estate (99) and reveals, I claim, the main ideological difference between the poems, which hinges on consumption within an environment of abundance versus consumption in an environment marked by scarcity. While Jonson foregrounds abundance, Carew foregrounds the tension between these two consumption styles. Like Jonson, Carew opens his poem by differentiating Saxham from that which is elsewhere, i.e., from an environment marked by scarcity:

Though frost and snow, locked from mine eyes
Thy beauty which without doors lies,
Thy gardens, orchards, walks, that so
I might not all thy pleasures know,
Yet Saxham, thou within thy gate
Art of thyself, so delicate,
So full of native sweets, that bless
Thy roof with inward happiness. (1-8)

Carew posits a strict demarcation between the inner sanctum of Saxham and the outside wintery world. At Saxham, a consumption style based on hospitality, abundance, and patriarchal sharing can only take place indoors. Even among estates, Saxham stands as an oasis: “the season hardly did afford / Coarse cates upon thy neighbors board” (15-16). The difference between Jonson and
Carew’s articulation is that while Jonson foregrounds the spatial and temporal isolation of abundance - abundance is *here* in the country and corresponds to an ideal *past* - Carew presents the temporal and spatial simultaneity of both abundance and scarcity. Carew’s version of the estate is threatened by the specter of scarcity just outside its gates, much like Milton’s Eden is threatened by the epic environments that surround it, which I will discuss more fully later. The libertine has not emerged yet, but the field of his emergence – a social field marked by scarcity and, consequentially, unruly matter – has been established. Scarcity threatens the estate from outside, but Carew’s vision of abundance is still stable enough to resist these outside forces. Despite the specter of scarcity as represented by weather or humanity - winter and thieves, respectively - Saxham’s consumable matter stays right where it is, stable and safe for the male consumer, the estate patriarch, to consume and share as charity and hospitality dictate.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Richard Lovelace inverts the relationship between abundance and scarcity as articulated in Jonson’s “Penhurst.” Lovelace traces a poetics of abundance within an environment marked by scarcity in “The Grasshopper. Ode. To My Noble Friend, Mr. Charles Cotton.” The first three stanzas clearly articulate pastoral images of abundance, which are neatly encapsulated in the speaker’s comment that “the joys of earth and air are thine entire” (5). As with Jonson’s and Carew’s estate poems, the abundance of consumable matter within the poem’s first three stanzas evokes utopian imagery: “all these merry days maks’t merry men” (11). Things take a drastic turn after this; Lovelace’s generically standard pastoral opening gives way to a poetics of scarcity in the fourth stanza:

But ah, the sickle! Golden ears are cropped;
Ceres and Bacchus bid good-night;
Sharp frosty fingers all your flow’rs have topped,
And what scythes spared, winds shave off quite. (13-16)

The ejaculatory nature of this transition, marked by the “ah” and exclamation point present in the text emphasizes the sudden nature of this transition as well as the violence that Lovelace evokes in the first and forth lines (“cropped,” “scythes,” “shave off quite”). Lurking beneath this pastoral or anti-pastoral imagery is the very real violence done to the body of the king; Charles I had been beheaded only four months prior to the publication of “The Grasshopper.” Gone is the abundant consumption style associated with royalist masculine consumption, represented here by images food and drink, and which will continue to ground images of masculine consumption as articulated in Milton and Rochester.

Carew moves abundance indoors, while Lovelace moves it inside of the speaker himself. Addressing Charles Cotton directly, Lovelace’s speaker states:

Thou best of men and friends! We will create
A genuine summer in each other’s breast,
And spite of this cold time and frozen fate,
Thaw us a warm seat to our rest. (21-24)

Winter, which in Carew only threatened from outside, has swallowed abundance, i.e., England is now a land of scarcity, which has been brought on by the Civil War and subsequent regicide. Concomitant with this inward spatial movement is a temporal movement as well. Jonson and Carew’s estate poems are present-focused: abundance is here and now in the earlier estate poems.

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15 A late 17th-century example of this can be found in Andrew Marvell’s “Mower” poems, including “Damon the Mower,” “The Mower against Gardens,” and “The Mower’s Song,” all published in the 1681 collection Miscellaneous Poems. Each poem juxtaposes images of death and harvest against traditional pastoral images, which I claim are analogous to the poetics of abundance discussed here.
discussed above, while in Lovelace abundance hovers in the future, promising to return when
England’s traditional social structures have been restored:

Dropping December shall come weeping in,
Bewailing th’usurpation of his reign;
But when in the showers of Old Greek we begin,
Shall cry, he hath his crown again! (29-32)

The restoration of the monarchy and aristocracy will also restore a metaphorical summer,
attendant with traditional forms of masculine consumption, the “old Greek” or wine that hovers
so often in the interstices of pastoral and royalist imagery in seventeenth century poetry.

In an instance of literary-historical irony, scarcity would in fact gain a greater foothold in
later seventeenth-century poetry, even as material abundance continued to increase for English
society at large. There would be no return to an idealized pre-Civil War past, as is hoped for by
Lovelace. After the restoration of the monarchy, a visible strain of English poetry is marked by
the presence of the libertine, who straddles generations, political ideologies, and even religious
commitments. The various fault lines that had fully fractured in English society would remain
open, out of which would come the figure of the libertine, who tries to consumes abundantly, but
in a world marked by scarcity.

Reason, Matter, and Consumption in Milton’s Paradise Lost

Like the libertines or “Court Wits” associated with Charles II’s court, Milton’s Satan is
driven by an appetite for the physical; his eloquent and seductive speech parallels the linguistic
performance of “wit” that defined libertines such as Rochester, Sedley, and Charles himself; like
the Restoration libertines known from bawdy poems and street performances, Satan holds a clear
contempt for things such as established hierarchy and moral stricture. As with the libertines of
Charles II’s court and the Merry Monarch himself - and this is the crucial similarity - Satan’s consumption is marked by scarcity; unlike the street performances\textsuperscript{16} of Sedley, Rochester, and Buckingham during the 1660s, however, Satan’s consumption performances are failures, because they take place in a material universe that is \textit{not} marked by scarcity. Satan consumes based on his false consciousness of scarcity, and the consequence of these performances is an antagonistic relationship to matter itself, which attends a physical and spiritual distancing from God.

As may come as no surprise, the relationship between Milton’s work and the Civil War has received much more attention from critics than has Rochester’s\textsuperscript{17}. \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution}, for example, devotes an entire chapter to \textit{Paradise Lost}, in which Annabel Patterson asks, “what does it mean to believe \textit{Paradise Lost} was somehow the \textit{product} of the English revolutionary period and Milton’s investment in it?” (624). Among several answers to this question, Patterson acknowledges that “we cannot avoid the fact that to open the poem with a rebellion of angels against their monarch would immediately, in 1667, have suggested a topical analogy” (633). Beyond such topical analogies, however, the question of just how Milton engages with the Civil War is much more problematic. Patricia Couch, like Patterson, denies the possibility of a strictly “allegorical” reading, and focuses on the typological similarities between the archangel Michael and millenarian English dissenters, such as Cromwell (151); Couch defines typology as “repetitions . . . always marked by difference. Typology asserts

\textsuperscript{16} For example, Sir Charles Sedley’s public nighttime rooftop performance in which Sedley publicly dipped his penis into a cup in order to toast the king’s health. This incident is recorded by Pepys in his entry for July 1, 1663. Kirk Combe discusses one such performance enacted by Rochester in his article, “Making Monkeys of Important Men: Performance Satire and Rochester’s ‘Alexander Bendo’s Brochure’.”

\textsuperscript{17} At the time of writing this analysis, an MLA International Bibliography search for “John Milton” and “English Civil War” garners 60 hits (“Civil War” provides an additional 18), while a search for “John Wilmot” and “English Civil War” returns just one result. Searches that included “Interregnum” garnered a 7:0 ratio, while the ratio for searches including “regicide” was 22:0.
an identity between remote things; it does not imply an identical-ness” (152). Stephen B. Dobranski in “Clustering and Curling Locks: The Matter of Hair in Paradise Lost” frames Milton’s descriptions of Adam and Eve’s hair styles in relation to the overtly political hair style preferences of the Civil War period: short and unfashionable for Roundheads, long and flowing for Cavaliers (337). Stephen Hequembourg discusses how Milton’s engagement with materialist philosophers such as Lucretius – a connection I will discuss more fully below – takes place within the intersection of Renaissance theories of poetic creation and wide-spread social trauma resulting from the Civil War (183). The questions of how, why, and to what extent Milton’s work can be seen as a product of (or response to, or reenactment of, etc.) the events of midcentury cannot be fully answered here. I will claim, however, that by examining how Milton deploys the Restoration figure of the libertine via Satan, we can gain a better understanding of how Milton’s epic poem functions as a post-Civil War representation of early-modern masculine consumption. By “post-Civil War,” I mean both simultaneously a backward-looking (“post-”) articulation of older masculinities associated with abundance – a la Jonson, Carew, and Lovelace – but within an environment marked by scarcity, of which the libertine is representative.

Paradise Lost’s theological narrative depends, both literally and figuratively, on a double movement. The speaker intends to “soar above / t’Aonian mount,” (1.14-15) to describe how Adam and Eve “fall off / from their creator” (1.30-31). In order to rise “to the great height of this argument” (1.24), Milton has to take a detour through the “vast abyss” (1.21); for the rest of the poem, Milton’s speaker, aided by his heavenly muse will take us back and forth, up and down, from Heaven to Hell and Earth in between. This movement entails not just physical and spiritual displacement for the male actors, namely Adam and Satan, but also a transition between denser and rarer material states, which correspond to downward movement away from God and upward
movement toward God, respectively. In Milton’s universe, movement away from God toward a
denser material existence necessarily results in an antagonistic relationship with matter, and men
in a post-lapsarian state are defined through such an antagonistic relationship. Masculine actors
in Milton’s universe are given a choice of consumption scripts, which are based on their
relationship to God - how they choose between these scripts is, above all, a matter of how they
choose to consume in a scarce universe, following either reason or unfettered appetite.

Milton presents a materialist conception of the universe, something that brings him in line
with thinkers such as Hobbes. The first critic to take seriously Milton’s materialist conception is
Stephon Fallon, who claims that “like Hobbes, Milton circumvented the mind-body problem that
vexed Decartes, Gassendi, and the Platonists and that moved them to construct elaborate models
of two-substance interaction” – but Milton also differentiates himself from Hobbes in that
“Milton assimilated matter to current notions of mind and moved toward the position that all
corporeal substance is animate, self-active, and free” (81 emphasis mine). Fallon’s analysis of
what he refers to as Milton’s “animist materialism” draws our attention to how Milton conceived
of the material world as agentic, and how this conception of an agentic universe emerged from
mid-century debates about the possibility of free-will, the relationship between mind and body,
and the nature of corporeality. Something Fallon overlooks, however, and which is central to a
recent strain of Milton criticism, is Milton’s engagement with another materialist thinker,
Lucretius. *Paradise Lost* draws on the monist vision found in Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, in
which Lucretius describes a material universe that is eternal, as in not created by an external
force, including God: “Well then, let this as the first Rule be laid, / Nothing was by the Gods of
Nothing made” (Lucretius 1.6) – this atheistic claim is not merely a corollary to Lucretius’s
thought, but the basis on which his entire argument rests. Lucretius replaces one or several divine
creators with matter itself, which is made up of atoms or “Seeds” in order to explain why, in the absence of a divine creator, material things can take on recognizable forms:

constant Nature all things breeds
From Matter fitly joined with proper Seeds,
Their various shapes, their different properties,
Is the plain cause why All from All can’t rise (1. 205-208).

While Milton seeks to “justify the ways of God to men” (Milton 1.26), Lucretius seeks to free men from the “slavish fear [of] Religion’s Tyranny” (Lucretius 1.83-84); as Paul Hammond claims, “Lucretius was correcting his contemporaries’ habit of invoking the gods; Milton in turn corrects Lucretius, deftly insisting on the superiority of his own philosophical poetry and its dogmatic framework” (Hammond 160). As he does with countless classical myths, Milton incorporates and supersedes Lucretius’s vision of a purely material, agentic universe.

The key difference between Milton and Lucretius is how agentic matter functions in a Christian, as opposed to atheist universe. Milton borrows the Lucretian notion that matter, far from being dead and inert, exerts nonhuman agency, although for Milton the nonhuman world is still subordinate to the will of God. The question of how to reconcile Milton’s Christian ethos with a radically materialist philosopher like Lucretius forms the kernel of a somewhat recent trend in Milton criticism that examines Paradise Lost in terms of physics. Philip Hardie claims that “as much as an epic of Christian heroism, Paradise Lost is a didactic poem on ethics and physics; Lucretius is the main classical representative of the genre of scientific and philosophical didactic poetry, and thereby an obvious model for Milton” (Hardie 13). Sarah Ellenzweig, frames the relationship between Milton and Lucretius in terms of physics and the agency of matter, claiming “Milton . . . is eclectically engaged with contemporary debates in the physics of motion,
and his view of matter’s autonomous and vital properties, informed by his readings of Lucretius, flirts dangerously with naturalism” (Ellenzweig 387). Significantly, this motion goes one of two ways: up or down. “The question of how and why a body falls in Paradise Lost,” Ellenzweig claims, “persistently returns to the declining bodies that occupy Lucretius’s De Rerum Natura” (386). Her thoughts echo those of David Quint, who suggests that in Paradise Lost, “either one is on the way up to God and heaven or one is condemned to a terrifying fall into untold, oceanic depths” (Quint 858). Both Ellenzweig and Quint are commenting on Satan’s fall through chaos in Book II, as this scene forms the kernel of their larger arguments about Mitlon’s preoccupation with how matter moves within a Christian universe. Quint compares Satan to “a Lucretian atom in free fall,” (859), just as Ellenzweig, above, evokes Lucretius “declining bodies” to describe both the fallen angels and post-lasparian Adam and Eve. Quint, examining Satan’s subsequent arrival on Earth, also claims that “it is not the universe that is falling, then, Milton responds to Lucretius, but rather the hardened sinner, who, unable to repent, falls ever further away from his Creator” (861 emphasis mine). Quint is using the adjective “hardened” theologically, but his language also evokes the fact that Milton is not merely interested in the “physics” of matter, but also in what could be called the “chemistry” of a Christian universe, that is, the nature of matter itself, rather than just how it moves within a Christian moral and ontological context.

Milton’s moral material chemistry is the subject of Juliet Cummins’s essay “Matter and Apocalyptic Transformation in Paradise Lost,” in which she argues that “unfallen and regenerate human beings evolve toward a more materially and spiritually refined state on earth, anticipating their reformation at the end of time. Conversely, the unrepentant in Paradise Lost undergo a process of degradation, which prefigures their reformation at the end of time” (169). Just as Ellenzweig explore the ways in which Milton “aligned himself with the new physics of his
contemporaries Descartes, Galileo, Hobbes, and Spinoza” (Ellenzweig 386) Cummins explores the ways in which “Paradise Lost betrays the influence of contemporary alchemical theory,” especially the central tenet of seventeenth-century alchemists that “suggested that material could not be destroyed, only altered” (Cummins 170). Cummins examines Milton’s chemistry in terms of the apocalyptic imagery presented in the later books of Paradise Lost, specifically Adam’s vision of the future, in which those loyal to God will be resurrected at the end of time, but I argue that the entirety of Paradise Lost depends upon the moral and ontological chemistry that Milton uses to describe what happens to matter itself – usually, though not always matter that makes up characters’ bodies - as it moves upward and downward in Milton’s Christian universe.

The claim that Milton’s acknowledgement of matter’s nonhuman agency somehow clashes ideologically with a Christian outlook loses any contradictory status if one considers the role of free will in relation to Milton’s material chemistry. According to Milton, the freedom to move up or down is a matter of free choice, as God makes clear multiple times throughout Paradise Lost, though most clearly in Book III: “I made him [Satan] just and right; / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. / Such I created all th’ethereal powers, / And spirits, both them who stood, and them who fail’d” (3.98-101). The corresponding chemical changes that result from upward movement toward God and downward movement away from God are a different story – angels and men may choose where they move in this universe, but once they have decided on a downward path they have no choice about what they become, physically speaking.

18 In his comparison of Milton’s corpus with the work of Hobbes, Fallon claims that “from the publication of Leviathan in 1651, raged a debate in which the question of freedom of the will was inseparable from the debate over the nature of substance . . . Milton’s Christian materialism shows signs of the influence of the contemporary debate; it is a shelter for the freedom of the will in an increasingly hostile environment” (98).
Over the course of *Paradise Lost*, Milton reverses Hobbes’s transition from a state of nature associated with scarcity to a commonwealth marked by shared abundance. In *Paradise Lost*, the narrative moves from a universe marked by abundance to one marked by competition and scarcity. The pre-lapsarian landscape of *Paradise Lost* is a pastoral utopia, in that the material world exists in harmony with human desires. This is a material universe marked by the presence of consumable matter, of which there is more than enough for all creatures, however materially dense or rare. With the exception of Hell, scarcity does not exist within Milton’s conception of a pre-fallen world. In Book V, the angel Raphael describes God’s created universe in terms of a chemical process, digestion, and it is fitting that this exchange takes place after Adam and Eve share a meal with their heavenly visitor. During his visit to Eden, Raphael tells the couple:

> ... food alike those pure

Intelligent substances require,

As doth your rational . . .

For know, whatever was created, needs

To be sustain’d and fed; of elements,

the grosser feed the purer. (5.407-416)

Ellenzweig, discussing Milton’s physics, claims that “Rapheal makes digestion the dynamic action that animates the universe, and Milton means for us to take this trope literally . . . for Lucretius, the digestive process explains motion at its most basic level: ‘In each thing, its own proper bodies are spread abroad through the frame within from all its foods, and being combined produce the appropriate motions’” (Ellenzweig 395).

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Adam, apparently confused how an angel could enjoy material food, questions Raphael about his ability and desire to consume matter. Raphael’s answer takes the form of a lecture. “O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to Him return” (5.469-470).

From God’s initial bounty arises a hierarchy of consumption:

\[
\ldots\text{So from the root}
\]
\[
\text{Springs lighter the green stalk,}
\]
\[
\text{from thence the leaves more airy}
\]
\[
\ldots\text{flowers and their fruit,}
\]
\[
\text{Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale sublim’d,}
\]
\[
\text{The vital spirits aspire, to animal,}
\]
\[
\text{To intellectual; give both life and sense,}
\]
\[
\text{Fancy and understanding; whence the soul}
\]
\[
\text{Reason receives, and reason is her being. (5.480-487)}
\]

In Milton’s universe, God provides and his creatures consume, both angel and human. And - what would be a delight to every modern chronic dieter – consuming matter makes one lighter and more spiritual. This is with the caveat, however, that said consumption is guided by reason, a concept that Milton associates with the mental powers of conscious beings and which dictates a harmonious relationship with God and God’s material universe.

In *Paradise Lost* consumption directly affects the physical makeup of conscious beings. Raphael explains that through reasonable consumption humans:

\[
\text{With angels may participate, and find}
\]
\[
\text{No inconvenient diet, nor too light fare;}
\]
\[
\text{And from these corporeal nutrients perhaps}
\]
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit. (5.493-497)

Upward movement towards God involves a change in one’s material state: one becomes lighter and rarer, although it must be stressed that one is still a material creature; in Milton’s universe, “spiritual” should not be conflated with “disembodied” or “immaterial.” Within Eden’s pastoral pre-lapsarian landscape, Raphael’s admonition for Adam to “Meanwhile enjoy / Your fill, what happiness this happy state / Can comprehend, incapable of more” (5.503-505) is the height of spiritual advice. By taking from what is below, Adam and Eve will also experience the best of what is above, and Raphael’s final clause, “incapable of more” evokes the difference between the model of masculine consumption represented by Adam, and that embodied in Satan.

Satan experiences the opposite process of material reformulation that Raphael describes to Adam - he slides down an ontological spectrum of density, becoming heavier and denser, while his body is more at odds with his desires. The crime that results in Satan’s antagonistic relationship to matter is, significantly, a crime based on wayward consumption, as becomes evident when examining Satan’s first appearance in Heaven and his subsequent rebellion.

Raphael describes Heaven, like its denser cousin Eden, as a place of worshipful consumption. Following God’s decree that the Son will act as His successor, the angels celebrate in a manner that Raphael translates in terms of consumptive behavior:

Tables are set, and on a sudden pil’d
With angel’s food, and rubies nectar flows
In pearl, in diamond, and massy gold . . .

---

20 Hobbes also attempts to establish a material basis for religious or supernatural phenomena, including supposedly incorporeal entities such as the soul, spirit, demons, angels, etc. Most of this work is found in the fourth book of Leviathan, titled “On the Kingdom of Darkness,” in which Hobbes attempts to address what he sees as errors in the Protestant religious tradition. He even goes so far as to claim, “the Scriptures do not teach that spirits are incorporeal” (427).
They eat, they drink and in communion sweet

Quaff immortality and joy. (5.632-638)

God’s angels know how to have a good time, but, significantly, they also know their limits - they remain “secure / Of surfeit, where full measure only bounds / Excess” (5.638-640); harmony with God means that excess is simply not possible, that one can consume only as much as one needs.

Unlike the other denizens of Heaven, Satan wants to consume more than he has. While the other angels sleep off their meals, Satan remains awake, “fraught with envy against the Son of God” (5.661-662). What Satan believes he cannot receive from God, he intends to take for himself. Satan perceives a lack, that is, he now sees the universe in terms of scarcity. To use Tindeman’s language, Satan (A) possesses less than the Son (B), or at least he perceives that he does. If the natural state of God’s creatures in Paradise Lost is one of reason-driven consumption within an infinitely abundant universe, Satan insists on inverting these dynamics. Satan essentially inaugurates a Hobbesean “state of nature”; in rejecting God’s vision of the universe, Satan also rejects any notion of abundance, and consequentially rejects the possibility of harmonious, reason-based consumption regulated by God’s dictates, much like the harmonious consumption that Hobbes believes is assured by the presence of a sovereign. His performances from the moment of his initial perception of scarcity will all be marked by a failure to consume matter in away that supports the identity he chooses for himself.

The war in Heaven begins not with a bang, a stab, a thrust or a parry, but with a performance that evokes the mid-century Civil War. From his opening appeal to the gathered angels that mirrors God’s language word for word – “Thrones, dominations, prinedoms, virtues, / If these magnific titles yet remains powers” – to the somewhat Cromwellian appeals to liberty:
Who can in reason then, or right, assume
Monarchy over such as live by right
His equals, if in power and splendor less,
In freedom equal (5.794-798)

Satan enacts a charismatic performance that will drive the angels, with the noted exception of
Abdeil, into rebellion. Here Satan synthesizes two recognizable performance styles: one
associated with God – his opening appeal mirrors God’s language word for word (3.320) - and
another associated with the rebel forces of the Civil War. Rhetorically, Satan draws from
discourses inflected by abundance (God’s word) and those based on competitive scarcity (Civil
War discourse). His speech is a hybrid mixture that taints the harmonious consumption
associated with a pre-lapsarian environment. Satan synthesizes physical spectacle and verbal
citation in order to achieve a successful performance that serves his consumption ends: deposing
God and gaining the status given to the Son.

As a consequence of his rebellion, Satan is bound by a fleshier, denser, material body. In
order to first survey Hell, “he steers his flight / Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air, / That felt
unusual weight” (1.225-227 emphasis mine); Although Milton shortly after mentions that spirits
are “Not tied or manacled with joint or limb, / nor founded on the strength of brittle bones,”
(1.426-427), Satan still experiences a more antagonistic relationship with matter than his loyal
counterparts. Compared to the loyal angels, Satan’s relationship to his body is problematic
because it makes its material status known through weight, pain, and most importantly, its ability
to thwart Satan’s desires. This becomes apparent during the first battle in Heaven: in traditional
masculine fashion\(^{21}\), Satan puffs himself up before the fighting. Facing the loyal angels, “Satan, with vast and haughty strides, advanc’d, / Came tow’ring, arm’d in adamant and gold” (6.109-110). Satan enjoys the ability to form his body at will, but when cut by Michael’s sword:

\[
\ldots \text{then Satan first knew pain,}
\]

\[
\text{And writh’d him to and fro convolv’d; so sore}
\]

the grinding sword with discontinuous wound

\[
\text{Pass’d through him. (6.327-330)}
\]

The flesh of Satan’s body asserts it’s status as a material entity via pain, thus hindering Satan’s ability to perform his militaristic masculine identity, and consume the throne of God.

Satan’s failed performances - complete with downward motion, an antagonistic relationship to matter, and the un-reasonable desire to satiate appetite in response to perceived scarcity - are condensed in Book X. Here Satan thinks that he has achieved his goal of perverting God’s creation; as he stands triumphant before the fallen angels in Pandemonium, God transforms Hell’s denizens into serpents in what is an ironic mimesis of Satan’s previous behavior. Satan becomes denser, more enslaved to matter, in a downward movement: “His arms clung to his ribs; his legs intwining / Each other, still supplanted, down he fell / A monstrous serpent on his belly prone” (10.512-514). God mocks Satan’s former obsession with physical size and grandeur: he is now not just a serpent, “but still greatest, he the midst, / Now dragon grown, larger than whom the sun / Engender’d in the Pythian vale on slime” (10.528-530). The

“Pythian slime,” associates Satan with waste matter, which is a connection that God will explicitly make with Adam. (As I will discuss in chapter 2, waste matter was often used by early-modern poets to articulate crises of masculinity.) Unwilling to conform his consumption habits to the dictates of reason, Satan and the other fallen angels are “parche’d with scalding thirst and hunger fierce, / Though to delude them sent, could not abstain” (10.556-557), and even though, “instead of fruit / [they] Chew’d bitter ashes” they are unable to stop consuming. God ritualizes this forced performance in which the fallen angels act as both performers and audience:

. . . thus were they plagu’d

And worn with famine, long and ceaseless hiss,

Till their lost shape, permitted, they resum’d,

Yearly enjoy’d, some say, to undergo

Their annual humbling certain number’d days

To dash their pride. (10.330-325)

In what is essentially the inverse of an annual religious fast, Satan and the fallen angels are forced into a regularly repeated ritual in which they perform their relationship with dense matter, i.e. their forced bondage in material bodies, in order to produce a communal affect, in this case shame. God essentially literalizes Satan’s perception of scarcity.

The fall of Adam and Eve - their initial crime and subsequent punishment – displays typological resemblances to Satan’s narrative in terms of scarcity, consumption, and resulting relationships to the material world. When Eve then eats from the Tree of Knowledge in Book X, she commits a crime of consumption: drawn to the fruit that she describes in physical terms as “Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste” (9.777), she commits the same crime Raphael warns Adam against in Book VIII. Her transgression also resembles Satan’s because it is committed based on
a perception of scarcity, as she claims, via apostrophe to the fruit, “his [God’s] forbidding / Commends thee more” (9.753-754). Once Eve has eaten of the fruit and persuaded Adam to do the same, Adam then discards Raphael’s other admonition not to fetishize Eve’s physical form: after eating the fruit, he is filled with “carnal desire” (9.1013), and then takes Eve to a more private setting, “a shady bank, / Thick overhead with verdant rook imbower’d” (9.1037-1038) in order to have sex with her. The fact that Adam removes Eve to a private setting in order to satisfy his physical desire creates a typological resemblance between Adam and Satan who incestuously consumes his daughter Sin “in secret” (2.766)²². These episodes of sinful, unreasonable consumption are also coded in a manner seemingly appropriate to the hedonistic consumption styles associated with royalist and libertine excess: the speaker claims that “Greedily she [Eve] grog’d without constraint” (9.791) and then felt “heighten’d as with wine, jocund and boon” (9.793); after making love in the throes of carnal desire, the first couple “rose / As from unrest, and each the other viewing, / Soon found their eyes how open’d, and their Minds / How darken’d” (9.1051-1054). The fall of man, itself a crime of overconsumption, is succeeded by a hangover.

Adam’s punishment, the promise of grace notwithstanding, is similar to Satan’s. God’s sentence for Adam is worth quoting in full:

Because thou hast harken’d to the voice of thy wife

And eaten of the tree, concerning which

I charg’d thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat thereof:

---

²² For more on the comparison between Satan’s consumption of Sin, as compared with Adam’s consumption of Eve, especially as these episodes engage with the Habermasian concepts of privacy and the public sphere, see Maria Magro, ‘Milton’s sexualized Women and the Creation of a Gendered Public Sphere,” and Erin Murphy, “Paradise Lost and the Politics of ‘Begetting’.”
Curs’d is the gound for thy sake; thou in sorrow
Shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life,
Thorns also and thistles it shall bring thee forth
Unbid; and thou shall eat th’herb of the field,
In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread,
Till thou return unto the ground: for thou
Out of the ground was taken, know thy birth,
For dust thou art, and shall to dust return. (11.198-208)

God foregrounds Adam’s gender identity, faulting Adam firstly for abstaining from his masculine prerogative as Eve’s superior. It is because Adam listened to Eve, rather than the dictates of reason, and consumed that which he should not, that he will be punished in kind: forced to labor in order to appease his appetite. In contrast to the easy labors both be and Eve performed in Eden, Adam will now have to struggle against matter, rather than work with it. His relationship with surrounding matter moves from one of symbiosis, appropriate to the pastoral setting of Eden, to one of struggle. Adam’s changing relationship to matter can be read as a movement from the pastoral to the more agonistic epic. His antagonist will not be a hoard of warrior angels, but the very earth itself, which God codes as an actor endowed with the agency necessary to carry out Adam’s punishment: the ground will “bring thee forth” inconsumable, unruly matter such as “Thorns and thistles”; linguistically, Adam is now coded as an object, which God underscores when He reminds Adam, “know thy birth, / For thou art dust, and shall to dust return.” Later in Book XI, when God gives orders to the Son to evict Adam and Eve, Adam is again coded as dense material that now differs, to evoke Raphael’s earlier language, not only in “degree,” but in “kind” as well:
Those pure immortal elements that know
No gross, no unharmonious mixture foul,
Eject him tainted now and purge him off
As a distemper, gross to air as gross,
And mortal food, as may dispose him best
For dissolution wrought by sin, that first
Distemper’d all things. (11.50-56)

Here Adam is not merely one material body among many ("thou art dust"), but also waste matter, that which is be ejected by a healthy body. I will have more to say about the role of waste matter as it pertains to masculine consumption in Chapter 2, but for now I would like to point out that Adam’s punishment involves the forced recognition of the limits of Adam’s material status. It is also here that God explicitly links Adam’s punishment with Satan’s: both Adam and Satan, who “first / Distemper’d all things” are now defined by their dense, material existences, which are antithetical to the “pure immortal elements” that compose the bodies in Heaven.

Adam’s punishment does, however, differ significantly than Satan’s: besides the offer of eventual grace and resurrection, God offers Adam a way to mitigate his punishment. When asked by Adam “is there yet no way, besides / These painful passages, how we may come / To death, and mix with our connatural dust?” (11.527-529) Michael offers Adam advice that evokes Raphael’s earlier comments in that it focuses on appetite and consumption:

There is . . . if thou well observe
The rule of not too much, by temp’rance taught,
In what thou eat’st and drink’st, seeking from thence
Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight. (11.530-533)
Even in man’s fallen state, he is left free to follow the dictates of reason in regard to appetite. In a pre-lapsarian world, God’s dictate, delivered though Raphael, was for Adam to “enjoy” the material world, while post-lapsarian Adam must now follow “the rule of not too much”; God has now instituted the law, in a Hegelian sense\(^\text{23}\), and the male subject now has a choice of how he will behave, which in Milton’s universe is a choice of how he will consume.

Adam’s expulsion from Eden can also be read as his emergence into history. In an examination of seventeenth-century English epics, Anthony Welch claims that

> In the hero’s struggle over whether to carry his epic burden or lay it down and escape to a place outside history, the poets found a symbol for their own struggle to find a political voice in defeat. Constructing fragile enclaves of romance inside their epics, they enabled themselves to explore not so much the topical issues of the moment but the idea of political engagement itself: the mysterious relationship between private psychology (viewed as the terrain of romance) and public history (the purview of the epic). (572)

Furthermore, Welch makes a direct connection between this wide-spread shift in the epic genre and the events of the Civil War (571). Given this generic determination, Adam’s transition to a post-lapsarian is state simultaneously a reversal of the Hobbes’s transition from a state of nature to a commonwealth, and an entrance into history itself. Human history, Milton seems to be implying, is marked by material scarcity.

In a universe no longer marked by abundance, men may follow one of two consumption scripts: like Satan they can conform their consumption to the dictates of appetite and face failure, or they can accept the same choice offered Adam, that is, they can attempt to follow reason’s dictates in their consumption performances. Either way they must now, in a post-lapsarian

\(^{23}\) In “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate,” Hegel places the imposition of the law after the Flood, but his language could equally be applied to God’s punishment in Paradise Lost: “Among living things, things capable of being mastered in this way, men were subjected to the law, to the command so to restrain themselves . . . to overstep these restraints was to fall under the power of this Being and so to become lifeless” (45).
universe, face matter itself as an antagonist. Milton does offer a way out of this predicament – the “rule of not too much” – but the basic antagonism with matter remains. Masculine consumption is, at least until the Resurrection, fraught with *agon*, but the possibility of grace through performance remains. Turning now to the corpus of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, we will see how the deployment of the libertine through poetry could be used to deny the possibility of any successful consumption performance for male actors in an environment marked by scarcity.

**Rochester and the Unavoidable Failure of Consumption**

If Milton’s career as a poet was winding down in the 1660s, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester’s career as a libertine was just beginning. Through his ‘real world’ performances and uniquely grotesque and cynical poetry, Rochester became the poster boy of libertinism. Despite a life seemingly devoted to hedonistic consumption, Rochester’s poetry takes an ironic stance on men’s engagement with the material world, and denies the possibility that men can successfully consume in a world marked by scarcity. Rochester’s poetic corpus displays a preoccupation with material scarcity and how the libertine performs, or fails to perform his identity within this environment.

Roughly a decade after *Paradise Lost*’s initial publication, Rochester began composing one of his most directly philosophical works, “A Satyr against Reason and Mankind,” in which he attacks the concept of reason using his typical mixture of scorn, sarcasm, and grotesque imagery. Significantly, the masculine, libertine speaker of the poem directs his ire towards the kinesthetic imagery on which Milton bases his conception of matter in *Paradise Lost*: upwards

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24 Rochester’s use of “reason” is more ambiguous than Milton’s. I agree with Ford Russell who claims that Rochester does not so much attack a specific version of “reason,” but rather a “spectrum of views in the court of Charles II” (248).
movement guided by reason, which seeks to attain the less materially dense regions of heaven. The masculine individual who follows “Reason” is lead astray by an empty ideal of his own making: “the misguided follower climbs with pain / Mountains of whimseys, heaped in his own brain” (15-16). Once the exposition gives way to a dialogue between the speaker and “some formal band and beard,” the latter’s diction comes remarkably close to Milton’s in *Paradise Lost* - in his opening statement, the scholar (probably a clergyman), launches a paean on:

> Reason, by whose inspiring influence  
> We take a flight beyond material sense,  
> Dive into mysteries, then soaring pierce  
> The flaming limits of the universe,  
> Search heaven and hell, find out what’s acted there,  
> And give the world true grounds of hope and fear. (96)

The speaker’s subsequent rebuttal yet again focuses on upwards movement, as the “soaring” Reason-guided wit of the scholar becomes a “charming ointment [that can] make an old witch fly / And bear a crippled carcass through the sky” (97). This transformation is significant in two respects: the supposedly masculine wit of the reasoning scholar is both feminized and materialized. The “old witch” is a figure marked by an antagonistic relationship to matter - her body is “crippled,” wearing the ravages of time, and it is only the imposition of superstitious imagery that, parodically because literally, allows her access to the upward movement so praised by the scholar. Men who base their consumption on reason, then, are not merely confused or plagued by a form of false consciousness, they are also feminized, relinquishing their masculine identities in the very process of trying to establish them.
Like Milton’s, Rochester’s materialism as articulated in “Satyr” draws from Lucretian thought. As David Vieth points out, line 69 of “Satyr,” in which Rochester’s scholar mentions “the flaming limits of the universe” seems to be a direct translation of Lucretius’s “flammantia moenia mundi” (Vieth 96). It is interesting that Rochester places this line in the scholar’s mouth; on one hand, it conveniently illustrates the fallacious upward motion that reason inspires, while on the other it reveals a double movement within Lucretius – a double movement that brings Lucretius, an atheist materialist thinker, in line with Milton, whose theologically inflected materialism, discussed above, seeks to rework the Lucretian source material. Rochester finds fault with such double movement – his “misguided follower” attempt to stay afloat with “bladders of philosophy / In hopes still to o’rtake th’ escaping light” (21-22); rather than accept the downward swerving motion exemplified by Lucretius’s *clinamen*, reason-driven men attempt to deny the natural tendency of bodies to move downward. And this denial of downward motion is also a denial of matter’s influence on men’s endeavors and identities. In the end, however, such a denial will:

Lead him to death, and make him understand,

After a search so painful and so long,

That all his life he has been in the wrong.

Huddled in dirt, the reasoning engine lies,

---

25 Rhetorically speaking, Lucretius often seems to evoke the upward motion Rochester rails against, despite his radically materialist vision of the universe. One example out of many from *De Rerum Natura* occurs in book 5 in a paean to Epicurus: “What Verse can soar on so sublime a wing, / As reaches his deserts [sic]” (5.1-2). Though modern readers may dissociate the “content” of the poem from its poetic form, David Norbrook reminds us that 17th-century readers (such as Thomas Hobbes) focused just as much on the rhetorical aspects of *De Rerum* as they did the philosophical content; see “Atheists and Republicans: Interpreting Lucretius in Revolutionary England” in *Lucretius and the Early Modern* (2016).
Who was so proud, so witty, and so wise. (26-30)

Rochester’s speaker cynically frames reason as a struggle to disavow material existence, but in the end our material bodies do what they always have, that is, decay. The imagery presented in these lines evokes God’s words to Adam, “dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.”

After the dialogue between the speaker and the scholar, Rochester provides what can be read as a libertine manifesto *in miniature*: “Thus, whilst against false reasoning I inveigh, / I own right reason, which I would obey: / That reason which distinguishes by sense” (98-100). For Rochester’s speaker, legitimate reason is dictated by sense, that is, by bodily interaction with a dense material world. Rochester inverts the relationship between reason and appetite as Milton establishes it; whereas in *Paradise Lost*, appetite is something to be governed and checked by reason, in Rochester’s “Satyr” reason is subordinate to appetitive consumption of material objects. In order to highlight the difference between misguided and “right” reason, Rochester illustrates the proper consumption of food:

- My reason is my friend, yours is a cheat;
- Hunger calls out, my reason bids me eat;
- Perversely, yours your appetite does mock:
- This asks for food, yours answers, “What’s o’clock?” (106-109)

To follow upward reason is a denial of the material, in this case the sustained effort that living bodies require; unlike the “difference in degree” that Milton’s Raphael uses to distinguish the reason-driven angels from men, Rochester’s two reasons are a different *in kind*, and the standard to judge them is consumption.

The difference between Milton and Rochester’s versions of reason is not merely one of checked versus unchecked desire. Much like the “reason” that guides Adam and the angels,
“right reason” as valorized by Rochester is not a free-for-all, nor does it lack an ethical component. The reason that “distinguishes from sense,” and which depends on acknowledging the material world:

... gives us rules of good and ill from thence,
That bounds desires with a reforming will
To keep ‘em more in vigor, not to kill.
Your reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy,
Renewing appetites your would destroy. (101-105)

Whereas in *Paradise Lost*, men’s interaction with the material world depends on their relationship with God - one moves upwards towards God, or downward towards a denser existence - Rochester’s reason forges a direct connection between men’s fleshy bodies and a material world in which there is no supernatural or divine mediation. These ethical dynamics of the “Satyr” evoke Hobbes’s conception of consumption. According to Hobbes, “whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire; that is, which he for his own part Call the good: and the object of hate, and aversion evil” (35), which Rochester seems to allude to when he describes “right reason,” which is “that reason which distinguishes by sense / And gives us rules of good or ill from thence.” For Rochester, as for Hobbes, morality is a matter of appetite, that is, of distinguishing one’s relationship to the material world, based primarily on the physical senses.

Despite what Rochester borrows from Hobbes’s thought, it is important to note how Rochester distances himself from key Hobbesean concepts. In Hobbes’s “natural condition of man,” all men are born equal, but soon move to a state of conflict. This is clearly articulated by Hobbes in his discussion of men’s mental faculties or “wit,” with which men are born and subsequently develop through experience or reason. The difference between men’s wits is part of
the larger trends of inequality – including material inequality driven by unfettered consumption – and the causes of wit can be ascribed to men’s passions: “the passions that most of all cause the difference in wit, are principally, the more or less desire of power, or riches, of knowledge, and of honor. All which may be reduced to the first, that is, desire of power. For riches, knowledge, and honor are but several sorts of power” (48) The conflict this desire causes is near unavoidable without a commonwealth, and Hobbes supplies “three principle causes of quarrel. First, competition; second diffidence; thirdly glory. The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; the third, for reputation” (Hobbes 83). Hobbes frames the desire for power in terms of a progression:

The first maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first uses violence, to make them masters of other men’s persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons, or by reflection of their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name. (84)

Spurred by the desire for power, men move from the acquisition and maintenance of material goods, to the acquisition, maintenance, and defense of largely immaterial phenomena. For Hobbes, it is only within a commonwealth that this final state of affairs has any hope of continuance, because the sovereign provides the stability under which common markers of men’s identities – their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name – can be fixed.

Rochester critiques Hobbes’s notion of a smooth transition from one relationship with matter - unfettered appetite - to one defined by the regulated consumption styles that allow this relationship to be intelligible in terms of identities and repeated performances. These two relationships are analogous to Hobbes’s notions of “state of nature” and “commonwealth,” respectively. The problem with this transition, as presented in the “Satyr,” is that the driving forces of human appetite as outlined by Hobbes in Leviathan do not go away, but are simply
transplanted into the commonwealth state. Reversing the upward motion that defines erroneous reason – which in turn involves a denial of the physical world – Rochester’s speaker tells us to:

- Look to the bottom of his vast design,
- Wherein men’s wisdom, power, and glory join:
- The good he acts, the ill he does endure,
- ‘Tis all from fear, to make himself secure.
- Merely from safety, after fame we thirst,
- For all men would be cowards if they durst (153-158)

It is here that Rochester’s language begins to clearly diverge from Hobbes’s ethical formulations. As Ford Russell notes, “like Hobbes, Rochester portrays man as either acting or reacting, as motivated by appetite or responding with aversion. In other words - those of contemporary behavioral scientists - any setting in which man is placed becomes a ‘flee or fight’ situation. In the Satyr Rochester chooses to speak mainly about fear, he places power in the background” (247). Whereas Hobbes sees the basis of human endeavor, and therefore human consumption, as the desire for power, which may instill fear, “in Rochester... Fear neither leads to immobilizing dread nor to a paralyzing awareness of death, but rather takes on a life of its own” (247). By casting fear as the basis of human endeavor, Rochester inverts Hobbes’s articulation of consumption, as that which properly occurs within a commonwealth.

Rochester both rhetorically and ontologically reverses the progression that Hobbes outlines. His speaker moves towards the “bottom” by looking through the formal and seemingly immaterial motives that drive men’s consumption, that is, their preoccupation with “wisdom, power, and glory” and as we the audience move down the page, we get to the “bottom” or basis of these desires, which is “fear” – after all it is “merely for safety, after fame we thirst.” It is
significant, however, that Rochester only moves downwards through what Hobbes presents as the latter two levels of social progression, “the second, for safety; the third, for reputation.” That level corresponding to the desire for what Hobbes calls “gain” is left alone. For Rochester, Hobbes’s first level of experience, corresponding to appetite, is the only legitimate relationship with the material world; ritualized forms of consumption, which correspond to Hobbes’s third level (reputation), are empty performances that are doomed to fail. Katherine Mannheimer, in an examination of how Rochester engages with Hobbes in order to critique mind-body dualisms associated with the deployment of language, argues that “Rochester’s poetry . . . seems to embrace just the kind of confusion that Hobbes shudders at, suggesting that human beings ought not to stay within the bounds of a single level of mentality, as it were, but rather to explore those regions above and below our assigned position” (491). I agree with Mannheimer that Rochester is in the business of destabilizing Hobbesean “levels,” as well as her claim that Rochester launches these critiques of Hobbes through primarily rhetorical means - such as diction, stress, and sound, what Mannheimer refers to as “language at its most material” (493) - though I disagree with her claim that, in doing so, Rochester somehow valorizes both the intellectual and the material. Rather than seeing Rochester as a kind of proto-deconstructionist who “exposes the absurdity of the assumption that one could ever place matter and meaning, body and mind, into any sort of stable hierarchy” (503), we should view Rochester as subsuming the ideal, immaterial, intellectual, etc. under the umbrella of the physical. His cynicism, as seen in the “Satyr,” leads to an inversion of binaries (mind/body, form/content, spirit/matter) rather than an implosion thereof. He also injects this cynicism into representations of masculine performances thwarted by the agency of matter.
In the final stanzas of the “Satyr,” the speaker launches attacks on the illegitimate consumption performances of two powerful groups: the court and the church. A bishop is described as “A greater fop in business at fourscore, fonder of serious toys, affected more / Than the gay, glittering fool at twenty proves / With all his noise, his tawdry clothes, and loves” (208-211). If, according to Rochester’s quasi-Hobbesian claims in the satire, successful consumption is measured by its ability to maximize pleasure for the consumer, along with said consumer’s acknowledgement of the sensory basis of appetite, then the bishop’s performance is a failure. The bishop’s fault is not just that he denies his appetite for material consumption, but rather that he hides this behind a veneer of upward-focused reason in order to discourage and disparage the consumption of other men. Clergymen such as the bishop use their position and assumed anti-materialist behavior in order to “chide at kings and rail at men of sense” (197) – notice the pun here on “sense.” Rochester’s speaker, however, insists on displaying their actual motivations and relationship to appetite. He insists that the clergymen who the bishop represents are really men:

    Whose lust exulted to that height arrives
    They act adultery with their own wives,
    And ere a score of years completed be,
    Can from the lofty pulpit proudly see
    Half a large perish their own progeny. (201-205)

Appetitive and lustful, men like the bishop consciously fix their relationships to material entities – in this case material bodies – in order to perform virile, patrilineal masculine identities. The bodies of the bishop’s children, like those of his lovers and wives, are merely physical accessories, valuable to the bishop because they take up visual space and can be seen by the
bishop from his pulpit. Their silent material status evokes Joseph Roach’s claims about accessories in relationship to celebrity:

to accessorize is to make a useful sign out of a practical superfluity. The word accessory suggests not only a surplus or an excess (as in a bejeweled purse too small to hold anything, for instance) but also an oblique yet significant instrumentality . . . to accessorize a costume is thus to furnish it with the supplementary but nonetheless telling items that serve to identify or locate the wearer. (52)

For the bishop, these material bodies are at once superfluous, because they serve no needs necessary for survival, and instrumental in that they reflect the bishop’s masculine identity as a virile, progeny-producing male. Standing in the pulpit, the bishop engages in two performances simultaneously: an open performance that conforms to his office as clergyman, and a hidden performance that he will “act” with his wife in secret. What the speaker takes issue with is not the fact that the bishop satiates his appetite by sexually consuming the bodies of women, and visually consuming the bodies of his children – the problem is that this consumption is hidden, it is a private performance that allows the bishop to straddle the roles of “libertine” and “clergyman.” Reason, as Rochester sees it deployed in practice, is merely a smoke screen that allows an illegitimate hybridity of roles that in turn allows men like the bishop to deploy their own physical desires, while seeking to curb the appetites of others.

Rochester’s “Satyr” seems to create a simple dichotomy between two types of performance: the hypocritical performances, like the bishop’s, that use “reason” to obfuscate their material basis, and consumption that follows “right” reason, i.e., physical drives. If the bishop’s performance is unsuccessful – the unruly matter of the bishop’s progeny reveals the illegitimacy of this performance - then it would, apparently, stand to reason that a successful consumption performance would involve the male consumer’s explicit acknowledgement of his relationship to matter, and his dominance of the material world in order to construct his own
identity. And yet, Rochester’s poetic corpus is filled with male consumers who do actively acknowledge their relationship with, and desire for matter, but yet nonetheless fail to successfully consume said matter. These men do indeed perform their relationship to manner in an attempt to fix their identities; they openly acknowledge their physical appetites; none of them fall prey to the upward kinesthetic imagery that marks illegitimate reason, and hence illegitimate consumption, in Milton or the figures lampooned in the “Satyr.” Their performances fail because their intentionality competes with the agency of the material world, which overtakes their actions and hence their masculine identities. The matter that thwarts these performances is often the matter composing libertine bodies; the male consumer is ontologically fractured, because his intentionality is divorced from the actions of his own body. This is illustrated most clearly in “The Disabled Debauchee,” “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” and “A Satyr on Charles II,” poems in which matter pushes back against the libertine’s agency, and therefore invalidates his consumption performances. In each case it the matter of the libertine’s own body that overtakes his agency to consume, much like Satan and Adam’s bodies in Paradise Lost. This is most obvious in the libertine figures that populate what I refer to simply as Rochester’s penis poems.

The basic trope that I will examine in these poems is the antagonistic relationship between libertine speakers and their penises, which do not function in a way that the speaker desires. Jason Farr has examined this phenomenon in terms of sexuality and ableism within the context of the Long 18th Century, claiming that “these publicly circulated texts – ranging in form from poetry, to epistle, to essay – all assume, or confront the assumption, that the presence of a physically disabled person turns a heterosexual encounter into a scene upon which he reading public could voyeuristically gaze” (98) – in other words, such texts function as print-mediated performances, through which “in establishing opposite-sex intercourse as natural and
preeminent, these writers portray disabled people as incapable of heterosexual relations, constituting able-bodiness as an individual’s ability to perform penetrative heterosexual sex” (98). Farr is right to point out the sexual and bodily hierarchies that exist within these texts, but I would like to add to Farr’s formulation of disability that, while it is true that such texts do seem to establish clear sexual and able-bodied hierarchies, they also simultaneously destabilize notions of agency and masculine identities that are based on the male consumer’s ability to successfully engage with matter. They may prop up an “ideal” kind of masculinity, but these texts often frame this ideal as an absence, something that a male subject has aimed for, but fails to achieve.

Rochester's speaker begins “The Disabled Debauchee” by evoking a model of masculinity associated with militaristic value, which by the 1670s was already becoming an outmoded model of upper-class masculine identity. Satirically framing this evocation as an epic simile, the speaker compares himself to “some brave admiral” (1), who views “two rival fleets appearing from afar,” and only “thinks himself amidst the foes” (11). Like the admiral to whom he compares himself, the debauchee is removed from the action described for the rest of the poem, which can be viewed as a constellation of libertine performances that center on libertine sexual consumption. Like the playwrights I will discuss in chapter 4, Rochester presents a violent form of libertine consumption. The “whores attacked” (33), the “bawd’s quarters beaten up” (34), and “well-looked linkboy” (38) are examples of material objects that the debauchee has violently consumed26. And, despite what victories the speaker may have achieved in his younger days, matter eventually wins out. Following the introductory mock-epic simile, the speaker provides the reason for his detachment from the “fight”:

26 I will have more to about the violent aspects of masculine consumption in Restoration culture in Chapter 4: “Courtship by Design: Behn, Centlivre, and the Emergence of the Feminine Subject”
... my days of impotence approach,

And I’m *by pox and wine’s unlucky chance*

*Forced from the pleasing billows of debauch*

On the dull shore of lazy temperance. (13-16 emphasis mine)

The speaker’s own body - ravaged, much like Rochester’s, by venereal disease and alcohol - has been rendered impotent, ineffective, and unable to carry out the speaker’s desires. Prevented from performing relationships with matter that conform to a libertine consumption style, the debauchee can only resort to memory. Although he can no longer enjoy women’s or young boys’ bodies, the speaker still looks back fondly on his libertine ways. “Past joys,” the speaker claims, “have more than paid what I endure” (24).

While the eponymous debauchee finds some comfort in his former exploits, as well as the chance of passing these on to younger libertines in-the-making, the speaker of Rochester’s “The Imperfect Enjoyment” deals with his body’s betrayal in a different manner. Also written in the 1670s, “The Imperfect Enjoyment” foregrounds matter’s ability to overtake the libertine’s agency, and satirically frames the attendant male anxiety over a failure to perform. For the first 45 lines of the poem, the speaker places the onus of failure on himself. At the poem’s (and the speaker’s) premature climax, he exclaims:

In liquid raptures, I dissolve all o’er,

Melt into sperm, and spend at every pore.

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27 Leah Benedict has analyzed the dynamics of impotence in Rochester’s “The Imperfect Enjoyment” in relation to both 17th-century medical discourses and Hobbes’s political thought in her article, “Generic Failures and Imperfect Enjoyments: Rochester and the Anatomy of Impotence.” Benedict claims that “the possibility that the passions might fail to engage, and that reason might find them wanting in vigour, escapes the philosophical tradition [for example, Hobbes]” (64).
A touch from any part of her had done’t:

Her hand, her foot, her very look’s a cunt. (15-18)

Here it is the libertine speaker who “dissolves,” “melts,” and “spends,” and describes himself as “trembling, confused, despairing, limber, dry, / A wishing, weak, unmoving lump I lie” (35-36).

At this point, the locus of blame hovers between the libertine himself and Corinna’s material body, which is represented synechdochally via her “cunt.” Significantly, the speaker chooses to address the former: it is the libertine himself who has failed, who has ejaculated too soon, and who has been reduced to an “unmoving lump,” or flaccid penis. Following this self-disparagement, the speaker shifts gears and addresses his penis through third-person apostrophe:

. . . stiffly resolved, ‘twould carelessly invade

Woman or man, nor ought its fury stayed:

Where’er it pierced, a cunt it found or made –

Now languid lies in this unhappy hour

Shrunken up and sapless like a withered flower. (41-45)

Here, the locus of agency shifts toward the penis itself – as with the eponymous disabled debauchee, the material body holds agency that the libertine himself does not. What follows is an ontological and rhetorical shift: the speaker frames his penis as an object ontologically detached from himself as the pronouns shift from first- to second-person. Addressing his penis directly, the speaker claims that “thy valor” is evident when it “Breaks every stew, does each small whore invade” (59), and functions as “a common fucking post, / On whom each whore relieves her tingling cunt / As hogs on gates do rub themselves and grunt” (63-65). The speaker’s physical penis then becomes the locus of both the poem and of any agency that is exerted within the poem’s final stanzas. The speaker cedes his agency to the penis both rhetorically, via the
pronoun shift, and ontologically, as the speaker dissociates his own will from that of his body. This is most obvious in the final lines of the poem, in which the speaker curses his penis:

Mays’t thou ne’er piss, who didst refuse to spend
When all my joys did on false thee depend.
And may ten thousand abler pricks agree
To do the wronged Corinna right for thee. (69-72)

Here, due to a failure to consume his lover’s body, the speaker dissociates his intentionality from his penis, which is framed as an agent. Cursing his own penis – “Mays’t thou ever piss, who didst refuse to spend” – the speaker seems to overlook the fact that he is in fact wishing to obstruct his own urinary tract. The onus of failure is placed on the penis itself, rather than the speaker; both the speaker and Corinna have been “wronged” by the matter of the speaker’s body. Ontologically speaking, the penis becomes “other.” The antagonistic relationship between the speaker and this phallic other results in an unconsummated sex act, which for the speaker is also a failed consumption performance.

This poetics of penis agency even carries over into explicitly political discourse in Rochester’s “Satire on Charles II.” In his analysis of this poem, Webster argues that “the lampoon’s primary point is less about Charles’s misuse of power than it is about Rochester and his libertine circle’s anxiety concerning their loss of influence over the king’s scepter to the women in Charles’s life and court” (3). I see Webster’s political reading of the poem as valid, especially given the various satires that Rochester composed on the women surrounding the court, including “On Cary Frazier” and the vicious “On Mrs. Willis”. This satirical comment on Charles’s “misuse of power,” however, is also built on the constellation of images associated with material scarcity, most notably the ontologically fractured male actor. The following
selection is illustrative of how unruly matter, the king’s own body, overtakes the king’s ability to consume successfully:

Poor prince! Thy prick, like thy buffoons at Court,
Will govern thee because it makes thee sport.
‘Tis sure the sauciness prick that e’er did swive,
The proudest preemptoriest prick alive.
Though safety, law, religion, life lay on’t,
‘Twould break through all to make its way to cunt.
Restless he rolls from whore to whore,
A merry monarch, scandalous and poor. (14-21)

Charles, the “poor prince” (notice the pun on “poor”) becomes the object of satiric pity, a poetic object that is subject to the kinesthetic movement determined by another object, “the proudest, preemptoriest prick alive.” The moving prick is described in a manner more appropriate for Charles himself; rhetorically, Charles and his prick have switched places. Instead of addressing, and respecting issues deemed appropriate for a monarch – “safety, law, religion, life” – Charles, or more appropriately his penis, is interested in one thing, women’s physical bodies, here identified synecdochally by the sharply stressed glottal stop “cunt.” Evoking the militaristic imagery found in “The Disabled Debauchee” and “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” the “sauciest prick that ever did swive” becomes an almost comically violent agent that “Twould break through all to make its way to cunt.” All matters of state and morality have given away to the king’s penis’s consumption effort: the kingdom is cast aside in order for two material entities, the prick and the cunt, to come together.
In the final line quoted above, Rochester’s satire links up with the anxieties displayed in Pepys’s account of the navy crisis. Shifting from Charles’s penis back to the king himself, the speaker claims that, “Restless he rolls from whore to whore, / A Merry monarch, scandalous and poor.” The speaker of “A Satire on Charles II” equates Charles’s unfettered consumption with Charles inability to effectively govern, that is, his ability to perform his kingship. A monarch neither absolute nor effective, Charles is simply impotent, although it is politically rather than sexually as in “The Disabled Debauchee” or “The Imperfect Enjoyment.” The somewhat playful and ironic tone evoked in these lines gives way to outright condemnation at the end of the poem: “All monarchs I hate, and the thrones they sit on, / From the hector of France to the cully of Britain” (32-33). Pepys, however much he laments Charles’s irresponsibility, still finds himself loyal to the King28, whereas speaker of “A Satire on Charles II,” takes a more cynical position that, taken together with the other Rochester poems discussed here, denies the possibility of any sort of successful consumption by the upper-class male in a post-restoration society that is haunted by material scarcity.

**Conclusion: The Fractured Libertine and the Rise of the Woman Consumer**

Milton and Rochester, taken together, embody a tension between pre- and post-Interregnum masculinities. As I have shown, their poetic works are marked by the presence of a consuming male, the libertine, who would consume as though he exists in a world marked by abundance, and yet is forced to confront a scarce reality. The consuming male, as seen through Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Rochester’s “A Satyr against Reason and Mankind” and penis poems, becomes a representational vehicle through which this tension between masculine

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28 Pepys’s entry for October 19, 1666 is typical of Pepys’s ambiguous relationship to Charles. Distraught and frustrated by the ongoing failure to fund the navy, Pepys nevertheless writes of his desire to “live peaceably, and study, and pray, for the good of the King and my country.”
identity and a scarce universe is expressed and debated. Importantly, this tension is not between two status-based forms of masculinity, such as that argued by Scott Mackenzi in “Sexual Arithmetic: Appetite and Consumption in The Way of the World,” though it is worth pointing out Mackenzie’s argument for comparison’s sake. Focusing on the deployment of desires and masculinities on turn of the century stage, Mackenzie argues that in Congreve’s play:

Millamant’s self-assertion rebukes, or simply frustrates, masculine gallant and/or libertine desire, and in doing so advocates an emergent reconception of desire. This heterodox mode of desire, I will argue, has recognizable connections to what we now call consumer desire. It can be distinguished not only from the aristocratic, martial, and sumptuary forms of appetite that predominate in literary representations from the first half of the seventeenth century but also from variations on aristocratic appetite that characterize the rakish sexualities of Restoration-era stage comedy, which are powerfully influenced by mercantile economics. (Mackenzie 262 emphasis mine)

As framed by Mackenzie, the onstage debate between older and newer masculinities in Congreve’s 1700 play involves the hybridization of class-coded desires (aristocratic and mercantilist), and the competition between gendered desires as well. Mackenzie’s work can therefore be seen as part of a larger critical trend that delineates the transition from an “aristocratic” to a “middle class” or “bourgeois” system of representation.

But Milton and Rochester, writing in the earlier decades immediately following the restoration, reveal the aristocratic-patriarchal male consumer’s already ontologically fractured status. No longer the semi-disembodied font of material abundance as constructed in the earlier poetics of abundance, he is now the libertine, a figure enabled and defined by scarcity, and who is therefore necessarily incomplete. Their preoccupation with the male consumer’s failed performances draws our attention to a crisis in English aristocratic masculinity, a gendered identity that, while still dominant, is beginning to fracture, and which will make room for the emergence of the feminine consumer, a figure (like Millimant in The Way of the World) I will
discuss more fully in the next chapter. The compromised male consumer is not represented primarily via negative juxtaposition with a classed or status-based “other,” because he makes no claim of ontological wholeness. His failure to consume reveals the fault lines within himself, leaving little need for an act of identity construction as against another. To return to Stallybrass and White’s remarks about the theatre, they claim that:

what we have here then is a perfect representation of the production of identity through negation, the creation of an explicit sense of self through explicit rejections and denials, ‘No, not that, and not that’. The public sphere is neither pure ideation nor something which existed only in and for itself: it is, like any form of identity, created through negations . . . it thus produces and reproduces itself through the process of denial and defiance. (89)

Stallybrass and White claim that the “public sphere” that emerged at the end of the Civil War and throughout the 18th century defined itself against the specter of the Restoration court: “in the atheistical amusements of the Restoration court we can detect an intense phase of that aristocratic hell-raking which was to carry ‘all the tricks of Aretine’ through the eighteenth century and which was to command a mixture of revulsion and admiration from the bourgeois writers of the period” (101). These claims hold true, to some extent, for non-aristocratic writers of the late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers – such as Pope and Swift, who I will examine in chapter 2 – but in the first few decades after the failure of the Commonwealth and Charles’s restoration, the English literary horizon was dominated by another process of “denial and defiance,” one in which the male consumer is defined negatively against the material world: his masculinity challenged not (yet) by the presence of the feminine or lower-class consumer, but by his very inability to exert agency over a material world marked by scarcity.

As Milton and Rochester articulate their respective visions of the failed masculine consumer, concomitant as it is with a growing awareness of scarcity, a very different narrative is acting itself out in England. Despite the mid-century battles, bloodshed, as well as the sense of a
break with, and incomplete return to the past, there exists and narrative of continual growth and development. Historian Linda Peck, in a study of 17th-century luxury consumption in England, pushes back against what she terms the “traditional bifurcation” of the 17th century in to pre- and post- Civil War periods (Peck 12). In lieu of this traditional model she suggests that 17th-century England witness a continual growth of demand for luxury goods, which in turn changed the meaning of consumption itself: “the disruption of the two civil wars must have been temporary and, indeed, masked remarkable continuation of growth in imports and exports, with a dip perhaps, in the mid-1640s. Other evidence suggests that the English Civil War and religious ideology made little dent in luxury consumption and, indeed, fostered it” (21). While the abundance associated with status-based masculinities is dwindling, another form of abundance grows silently in the background. From at least the reign of James I, there was steady growth of a different kind: as noble families find themselves dispossessed, the flow of commodities and exotic goods into England continues to grow; as the monarchy is threatened and even temporarily abolished, the New Exchange continues to develop and expand; while Charles Stuart flees to the continent, and then returns to rule as Charles II, the shopkeepers and shoppers of London experienced a surge of new commodities and goods that would allow for the emergence of a material abundance that, rather than mark a return to an abundant past, would usher in the troubling, hyperabundant figure of the feminine consumer.
Chapter 2
Waste Matter and Feminine Consumption in Hannah Woolley and Jonathan Swift

*Introduction: From Scarcity to Hyperabundance*

In a burst of whiggish enthusiasm for the emerging powers of mercantilism, Joseph Addison offers the following perspective on a “single dress of a Woman of Quality,” which is “often the product of an hundred Climates. The Muff and the Fan come together from the different Ends of the Earth. The Scarf is sent from the Torrid Zone, and the Tippet from beneath the Pole. The Brocade Petticoat rises out the Mines of Peru, and the Diamond Necklace out of the Bowels of Indostan” (Addison 205). Written in 1711, this description of a fashionable ensemble presents a radically different view of consumption than the poetics of scarcity discussed in the previous chapter. Addison’s description of the dress immerses the reader in an environment marked by global abundance, of which London is the center. His canny decision to use a woman’s dress, a constellation of material objects decidedly gendered feminine, reflects the growing cultural visibility of the feminine consumer. In this chapter, I will examine the transition in English poetry from a preoccupation with the failed masculine consumer to an anxiety ridden focus on the feminine consumer. By focusing on how Restoration recipe writer Hannah Woolley and poet Jonathan Swift frame women in relation to waste matter - a necessary component of virtually any act of consumption - we can see how the emerging feminine consumer both inspired and supported masculine anxieties over consumption and poetics. Both of these authors, writing in different genres, and during different generations, reflect a transition in English culture from a preoccupation with masculinity and scarcity to an anxiety-ridden focus on femininity and hyperabundance.
As I have addressed in the Introduction to this study, the rise of the female consumer - her increasing visibility on the English cultural horizon throughout the 18th century - is now a hallmark of historically oriented material culture studies. Beth Kowaleski-Wallace’s reading of Alexander Pope’s Belinda from *The Rape of the Lock* is worth re-examining here:

Belinda’s situation as a marketable commodity is matched by her status as participant in the marketplace. If the presence of china in the poem encapsulates Belinda’s condition (as Cleanth Brooks has suggested), it also signals a range of qualities in her which, to this day, stereotypically attend the woman shopper, namely, an obsession with what is expensive and beautiful; a taste for what is sensual or luxurious; a longing to possess extraordinary articles of value. (154)

This reading of Belinda places her at an ideological midpoint between status as object and that of agentic subject: “we can see how the female as an *object* of male desire became, over the course of the long eighteenth century, the female as desiring *subject*” (155). This chapter examines part of this larger cultural transition by examining the waste that feminine consumption leaves behind. By focusing on the period that ranges from the 1660s to 1734, when Swift published “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” we can see how the presence of waste in recipe books and poetry was used to articulate emerging anxieties about the feminine consumer, specifically how she threatened the enactment of masculine consumption within emerging conditions of hyperabundance.

What I mean by hyperabundance is the physical presence of too much matter in the proximity of the potential subject, whether in the form of commodities, things, waste, or any other modality. Where hyperabundance occurs, the potential subject confronts matter, which should be (but is not) a passive object or collection of objects, and experiences a loss of agency during this confrontation. Given the gendered nature of consumption, as it emerges in the early eighteenth century, the subject who looses agency is often gendered masculine, whereas the feminine consumer is often able to navigate the swirling mass of stuff that leaves the male
subject impotent. Alexander Pope alludes to this phenomenon in his description of Belinda’s toilet:

This casket India’s glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux
Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms. (1.133-140)

Belinda’s toilet is as packed with objects as Pope’s strict iambic pentameter is overpacked with syllables - “Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux” - and the final two lines gesture toward the agency this gives Belinda over her social surroundings. Filling in for the weapons and shields of epic poetry, Belinda “arms” herself with her cosmetic array. Pope’s mock-epic description may be ironic, but it does successfully outline the threat of feminine agency as enacted via consumption. Belinda’s cosmetic aids, the physical nonhuman objects she enters into relationships with, do indeed give her agency over the other characters in the poem, especially the males with whom she enters a mock battle in Canto 5.

Pope also gestures towards waste matter that threatens feminine consumption. On first impression, The Rape of the Lock may seem to hold little in common with the pissing contests and sewer diving that marks Pope’s Dunciad, but waste matter does, however briefly, threaten the image of feminine consumption that Pope represents in the former. In Clarissa’s speech to
Belinda and the assembled “armies” of ladies and beaux in Canto 5, she appeals to the unruly matter that composes the bodies of those assembled:

Oh! If to dance all night, and dress all day,
Charmed the smallpox, or chased old age away;
Who would not scorn what housewife’s cares produce,
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?
To patch, nay ogle, might become a saint,
Nor could it be such a sin to paint.
But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,
Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to grey,
Since painted or not painted, all shall fade,
And she who scorns a man must die a maid (19-28 emphasis mine).

Clarissa’s speech, then, can be read as an insistence on the feminine consumer’s ultimate inability to control her surroundings, whether physical or social. Waste matter – in this case, the “locks” that will “turn to gray” – will ultimately trump feminine efforts to consume the material world and, by extension, any form of agency that women exert over human and nonhuman actors alike. Like the philosopher’s decaying body in Rochester’s “Satyr against Reason and Mankind” that lies “huddled in dirt,” the bodies of women who, like Belinda, perform their feminine identities via cosmetic objects will, in Pope/Clarissa’s, words “decay.” The lock itself, turned to leftover waste matter by the beaux who clips it from Belinda’s head, is only preserved for memory by the male poet, as emphasized in the final lines of The Rape of the Lock: “This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame, / And midst the stars inscribe Belinda’s name” (5.149-150).
In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope evokes a concept central to my own argument about Woolley, Swift, and a shift from a poetics of scarcity to that of hyperabundance: labor, which I will expand on later in this chapter. As a feminine consumer, Belinda enacts agency over her physical and social surroundings; as a masculine poet, Pope seeks to valorize his own form of masculine labor. As Tita Chico suggests, “Pope represents the agency of the spectacle of a cosmetically constructed women in order to displace that power with his own brand of cultural and aesthetic authority – the perfect poem” (3-4). Chico reads *The Rape of the Lock* as Pope’s attempt to both “manage” women and to valorize his own masculine labor as poet: “Pope’s poetry and Belinda’s cosmetics are analogous because both kinds of art aspire to a kind of truth by applying paint to display women as aesthetic objects. The question for Pope is, which is better? To provide an answer, Pope enacts an aesthetic contest within *The Rape of the Lock* that positions ekphrasis as aesthetically superior to Belinda’s cosmetics” (11). While Pope clearly establishes masculine poetic labor as superior to feminine cosmetic labor, and uses waste matter to make his point, I will show that his assertion is part of a wider cultural debate about the role of women, waste, labor, and, ultimately, the meaning of consumption itself. By considering the radically different articulation of feminine labor found in Woolley’s recipe book *A Supplement to the Queenlike Closet* and Swift’s poems “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” we can see how waste matter functioned as an ideological nodal point in early-modern England’s emerging conceptions of gender and consumption.

**Masculine Poetics and Waste**

During the Restoration, a satiric strain of poetry articulated masculine anxieties about consumption by linking the figure of the consumable woman with the waste she produces. There are some earlier seventeenth-century precedents for this, for example in the work of Robert
Herrick\textsuperscript{29}, but during the Restoration these anxieties enter the representational constellation of scarcity discussed in the previous chapter, complete with libertines, grotesque physical appetite, and the ontological fracturing of the male consumer. By focusing on Rochester’s poetry, I will show how masculine poetics framed women as receptacles for waste and, thus, as a threat to male desire. My purpose for doing so is to provide a comparison for Rochester’s contemporary, Hannah Woolley, who would valorize the feminine consumer as an antidote to waste, and to offer a poetic precedent for my reading of Swift’s early-eighteenth century poems, which frame women and waste as threats to masculine desire, but also gesture towards the agency that women and waste hold over both masculine consumption and masculine poetics.

To date, the most comprehensive examination of waste in English literature is Sophie Gee’s \textit{Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination}, which “tracks the enormous power and capaciousness of waste in eighteenth-century literature” (5). Gee maintains that, when it crops up in literary texts, waste is “three things at once: it is literal, manifest in material culture; it is philosophically charged, meaningful by virtue of its role in intellectual debate; and it is literary, which is to say that it is created by the very text in which it appears” (5). In my reading of late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century texts, I will maintain that waste adheres to all three of these categories, though I will emphasize both the first and last of these, that waste is both “literal” - that it refers to actual, physical waste matter - while also simultaneously “literary,” that is, created by the texts in which it is addressed. My reason for emphasizing these aspects of waste - both literary and literal, physical and symbolic - stems from

\textsuperscript{29} For example, in Robert Herrick’s “Upon Some Women” (1648), the speaker answers his own imperative to “Learn of me what woman is” (2) by describing women as “Pieces, patches, ropes of hair, / Inlaid garbage everywhere. / Outside silk and outside lawn, / Scenes to cheat us, neatly drawn”” (Herrick 5-8).
the New Materialism assumptions that inform this study as a whole, namely that nonhuman physical matter exerts its own agency over human subjects, and that this tension between human and nonhuman agencies is expressed quite explicitly in symbolic representations of gender.

According to Gee, waste first becomes a significant preoccupation for English writers in the early years of the Restoration. Despite some literary precedents from the early seventeenth century, I broadly agree with Gee’s claim that “the Great Fire put real waste into eighteenth-century literature, and established the wasteland as a crucial landscape in modern urban writing. As the eighteenth century goes forward, however, literary waste become increasingly abstract” (5). The texts which I will address in this chapter were produced when writers were still preoccupied with the more literal representations of waste. Additionally, I claim, these representations were bound up with anxieties over masculine consumption and, eventually, a threatening agency that the figure of the woman consumer exerts via waste over the masculine consumer. Waste’s placement in literature, especially in representations of masculine consumption, evokes an anxiety about the masculine subject’s relationship to the physical world.

Rochester’s corpus provides many examples of this phenomenon, including an untitled “Song” published posthumously in 1680, and “On Mrs. Willis,” directed at the prostitute Sue Willis who moved among certain court circles. In each poem, the male speaker frames waste matter as that which compromises male sexual performances, i.e., the processes by which men physically consume women’s bodies. In the 1680 “Song,” Rochester’s speaker begins by laying out the subject of the poem as follows:

By all love’s soft, yet mighty powers,
   It is a thing unfit
   That men should fuck in time of flowers,
Or when the smock’s beshit. (1-4)

Rochester’s speaker ironically frames feminine waste as the proper sphere of masculine poetics in his opening invocation “By all love’s soft, yet mighty powers,” which ironically invokes a sort of muse for the purposes of discussing waste. Rochester then provides instructions for women on how to enter into relationships with physical objects in order to please his own masculine desires:

“Fair nasty nymph, be clean and kind,
And all my joys restore.
By using paper still behind,
And sponges for before. (5-8)

In other words, Rochester satirically instructs women how to consume in order to perform their identities as attractive, sexually desirable objects rather than fully agentic subjects. Rochester also insists that the waste produced by women precludes successful masculine consumption of their bodies: “None but fresh lovers’ pricks can rise / At Phyllis in foul linen” (15-16). Women in Rochester’s poetry are objects whose consumption - their use of physical objects to perform their identities - is subservient to masculine desire. Because of this, feminine consumption does not offer them a route to subjectivity or independent agency.

Even when men successfully consume women in a manner dictated by libertine ideology (see Chapter 1), waste matter rears its head as that which compromises the agency of the libertine actor. Gee intimates the agency that waste exerts in her opening discussion of Pierre Jean Grosley’s 1772 Tour to London; or, New Observations on England and its Inhabitants:

“Animation comes from abjection, not from the divine splendor of St. Clement’s, which remains static and aloof . . . This same abjection gives London its life, not just the life-affirming beat that
runs through Grosley’s prose, but the cultural life of eighteenth-century London too: its fashions, its quotidian rhythms and patterns emerge, in this account, from befoulment” (Gee 2). Jane Bennet takes this aspect of waste more literally in her description of street refuse:

Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmered back and forth between debris and thing – between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity (the workman’s efforts, the litterer’s toss, the rat-poisoner’s success), and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying. (4)

Although produced by human subjects, waste exists partially outside the subject’s purview; it “calls” the subject, demanding his or her attention, while simultaneously escaping the subject’s ability to categorize or describe it. Crucially for my purposes, waste exerts its own agency over the course of human actions and thus complicates the performance of masculine subjectivity via consumption.

In the viscously scatological “On Mrs. Willis,” Rochester begins by evoking the poetics of prick discussed in the last chapter. The opening of this poem reads:

Against the charms our ballocks have,

    How weak all human skill is,

Since they can make a man a slave,

    To such a bitch as Willis. (1-4)

Much like the “poor” king in “Satire on Charles II” and the libertine speaker of “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” the speaker of “Willis” laments the loss of masculine agency to male genitalia – men are charmed by their own “ballocks” into desiring “such a bitch as Willis.” As in the “Song,” the speaker satirically invokes a muse, thus ironically attempting to legitimate his poetic
endeavor: “Whom that I may describe throughout, / Assist me bawdy powers” (5-6). In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker associates Willis with the waste her body produces:

Bawdy in thoughts, precise in words,

Ill-natured though a whore,

Her belly is a bag of turds,

And her cunt a common shore. (17-20)

This final stanza can be read as an effort to metonymically reduce Willis to her stomach and vagina, much as men in Rochester’s corpus are reduced to their penises. Moreover, these body parts are marked by the presence of waste: her stomach is merely a receptacle for her own feces, while her “cunt” is a sewer that is open to all comers. These lines echo the description of Corinna in Rochester’s “A Ramble in St. James Park” in which Corinna’s “lewd cunt came spewing home / Drenched with the seed of half the town” (113-114); the speaker of “Ramble” chides Corinna because she is “a whore in understanding, / A passive pot for fools to spend in!” (101-102 emphasis mine). Rochester’s corpus is filled with women who act as receptacles for waste, and this trope becomes weaponized in “On Mrs. Willis.” The presence of waste in and around the female body complicates masculine consumption, which in Rochester is satirically directed by the penis, rather than the masculine subject associated with said organ. Slaves to their own “bollocks,” men are simultaneously drawn to consume Willis’s body, despite the repulsive presence of waste that this body contains.

**Tracking Waste: Consumption and Labor**

How, then, does one track waste throughout early-modern representations of consumption? I will claim that the concept of labor, as it relates to consumption, provides the key hermeneutic for analyzing how Woolley and Swift frame their representations of women and
waste. By concentrating on how women physically engage the material world we can see how waste becomes a flash-point for representation of feminine consumption as the seventeenth century gives way to the early decades of the 1700s.

To reiterate a central assumption of this study, consumption is any ritualized, performative event by which humans form relationships with nonhumans in order to establish their social identities. A key corollary of this definition is the simple fact that these ritualized, performative events require labor – significant physical effort – on the part of the human actor, whether or not the performance is successful. As mentioned in this study’s Introduction, consumption as labor comes from Daniel Miller’s work on modern consumption: “consumption as work may be defined as that which translates the object from an alienable to an inalienable condition; that is, from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artifact invested with particular inseparable connotations” (190). Labor, then, is a crucial component of consumption, as it comprises the actions by which, symbolically and literally, human actors, in their quest for subjectivity, engage the material world and attempt to construct their social identities. This chapter seeks to reconsider early modern consumption as labor, and how this affected representations of gendered consumption.

Miller’s discussion of consumption as work, much like the production-centered Marxist paradigm he critiques, does not consider the role that waste matter plays in the enactment of consumption, gendered or otherwise. Gee’s discussion of waste, however, leaves room for considering how waste haunts consumption, especially in literary representation thereof. According to Gee, waste is always *made*, not found – created by political and social processes, and, most importantly, by language itself. . . . its appearance in literature always marks the spot where a troubled process of making has occurred. But it is a process that readers frequently do not see, because all that remains is a leftover figured as abject matter. In
eighteenth-century literary texts, the narratives connected to waste and its production have often been made to disappear; I rehabilitate them, showing that the appearance and disappearance of waste narratives is almost always politically motivated. (9)

I agree with Gee that waste does indeed mark “where a troubled process of making has occurred.” Gee effectively lays out how this process was often inflected through contemporary linguistic, philosophical, and political processes. In addition to the paradigm Gee successfully outlines, I would like to also draw attention to the very physical processes that her readings overlook. This labor, along with the waste it necessarily creates and, in the case of Woolley, recycles and reformulates, grants the feminine consumer an agency that, in poetry, came to be seen as a threat to masculine consumption. By focusing on the relation between feminine consumption, waste, and labor, we can read Woolley’s *A Supplement to the Queenlike Closet*, and Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” as, respectively efforts to frame feminine consumption as an antidote to waste, and an ironic assertion of the ultimate failure of consumption, masculine or feminine.

**Hannah Woolley: Feminine Consumption as a Cure for Waste**

Arguably, the most well known line from Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” is Strephon’s reaction to seeing, smelling, and groping Celia’s chamber pot: “Celia, Celia, Celia shits!” As I will discuss later, Swift uses waste matter to articulate, but not resolve, a tension between feminine cosmetic labor and masculine poetics. The most obvious form of feminine labor in the poem is cosmetic, by which Celia constructs herself as a “goddess” (Swift 3). Right before the infamous “Celia shits!” line, however, Swift’s speaker gestures towards another form of gendered labor in a mock-epic simile that begins:

As mutton cutlets, prime of meat,

Which though with art you salt and beat,
As laws of cookery require,
And roast them at the clearest fire. (Swift 99-102)

Far less critical attention has been paid to this section of the poem as opposed to the overtly scatological sections. Swift’s language here reveals a certain awareness of established labor practices whereby feminine human actors enter into relationships with nonhuman, material entities, in this case cuts of meat. The connection between culinary imagery and bodily waste is obvious enough – where else would Celia’s shit come from? – but the connection between culinary labor and cosmetic labor is equally as significant, because each of these clusters of activity can be read as feminine forms of labor by which women attempt to fix relationships between themselves and nonhuman entities in order to establish their own identities. Turning now to Hannah Woolley’s Restoration recipe book, *A Supplement to the Queenlike Closet*, I will examine how Woolley consciously articulates women’s self-directed consumption, and valorizes this activity by framing it as an antidote to, rather than a source of waste.

In the first two decades of the Restoration, Hannah Woolley managed to gain a quasi-celebrity status via the many recipe books she published for a feminine readership. Julia Reinhard Lupton points out that “by 1670, she had established a name and a bit of a career for herself, enough that publishers would want to capitalize on her reputation, not only publishing more volumes under her name, but also developing her personality and biography in a quasi-fictional direction” (Lupton 64). Some critics have claimed that Woolley prefigures such media personalities as Martha Stewart and Julia Child. Woolley’s popular Restoration recipe compendium *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet* provides detailed articulations of how

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women can engage with material objects and things in order to perform their feminine identities. Positioning herself within a perceived gendered community of readers and, by extension, a gendered community of consumers, Woolley dedicates the *Supplement* via its subtitle “to all Ingenious Ladies, and Gentlewomen” (Woolley, cover copy). This dedication – “to all Ingenious Ladies” – emphasizes the assumed skill and ability that her feminine readers possess. Woolley’s text broadens the category of feminine labor to include not only cosmetic labor, but also labor associated with cleaning, cooking, and medicine.

Recipe books such as the *Supplement* reveal how feminine labor, though restrictive in many aspects, was also a multi-faceted, creative engagement with the physical world. This is partly a result of the genre itself, what Francisco Alonso-Almeida claims is best described as a “discourse colony,” which he defines in opposition to narrative texts (such as Swift’s) as discourses that do not rely on sequence for their meaning (Alonso-Almeida 82). Despite this lack of temporal or logical sequence, “the methodological implications of this definition are evident: larger textual entities (such as recipe compilations) may be studied as single units, rather than as collections of smaller texts (the recipe itself)” (82). Moreover:

the notion of the discourse colony asserts that, although many of the recipes show a weak connection between each other, or even none at all, the intention and utility of the collection as a whole suffice to make a claim for the unity of the texts within, and thus for

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31 As Lupton claims, “Woolley’s book assumes some familiarity with basic techniques; this tome is no ‘Blood Puddings for Dummies,’ but rather what she calls a ‘Memorandum,’ whose brief notations build upon the considerable skills already commanded by most of her readers . . . Early modern cookbooks unfold in a hermeneutic circle spun from hands-on training conducted in real kitchens; the resulting recipes are highly laconic, their tacturnity bespeaking the depths of knowledge that the reader brings to the table” (78).
them to be construed as a higher textual entity, and not simply ‘miscellaneous.’ (85 emphasis mine)

By reading Woolley’s *Supplement* as a unified discourse, I will show how her text functions as a discursive effort to validate feminine consumption and, as a related effort, to frame waste very differently than poetic texts of the period.

Early modern recipe books demand a significant degree of attention be paid to physical ingredients and equipment – examples of what I have referred to as nonhumans – on the part of the reader. Alonso-Almeida provides the following schema for medicinal and culinary recipes: “(Title)* Ingredients* (Preparation)* (Application)* (Evaluation/Efficacy)* (Storage)* (Expiry date)* (Virtues)*” (72). The asterisks represent recipe units that have variable order within any given recipe from the period, while the parentheses denote steps that are optional; like the Renaissance precedents that Alonso-Almeida examines in the same study, the ingredient component remains a “compulsory stage” in later seventeenth and eighteenth-century recipes (72). Recipes in the *Supplement* foreground the various objects that women consumers form relations with in order to ornament, heal, and nourish their bodies; crucially, these recipes also foreground the labor involved in women’s consumption.

Among the many recipes for cleaning, cookery, medicine, and cosmetics, Woolley intersperses commentary on her own status as a feminine consumer. After presenting the initial group of recipes, Woolley injects herself into the text in order to perform her authority as an author: “before I begin to teach, be pleased to take notice of what Cures I have done, that you may be assured of my ability” (Woolley 8). When Woolley was a young girl, her employer noticed her “genius” in home medicines, what Woolley refers to as “Physick and Chirurgery” and rewarded the young servant by legitimating her identity as a feminine consumer: “I had her
purse at command to buy what Ingredients might be required to make Balsoms, Salves, Oynments, Waters for Wounds, Oyls, Cordials, and the like” (8). In order to be a good housewife, then, Woolley implies that women must be knowledgeable, effective consumers; in order to produce the “Balsoms, Salves, Oynments . . . And the like” that Woolley’s text discusses, women must first know how to consume - to obtain and then to manipulate - the proper physical ingredients. After she was married she often treated the ailments of her husband’s students: “as Agues, Feavers, Meazels, Small-pox, Consumptions, and many other diseases; in all which, unless they were desperately ill, their Parents trusted me without the help of any Physician or Chirurgion” (9). After this brief catalogue of maladies she has effectively treated, Woolley presents a list of 31 instances in which she treated her neighbors “in eight or ten miles round” (9). The following snippet exemplifies how Woolley rhetorically uses a list structure in order to convince the reader of her qualifications:

Many of the Convulsion-fits, and Rickets among the Children I did cure.  
One being bitten with a Mad Dog, I in very short time did cure him.  
Several Women who had sore Breasts and sore Nipples, I cured.  
Many who had violent fits of the Stone I eased them.  
A Man being much bruised with the fall of a Cart upon him, I Cured. (10)

Through this mantra-like repetition of “I cured,” “I eased,” and similar phrases throughout all 31 examples, Woolley performs her identity not just as a producer of medicine, or a good “huswife” (though it certainly aims to do these things), but also as an effective feminine consumer of material goods, as is evident in the structure of the recipes themselves.

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32 Lupton makes the relationship between recipe and performance explicit: “the recipe is a kind of script, in both the dramatic and software sense: the forms of thinking it ‘directs’ are pragmatic, unfolding as a series of what game theorist Ian Bogost (2006) calls ‘unit operations,’ consisting of discrete, portable, procedure-based bits of media whose aim is to do things to things in the world” (66)
Woolley’s recipes provide a program or script for women to engage nonhumans in specific performances. Many of the actors are nonhumans that are considered waste matter by poets. In a recipe titled “To get spots of Ink out of any linnen Cloth,” Woolley directs her reader to incorporate what the poetic tradition would label waste:

Before that you suffer it to be washed, lay it all night in Urine, the next day rub all the Spots in the Urine, as if you were washing in water, then lay it in more Urine another night, and then rub it again, and so do till you find they be quite out. (Woolley 6)

What appears as threatening waste matter in masculine poetics, Woolley recycles for the pragmatic purpose of cleaning one’s linen, that is, preserving certain objects that the reader regularly consumes. This recycling also does the cultural work of feminine identity construction, i.e. the economical housewife effectively and cheaply performs her domestic duties. In another recipe titled “For Worms a miraculous cure,” Woolley directs her readers to “let the party drink their own Water, with a little Methridate mingled therein, for three days together in the morning fasting, and walk after it” (14). Again, what would elsewhere qualify as a troubling leftover is reframed as recyclable matter; the urine used in this recipe becomes consumable matter, not just the refuse that necessarily results from feminine consumption. Another recipe from the *Supplement*, “For a Squinacy, or other Sore Throat,” directs the reader to “take the whitest dung of a Dog, which he hath dunged abroad in May, let it dry in the Sun very well, and when you have occasion to use it, beat it fine and searce [strain] it, and give the party thereof a slight spoonful in a Glass of White-wine” (40). As in the “Worms” recipe, Woolley has her readers recycle matter that could be considered waste, but which is rehabilitated by feminine labor and thus placed back into the flow of consumption. This recycling or rehabilitation depends on the proper selection and preparation of physical objects - “the *whitest* dung of a Dog” must be dried, beaten, strained, and mixed with white wine – and the physical labor of Woolley’s female reader
who will “give the party thereof a slight spoonful.” In Woolley’s text, waste becomes a vehicle for feminine agency over the physical world.

Woolley is not the only Restoration writer to incorporate waste into recipes. *The Accomplis’t Lady’s Delight*[^33], which went through several editions in the 1670s and 1680s, features several recipes that call for the reader to incorporate waste matter. Two examples of this include recipes to “make the Hair very Fair,” and “For the falling of Hair.” The former recipe contains two variations on the original: “also, the Ashes of Frogs do encrease [sic] Hair, as also the Ashes of goats-dung mingled with Oyl” (*The Accomplis’t Ladies Delight* 79). The latter recipe includes a similar instruction, starting with “Take the Ashes of Pidgeons-dung in Lye” (80). Johann Wecker’s 1660 recipe book *Cosmeticks, or, The Beautifying Parts of Physick*, which the prefatory material dedicates to “all truly vertuous ladies” (Wecker A1), instructs the feminine consumer how to recycle waste. In three cosmetic recipes, Wecker instructs his reader to place several ingredients within a glass vial, which is then warmed under dung for period ranging from several hours to several days. These recipes include: “An oyl for Spots on the Face,” “A red Water for the Face,” and “An Oyl to Colour the Face” (10; 31-32; 54). The fact that these recipes are for facial cosmetics is significant, because the final product would have ornamented one of the most visible parts of the woman’s body. Three more recipes, “Against tears of the Eyes, “An Ointment for warts in the Hands,” and “Another [hand ointment]” call for the incorporation of “Sheeps-dung, or Goats-dung,” “Pigeons-dung,” and “also a dog turd,” respectively (10; 116). Recycling waste matter via feminine consumption seems to have been a common imperative in later 17th-century recipe books.

[^33]: *The Accomplish’t Lady’s Delight* is often ascribed to Woolley, though several scholars have questioned this. Margaret J. M. Ezell gives an overview of this problematic attribution in “Cooking the Books, or, the Three Faces of Hannah Woolley” (2013).
What male poets revile as waste matter Woolley insists on recycling, but this is not to say that waste matter does not haunt or threaten consumption practices as Woolley articulates them. The difference between poetic articulations of waste and Woolley’s rests on the question of who these authors associate threatening waste with. For poets such as Rochester, women are the locus of waste production, but for Woolley waste is associated with human actors who are othered primarily in terms of class: servants. In a rare instance of evaluative language that appears (without lines, dashes, or any other textual break other than a slight indent) after a recipe “To make a Pudding of cold Meat,” Woolley claims, “They are fools who cannot tell what to do with scraps of Meat: (Are they any worse than the rest?)” (Woolley 71). Woolley admonishes these “fools” because they cannot tell the difference between recyclable matter and waste matter or, what amounts to the same thing, those who cannot translate matter from one state to another. This section quickly develops a didactic flavor, as Woolley directs her female reader in the proper management of household servants.

It is here that she also explicitly addresses how waste threatens the proper methods of consumption that her book seeks to outline and disseminate amongst literate English women who run their own households. Therein lies, according to Woolley, her motivation to codify feminine consumption via the Supplement:

Did I not see what fools we are made, here in England, both by our Nurses and Servants, and what destruction there is made in many Houses, I should not speak; but really there is in some Houses, I know so much Waste, as that it is a great shame and discredit to those who guide the Family, and if they would look a little more into their Affairs, they would be more careful for the future. (73, emphasis mine)

Woolley articulates waste as a classed phenomenon, rather than a gendered one; it is the result of improper consumption, rather than the necessary result of consumption per se. The female head of house is responsible for ameliorating waste production: “Therefore all you who are Mistresses
of Families, look narrowly to your servants, and let them not Spoil or waste your Goods, for which you must take pains and care” (73). For Woolley, the female head of house not only performs and regulates household consumption, she acts (or should act) as a bulwark against waste.

Woolley’s use of the term “waste” to describe a modality of matter in relation to consumption evokes at least two definitions of the term that were contemporaneous during the Restoration. The first, according to the OED, denotes “useless expenditure or consumption, squandering (of money, goods, time, effort, etc.)” – this definition first appears in 1297 and was still in use in 1673, when it appeared in Milton’s Paradise Lost. This definition of waste describes a function or process in which consumers act without thought to notions of practicality or scarcity. The second definition I would like to highlight reads “refuse matter; unserviceable material remaining over from any process of manufacture; the useless by-products of any industrial process; material or manufactured articles so damaged as to be useless or unsaleable”; this definition, first mentioned c. 1430, is still current today. While the first definition describes a style of consumption, the second denotes a category of matter that is divorced from economic flows of production and consumption. Woolley’s use of the term synthesizes the two: as her discussion of servants and scraps of meat frames waste, it is simultaneously a process whereby unruly servants “waste” their employers’ material goods, while also embodied in the “scraps” of meat that go unused.

By means of this association between servants and waste, the Supplement evokes a third definition of waste listed in the OED: “offscourings, dregs, worthless people.” This definition first appears in 1592, and is also discussed by Gee, who claims that in the early eighteenth century, “waste was already metaphorical as much as literal; it described the wasted lives, the
waste people, the wasteland, which were vividly present” (Gee 6). Moreover, “the most insidious instances of waste making appear where individuals or groups of people are positioned as abject” (10). In the section of the Supplement immediately following Woolley’s discussion of waste, she warns the female head of house that, “if you see your Servant go beyond what you think the Wages you allow her will well maintain, and to lay up somewhat in case of Sickness, or being out of Service you ought to Question her, or him; for either they must run into Debt, or Cheat you, or take some ill Course to maintain their pride and folly; and then of necessity discredit must follow” (Woolley 73). As part of the feminine consumer’s charge to regulate waste, then, she must regulate her servants’ consumption.

Her comments on servants evoke an anxiety over waste that is inflected through scarcity: lower-class members of the household take away from the heads of house when they create waste, and it is Woolley’s female reader, and hence female consumer who must defend against this phenomenon. And yet, Woolley’s admonition to her female readers also acknowledges improper consumption determined by conditions of hyperabundance. Following her comments about the “fools” who cannot properly recycle old meat, she claims that “it is an easie matter here for any that hath money, if they have nothing but cold Meat in the House, to go to the market and buy a joynt of Meat: But, I pray what do they in other Countries, where they have not such pleanty?” (73). In what David Goldstein refers to as “a version of the old ‘eat your dinner, because children are starving in Africa’ line’ (Goldstein 121), Woolley raises the specter of scarcity while simultaneously thrusting it outside of England, an environment marked by abundance in which readers can easily “go to the market to buy a joynt of Meat.” It might seem somewhat contradictory for Woolley to raise this specter, but as Goldstein points out, “Woolley’s post-Civil War readers, though, have experienced a period of insecurity the equal of
any in England’s history. Many of them no longer have the easy capital necessary for such purchases” (121). What Goldstein does not consider is the fact that, despite the threat of scarcity and social instability caused by cultural trauma of the Civil War, England had in fact witnessed a steady growth of consumption, something Woolley herself seems aware of.

In another didactic aside to the reader, this time about clothing, Woolley seems to acknowledge the cultural anxieties surrounding consumption within hyperabundant environments that Swift would exploit more fully several decades later. In a recipe labeled “To embroider Petty-coats, Bodices, or Belts,” Woolley ends the first paragraph with the claim, “thus you may go fine, and with less cost than if you bought good Lace” (Woolley 60). Woolley exploits a desire in her readers to preserve their economic capital, something that might seem appropriate to readers whose mindsets are inflected through perceived scarcity. Her following aside, however, frames her claims in terms of ethics, rather than properly economic concerns. “It is more commendable a great deal,” she argues, “to wear one’s own Work, than to be made fine with the Art of others; and though one may be envied for it, yet none can have so just a quarrel against them, because it is their Ingenuity; and besides it argues a person not to be idle, but rather a good housewife” (Woolley 60). The problem with hyperabundant consumption styles such as those critiqued by Woolley, and by Swift later in the 1730s, is not that women consume without a thought to “real” scarcity, but rather that, in indulging too much in luxury consumption, or the consumption of an ever-increasing tide of manufactured goods, women are thus “idle,” the

34 Amy Tigner reads Woolley’s use of “preserve” in the Supplement in relation to “England’s emerging project of global discovery,” (Tigner 131). She argues that in Woolley’s texts, “the ingredients and recipes . . . impart a domestic narrative of Restoration England as an emerging economy built from both the household garden and global trade in comestible materials. As the story unfolds from recipe to recipe, women figure as the primary agents who converted domestic and foreign organic products into stable concoctions, preserved in time and to preserve the body” (131).
ultimate Protestant sin, forgoing their “own Work” in favor of the “Art of others.” This section of Woolley foreshadows Clarissa’s comments about feminine consumption in *The Rape of The Lock*. Clarissa’s rhetorical question, “who would learn one earthly thing of use?” draws a line between, on the one hand, labor that is superfluous and “idle” and that which is practical and thus less ethically suspect. Woolley frames cosmetic labor as a legitimate subset of feminine practices, she also makes distinctions between what she deems proper cosmetic consumption and ethically suspect, “idle” consumption. In a hyperabundant environment then, it becomes imperative that women consume with a thought to minimizing waste, in ways that display their own skill and effectiveness at entering into relationships with nonhuman objects.

Woolley goes on to claim “any fool may be fine with Cost, but give me those who can be neat and nobly habited with but a reasonable charge. The world is grown very fine of late years, but it is with so much charge (together with so ill a phansie some have in choosing things) that they look more like Stage-players than fit to come into any Church, or Civil Places” (60). Similar to her assertion that anyone can go to the market for fresh meat, this passage assumes a growing level of luxury clothing consumption in England, especially for women. This passage presents another instance of the tension between feminine consumption in a hyperabundant environment and a need to reduce waste matter via said consumption. Historian Linda Peck asserts that “women, who always exercised an important role in the consumption decisions of the family, created autonomous selves through the purchase, bequest, and display of luxury goods. The critique of luxury purveyed in sermons, plays, and pamphlets, reiterated the traditional accusation that women caused luxury which weakened and effeminate men” (Peck 363). Woolley engages with the widespread discourses that vilified women’s luxury consumption – her comparison of feminine consumers to “Stage-players” evokes a common critique of women from
this period - but without condemning women’s consumption, *per se*. Her recipe book is thus an effort to both correct what she sees as improper feminine consumption practices, while articulating the legitimate ways in which women can consume physical goods, including those that serve to ornament female bodies, which Swift would examine decades later. Instead of consuming through “Cost” alone, Woolley implies, one must consume through the skillful, learned methods that she presents to women readers. As Peck makes clear in her examination of seventeenth-century luxury consumption, the availability of fine clothing (among many other types of commodities) was a very real, highly visible component of English culture during the Restoration, despite the specter of scarcity and cultural trauma surrounding the Civil War: “Civil Wars and religious ideology made little dent in these forms of luxury consumption and, I argue, promoted cultural borrowing. By 1670 luxury consumption was deeply imbedded in English culture, society, and economy, despite political and religious conflict” (352). Woolley hovers in the interstices between a narrative of scarcity that emerged from the Civil War and a narrative of growth and economic change that had been developing via the real behavior of consumers since at least the early 1600s.

*Feminine Consumption, Waste, and Masculine Impotence in Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed”*

It is quite possible that Swift was aware of how waste and consumption influenced recipe books such as Woolley’s, texts that instruct mistresses on the conduct of their servants. Tellingly, these are the ideas he uses to satirize servants and owners in his mock conduct book, *Directions to Servants*, published posthumously in 1745. Swift’s parody begins with an address to all servants in which he instructs them to waste their masters’ capital:

The Cook, the Butler, the Groom, the Market-man, and every other Servant, who is concerned in the Expenses of the Family, should act as if his Master’s whole Estate ought
to be applied to that Servant’s particular business. For instance, if the Cook computes his Master’s Estate to be a thousand Pounds a Year, he reasonably concludes that a thousand Pounds a Year will afford Meat enough, and therefore, he need not be saving. (Swift, *Servants* 7)

Swift compliments this general admonition to servants with specific instructions for each type of servant, such as the cook, the footman, the butler, the groom, and so on. For example, he instructs the Butler to set glass on the very edge of a side-board, “by which Means they will cast a double Lustre, and the Consequence can be at worst, but the breaking of half a Dozen, which is a trifle in your master’s pocket” (21). Swift diametrically inverts the advice Woolley gives in the *Supplement*; while Woolley admonishes mistresses to police their servant’s consumption in order to offset waste production, Swift ironically instructs servants to waste as much of their employers’ goods and money as possible. He also instructs servants to produce and leave behind as much waste matter as possible. Butlers are to wipe their shoes on the bottoms of curtains (14) and wash glasses with “their own Water” (21); the cook should never wash her saucepan (32); coachmen are to sit with the lady of the house in the carriage, because “it is better the Bottom of her Pettycoats should be dangled with your dirty shoes, than your Livery be spoiled” (38).

Swift’s direction to the chambermaid are of particular interest for two reasons. In this section, the servant in question is a particular employee of the “Lady” of the house - the very figure to whom Woolley dedicates her recipe book. Secondly, the persons and objects - the humans and nonhumans - addressed in this section are the same as those that appear in “The Lady’s Dressing Room.” In this section, Swift instructs the chamber-maid in the proper way to clean the lady’s chamber pot and ironically frames this labor as feminine. “Do not carry down the Vessels for the Fellows to see,” Swift instructs, “but empty them out the Window, for your Lady’s Credit. It is highly improper for Men Servants to know that fine Ladies have Occasion for such Utensils; and do not Scour the chamber pot, because the Smell is wholesome” (53). Besides
the above direction to chambermaids, he also instructs house-maids to empty their mistress’s chamber pot in the most public way possible, because “I am very much offended with those Ladies, who are so proud and lazy, that they will not be at Pains of stepping into the Garden to pluck a Rose, but keep an odious Implement sometimes in the Bed-chamber itself, or at least in a dark Closet adjoining, which they make Use of to ease their worst Necessities” (60). This advice is diametrically opposed to that which he gives the chamber-maid, i.e., she should make her mistress’s waste as public as possible despite the chamber-maid’s gendered injunction to hide said waste from masculine eyes. Despite the obvious contradictions inherent in these directions, their placement in the mock conduct book works to unravel the ideological work done by texts such as Woolley’s. In a sense, Swift encloses Woolley’s articulation of waste, class, and gender within the satiric masculine frame found in Rochester’s satiric verse. Swift’s mock-conduct book reflects, while admittedly mocking, classed and gendered relationships as Woolley articulates them. In his poetry, to which I now turn, Swift further destabilizes the role of the upper class feminine consumer by focusing almost obsessively on the waste she produces and how her consumption, performed within hyperabundant environments, threatens the enactment of masculine desire.

By the time Swift published both “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732) and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” (1734), “waste” had developed an additional connotation that reflected the increasing cultural visibility of hyperabundant consumption. First mentioned in 1725, over a decade after Addison’s allegory of Lady Credit and fawning admiration of the New Exchange appeared in the Spectator, this definition of waste reads, “a profusion, lavish abundance of something.” Like the “Heaps of Bags of Money” that surround Addison’s Lady Credit (Addison 190), this version of waste is defined via the notion of abundance, and the same
can be said for the many objects that litter Swift’s two scatological poems. The difference, however, between these two abundant versions of matter is that, while Addison’s basks in the early-mercantilist, Whiggish enthusiasm for economic growth, Swift’s is inflected by a reactionary move that also evokes the older definitions of waste found in Woolley: matter that is detached from use value, or the process by which this “useless” matter is produced. In this light, “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “Beautiful Young Nymph” can be read as reactions to perceived conditions of hyperabundance that were beginning to emerge as semi-stable categories during the time of Woolley’s career as an author.

Swift associates feminine consumption with hyperabundant environments that preclude the successful performance of masculine identity. “The Lady’s Dressing Room” opens by gesturing towards a perceived gap between the time Celia emerges from her chamber as a “goddess” and whatever she may be before this emergence:

Five hours (and who can do it less in?)
By haughty Celia spent in dressing,
The goddess from her chamber issues,
Arrayed in lace, brocade, and tissues.
Strephon, who saw the room was void,
And Betty otherwise employed,
Stole in and took a strict survey
Of all the litter as it lay. (Swift 1-7)

Strephon perceives that the room is “void,” which to him means Celia is absent. In an examination of Swift’s allusions to Lucretius in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” Laura Baudot claims that “Celia’s absence leaves a void. Exploring this void . . . opens unexplored dimensions
of Swift’s poem – his critical engagement with both philosophical materialism and aesthetic ‘enthusiasm’ - and permits a glimpse beyond the satirical fabric of the poem to disclose Swift’s self-reflexive inquiry into the nature of poetic creation” (Baudot 638). While I agree that “The Lady’s Dressing Room” contains a “self-reflexive inquiry” on the nature of poetic creation, I would like to point out, at the risk of sounding myopic, that the dressing room is not void. Like Milton’s Satan, Strephon perceives a lack (Celia’s body is not there), but he overlooks the abundance of waste matter left behind. In a very literal sense, the dressing room is packed full of the traces of Celia’s cosmetic consumption; these traces assert themselves as waste matter.

Several objects follow Celia out of the dressing room – her “lace, brocade, and tissues” – but just as many, if not more, remain in her private space.

Nonhuman actors constantly outnumber Strephon throughout the poem. Right before the poem’s climax - Strephon’s well known ejaculation “Celia shits!” - the speaker frames Celia’s bodily waste as a collection of nonhuman agents: “A sudden universal crew / Of human evils upward flew” (Swift 85-86). This “universal crew” exerts its own agency against Strephon: it “flew” into his nostrils, supposedly against his own wishes. The smell exerts agency over the masculine actor who cannot avoid the physical particles that “waft a stink round every room” (114). Once Strephon opens the chest that disguises Celia’s chamber pot, he is no longer in control of the action of the poem: “He lifts the lid: there need no more, / He smelt it all the time before” (81-82). Swift’s “there need no more” can be taken two ways: as either an instance of the speaker ironically refusing to speak about the scatological material; or the line can be taken as a comment on the inevitability of what is about to happen, i.e., Strephon, having opened the chest, will inevitably smell Celia’s shit. As happens so often in Swift’s poems, this line resists a clear interpretive choice. I argue that both interpretations are necessary to understand how Swift
represents both masculine and feminine consumption styles; in these lines the speaker gestures towards what poetry (much like Strephon) should not examine, while highlighting the agency that the nonhuman world holds over the male consumer. Like a stereotypical pastoral swain, Strephon ventures into the nymph’s arbor, here replaced by Celia’s dressing room, in order to enact a heteronormative performance; he ventures in with the understanding that Celia’s space is also his to occupy by virtue of his masculine desire for her body. But this space is decidedly unpastoral, both in its rejection of romantic tropes, and in the relationship between the human and nonhuman actors that define this space; much like the “universal crew” that assaults Strephon’s nose at the climax of the poem, the objects in Celia’s dressing room work together to launch an all-out assault on Strephon’s masculine identity.

Swift dramatizes this confrontation between masculine actor and feminine waste matter through the first object Strephon encounters – “At first, a dirty smock appeared, beneath the armpits well besmeared” (11-12). Strephon’s initial shock mirrors the speaker’s initial, and ironic, reticence to fully describe the smock: “In such a case, few words are best / And Strephon bids us guess the rest” (15-16). The irony in these lines emerges from the fact that readers do not have to guess at what makes the smock, or any of the other objects found within the dressing room, so repulsive to Strephon, who then reacts to the smock by pronouncing judgment not on Celia, herself but on other men: he “swears how damnably men lie, / In calling Celia sweet and cleanly” (17-18). Waste matter inside the dressing room threatens the homosocial network that exists outside the dressing room. Confronted with the smock, and the first example of Celia’s waste, Strephon reacts by questioning the homosocial bonds that support Celia’s image as a goddess and which thus support the social relations necessary to perform his own masculine identity.
Celia’s consumption of highly fashionable commodities shocks Strephon in part because of the sheer abundance of objects in the dressing room. What follows the initial object of Strephon’s “strict survey” is an anti-blazon that categorizes the various objects he encounters. These objects include: “various combs” (7) that are clogged with “Sweat, dandruff, powder, lead, and hair” (20); a “forehead cloth”; “alum flour to stop the steams [sweat]”; “night-gloves made of Tripsy’s hide” (26); “puppy water” (28); “gallipots and vials” (31); “pomatums, paints, and slops” (33); and “a filthy basin” (37). These objects all share one thing in common: their past and assumedly future relationship to Celia’s body, which Swift’s speaker never directly describes. Strephon and the reader are aware that Celia is the one who “begrimed” the smock, that it is her “scabby chops” and “unsavory streams” that these objects help to obfuscate. Celia’s body may be absent from the dressing room, but she is still very much present – her identity, or presence, extends to the objects that serve as material remains, and thus reminders of her feminine consumption practices. Swift seems to highlight this presence in the description of the “filthy basin” by using active, present-tense verbs, “for here she spits, and here she spews” (42).

Hyperabundant waste matter leaves Strephon impotent at the end of the poem, which Swift highlights by providing a psychological sketch of the “swain disgusted”:

His foul imagination links
Each dame he sees with all her stinks:
And if unsavory odors fly,
Conceives a lady standing by:
All women his description fits,
And both ideas jump like wits. (121-125)
Having seen, smelled, and touched the waste objects in Celia’s dressing room, Strephon can no longer enjoy what the speaker refers to as “the charms of womankind” (130), that is, Strephon is no longer able to consume women’s bodies\(^{35}\). What is so threatening to Stephon is not merely Celia’s waste producing body, but also the hyperabundance of objects that she consumes in order to construct herself as the poem’s “goddess.” In the final stanza, the speaker tells us that Strephon:

... so impiously blasphemes

Her ointments, daubs, and paints and creams;

Her washes, slops, and every clout,

With which she makes so foul a rout. (137-140)

Returning once more to the fast-paced list structure found in stanzas three and four, the speaker places the onus of agency – that which has caused Strephon’s impotence – on the objects that surround Celia’s body, rather than that body itself. If we keep in mind Gee’s claim that the presence of waste assumes that a “troubled process of making has occurred,” then we can read Celia’s waste as a troubling reminder of her self-directed efforts to perform her feminine identity via consumption. Readers do not see her labor – she has already left when the speaker and

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\(^{35}\) His engagement with the physical world, in this case women’s bodies and the physical accessories that they use for display, as represented by Celia’s initial “goddess” persona, has shifted from a visual relationship to an olfactory relationship. The waste matter in Celia’s dressing room overtakes the agency of the masculine actor by forcing him to perceive Celia’s consumption in terms of smell, rather than sight. Donald T. Seibert has comments on this phenomenon in “Swift’s Fiat Odor: The Excremental Re-Vision” (1985). Siebert notes, “even though sight and smell cooperate in the survey, it is smell which finally displaces sight and tyrannizes over the imagination of poor Strephon” (28). I will have more to say about how sensory engagement with the physical world - which senses are used and how successfully - determines representation of gender in Chapter 3, “Groping in the Dark: Masculine Consumption and Hindered Visibility.”
Strephon enter her dressing room – but they do see the aftereffects of this activity, both in her brief appearance as a “goddess,” and in the waste she has left behind.

The speaker reveals his own impotence in his ironic reluctance to follow Strephon through the dressing room and to present the waste objects it contains to the reader. Just as Strephon finds his masculine identity compromised by these waste objects, so the speaker reveals his compromised identity as a poet. This first occurs in the second stanza, while the speaker describes Strephon’s reaction to the smock. The speaker presents the “besmeared” article to the reader, but ironically places blame for this presentation on Strephon: “Stephon, the rogue, displayed it wide” (13). Chastising Strephon (“the rogue”) for doing the same thing he is doing, the speaker reveals his ironic discomfort with handling waste objects by displacing his own agency onto his embodied poetic creation. This ironic discomfort also occurs when describing Celia’s stockings, although this time the speaker places the onus of representation on himself: “The stockings why must I expose, / Stained with the moisture of her toes” (51-52); the speaker now acknowledges his own role as speaker, though he still frames his poetic activity as unwilling labor. This ironic reluctance is perhaps most fully developed when the speaker first introduces Celia’s chamber pot:

Why Stephon, will you tell the rest?
And must you needs describe the chest?
That careless wench! No creature warn her
To move it out from yonder corner,
But leave it standing in full sight,
For you to exercise your spite. (69-74)
The speaker ironically questions Strephon’s actions, and his desperate, frustrated tone highlights the fact that, just like Strephon, the poet is also out of place in this hyperabundant feminine space. The fact that he blames *Celia* for leaving the chest “in full sight” is doubly ironic, as he has already chastised Strephon for entering the dressing room in the first place, and because the fact that it is not Strephon who will “tell” the reader about and “describe” the chest, but the speaker himself. The speaker frames “The Lady’s Dressing Room” as a textual contradiction: the poem itself, an artifact of poetic labor, constantly asserts its creator’s (albeit ironic) discomfort with its creation. As represented in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” masculine consumers have no proper place in hyperabundant settings: the sheer amount of waste matter that results from feminine consumption in these environments throttles both the male consumer’s prerogative to consume women’s bodies and the male poet’s right to ornament women for consumption by other males.

In “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” Swift reverses the presentation of feminine waste matter found in “The Lady’s Dressing Room.” Whereas “The Lady’s Dressing Room” begins with the female consumer leaving for the day, “Beautiful Young Nymph” follows Corinna home, “returning at the midnight hour; / Four stories climbing to her bower” (Swift 7-8). Once home, Corinna begins to undo her cosmetic labor, and in doing so she highlights the various objects that allow her to perform her feminine identity, which Swift satirically frames as the “pride of Drury Lane / For whom no shepherd sighs in vain” (1-2). Whereas “Dressing Room” presents the after-effects of feminine consumption via the waste it creates, “Beautiful Nymph” negatively dramatizes the physical labor involved in feminine consumption and shows us waste being produced in real time. In both poems, hyperabundant environments render the masculine speaker impotent.
In “Dressing Room” Swift’s speaker does not directly show the female consumer, Celia, form relationships with the objects that she uses to construct her goddess persona; like Strephon, we have to construct it after the fact. In “Beautiful Nymph,” however, the speaker shows Corinna actively and literally deconstructing her “goddess” (23) identity, as she removes various objects from her body. The speaker shows us Corinna removing her hair (10), “a crystal eye” (11); her eyebrows (13); her mouth plumpers (17-18); the rags she uses to make her breasts look fuller (21-22); and her makeup (34), just to mention a few examples. Significantly, the speaker describes not only the objects, but also Corinna’s labor involving them, i.e. her consumption activities, using more active verbs than in “Dressing Room.” Consider the following sections from each poem:

But oh! It turned poor Strephon’s bowels,
When he beheld and smelt the towels;
Begummed, besmattered, and beslimed;
With dirt, and sweat, and earwax grimed.
No object Strephon’s eye escapes,
Here, petticoats in frowzy heaps;
Nor be the handkerchiefs forgot,
All varnish o’er with snuff and snot. (“Dressing Room” 43-50)

The majority of the nouns (towels, dirt, petticoats, etc.), are associated with Celia’s body and the waste she produces. And yet all of the verbs, both active and passive, functional and morphological, are dissociated from Celia own actions. For example, what “turned” Strephon’s bowels is the act of beholding and smelling the towels – ontologically speaking, are the towels or Strephon’s actions responsible for his reaction? Morphologically speaking, the words
begummed, besmattered, and begrimed denote verbs (to gum, to smatter, to beslime), but functionally they are used as adjectives to describe the towels. The handkerchiefs are not to be “forgot” by either Strephon or the reader; the handkerchiefs are described as “varnished o’er with snuff and snot” but the assumed subject of this clause, Celia, is absent.

In “Beautiful Nymph,” the syntax frames Corinna as the subject, the agentic performer of cosmetic labor. The following section illustrates this syntactic recognition of agency:

Now dexterously her plumpers draws,
That serve to fill her hollow jaws.
Untwists a wire; and from her gums
A set of teeth completely comes.
Pulls out the rags contrived to prop
Her flabby dugs, and down they drop. (17-22)

Corinna herself “draws,” “untwists,” and “pulls out,” while the other verbs in this section follow a hierarchy of action: “serve to fill,” “comes,” and “drop” describe actions performed by the objects themselves, but this action can only take place after Corinna has completed hers. Even the morphological verb and functional adjective “contrived” refers us, however indirectly to Corinna’s intent and actions. Furthermore, the speaker often frames Corinna’s actions in terms of their meticulousness or skill:

Now, picking out a crystal eye,
She wipes it clean and lays it by.
Her eyebrows from a mouse’s hide,
Stuck on with art on either side,
Pulls off with care, and first displays ‘em,
Then in a play-book smoothly lays 'em. (11-16 emphasis mine)

Unlike Celia, who merely “spits,” “spews,” and “shits” in the few instances where she actively performs her cosmetic consumption, Corinna carefully and intentionally preserves her cosmetic aids; as Swift frames it, her consumption is more ritualized and complex than Celia’s. Unlike the fast-paced list structure that comprises the stanzas three and four of “Dressing Room,” there is an order to Corinna’s cosmetic labor not found in Celia’s more upper-class dressing room.

Celia moves from a state of constructed order – a “goddess” in “lace, brocade, and tissues” – to an absent presence that is defined by chaos, waste, and hyperabundance. The same can be said of Corinna in the final stanza of the “Beautiful Nymph,” which opens with the ejaculatory “Corinna wakes. A dreadful sight! / Behold the ruins of the night!” (57-58). No longer the ironically dubbed “nymph” or “goddess,” Corinna awakes to a scene of physical abjection marked by the hyperabundance of objects that are now waste matter:

A wicked rat her plaster stole,
Half ate, and dragged it to his hole.
The crystal eye, alas, was missed;
And Puss had on her plumpers pissed.
A pigeon picked her issue-peas,
And Shock her tresses filled with fleas. (59-64)

The objects that comprise Corinna’s “nymph” persona have been translated into waste; the plaster that she uses to cover the sores caused by venereal disease\(^{36}\) is half eaten by a rat; her

\(^{36}\) Several critics have read Swift’s “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” as a comment on the prevalence of venereal disease in early modern London. For more on this, see Mary Beth Gugler, “Mercury and the “Pains of Love’ in Jonathan Swift’s ‘A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed’” (1991), and Hermann J. Real & Heinz J. Vienken, “‘Those Odious Common Whore of Which This Town is Full’: Swift’s ‘A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed’” (1981).
crystal eye has gone missing, much like a piece of trash; a cat has urinated over her cheek plumpers; the “issue-peas” she uses to treat ulcers (probably caused by venereal disease) have been ruined, and her wig is full of fleas. These waste(d) items, already associated with Corinna’s diseased and broken body are now beyond the possibility of rehabilitation; unlike Celia, who can be “raised” from dung, Corinna is left is a state of abjection. In fact, she herself can be read as waste matter, her cosmetic labors in vain, as is emphasized in the last lines of the poem; “Corinna in the morning dizened, / Who sees, will spew; who smells, be poisoned” (73-74).

It is here that the speaker reveals his own impotence, as he does in “Dressing Room.” After describing the “dreadful’ state of Corinna’s garret, the speaker defers from showing us how she re-establishes the relationships with the objects she so carefully manipulates the night before:

But how shall I describe her arts
To recollect the scattered parts?
Or show the anguish, toil, and pain,
Of gathering up herself again?
The bashful muse will never bear
In such a scene to interfere. (67-72)

Confronted with Corinna’s “mangled” state, the speaker defers to speak; in doing so, he consciously frames part of Corinna’s cosmetic labor as something that poetry, represented metonymically by the “bashful muse,” cannot express. Formulated as a question, the speaker rhetorically casts doubt on his own ability to describe how the “scattered parts” can be reformulated into a “nymph” or “goddess” persona. Swift’s speaker adamantly refuses to ornament Corinna through poetic or rhetorical means; put another way, he refuses to tame the relationship between this feminine consumer and the hyperabundant objects that surround her in
the morning. That task, supposedly, will be left to Corinna herself; just as Celia enters into relationships with physical, consumable objects in the privacy of her dressing room, Corinna will have to “recollect the scattered parts” once the speaker leaves her garret.

Even though Swift’s speaker refuses to describe Corinna’s cosmetic labor, there is one area of her life that he does not hesitate to examine: her dreams. The speaker compliments Corinna’s physical abjection by examining her mental state, something that Swift does not provide for the largely absent Celia. Before Corinna falls asleep, her mind “with pains of love tormented lies” (39). In these lines, she resembles Pope’s Belinda, who dreams of her male love interests before waking up and performing her cosmetic rituals (Pope 1.23-24). Unlike Belinda’s dreams, Corinna’s are inflected by her lower-class realities: she dreams of Bridewell and the physical pain of being whipped in prison (41-44); she is transported to Jamaica (45); she dreams of constables and other penal figures (51-52). This lower-class reality also involves waste matter: in her dreams she is “near Fleet Ditch’s oozy brinks, / Surrounded with a hundred stinks” (57-58). Waste forms a continuity between Corinna’s sleeping and waking states. The hyperabundant waste matter that surrounds Corinna in the morning further emphasizes the futility of her cosmetic endeavors, that is, her failure to effectively construct a “goddess” identity by fixing her relationships to objects.

Taken together, “The Lady’s Dressing Room” and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” can be read as reactionary articulations of consumption that weave together images of desire, waste, and gender. Written and published at a time when hyperabundant consumption had gained an undeniably visible foothold in English society, these poems reveal how, as material culture scholars have pointed out, the figure of the woman consumer became a locus of masculine anxieties over changing economic, social, and gender relations. Furthermore, as I have
shown, Swift gestures towards a long ignored discourse, as represented by Woolley, that consciously articulates feminine consumption as legitimate, creative labor. In doing so, Swift is able to graft older articulations of gender and labor onto his critique of the effectiveness of masculine poetics. Lastly, by comparing Swift’s later reactive work to Woolley’s Restoration precedent we gain an understanding of how waste functions as an ideological nodal point in widespread discursive efforts by English writers to codify gendered relationships between humans and nonhumans.

**Conclusion: Agency through Waste**

As the masculine consumer faded into the background of the English cultural horizon, the feminine consumer emerged amidst an influx of novel, fashionable commodities. Scholarship on early-modern culture has outlined the many ways in which women could find agency through consuming the many new objects available to increasing percentages of the population: hats, fans, china, shoes, and novels, just to name a few. In this chapter, I have insisted on recognizing how waste matter functions in representations of feminine consumption, how said waste reveals the ontological and social agency feminine consumers possessed, and how this agency threatens poetic masculine prerogatives. Woolley uses waste in order to valorize feminine consumption during a period of transition from scarcity to hyperabundance, while Swift uses waste to critique the agency of both masculine and feminine actors to successfully construct their social identities. By way of conclusion, I would like to consider Mary Wortley Montagu’s “The Reasons that Induced Dr. S to Write a Poem Called ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’” as both a critique of anxiety-ridden depictions of feminine consumers, and a reflection on the agency that waste offers women within patriarchal institutions.
Montagu inverts the gender dynamics presented in Swift’s poem. “Dr. S” makes his appearance as a consumer of abundant commodities. The first lines of the poem mentions his “starched band” (1), “golden snuff box” (2), and “diamond ring” (3), and later frames these objects as participants in an ultimately unsuccessful enactment of fashionable masculine identity:

\[
\ldots \text{men their talents till mistaking,}
\]

\[
\text{The stutterer fancies her is speaking.}
\]

\[
\text{With admiration oft we see}
\]

\[
\text{Hard features heightened by toupee. (39-42)}
\]

Dr. S holds the same position as Celia or Corinna, a gendered consumer who attempts to enact successful consumption performances though ultimately failing to do so. Like Swift, and even Pope and Rochester, Montagu’s speaker peels back the facade of commodities and objects with which Dr. S forms relationships in order to expose his ultimate inability to maintain his identity via consumption. Unlike these male poets, however, Montagu does not do so by associating male actors with the waste they produce; instead she has Betty, the prostitute Dr. S has come to visit and whose body he wishes to consume, embrace her own status as waste producer.

Following Dr. S’s inability to perform sexually, he immediately blames the presence of waste matter in Betty’s room:

\[
\text{He swore, ‘the fault is not in me.}
\]

\[
\text{Your damn close stool so near my nose,}
\]

\[
\text{Your dirty smock, and stinking toes}
\]

\[
\text{Would make a Hercules as tame,}
\]

\[
\text{As any beau that you can name. (69-73)}
\]
Dr. S’s reaction neatly summarizes and parallels Strephon’s experience in Celia’s dressing room, but this appears as a pathetic excuse for his own impotence. His threat to expose her waste is clearly an effort to compensate for his fractured masculinity; like the male characters discussed in chapter 1, Dr. S’s own body is at odds with his intentionality. Montagu wants to make it clear that Dr. S / Swift’s poetry is merely a compensation mechanism for his own inability to perform.

In her parting shot to Dr. S, Betty throws his own threat back in his face: “She answered short, ‘I’m glad you’ll write. / You’ll furnish paper when I shite’” (88-89). Unlike Celia or Corinna, who attempt to hide their waste from prying masculine eyes, Betty openly acknowledges, and even weaponizes her waste. Montagu reformulates her symbolic tack on Swift’s poem as a physical attack on Dr. S’s poetic progeny. Betty reduces Dr. S’s poetry to its most material components – it’s embodiment as printed text on paper – and thwarts it’s efficacy with her own waste matter. What poets such as Swift frame as a threat to masculinity, Montagu reframes as a positive assertion of agency; she acknowledges that women do create waste, but instead of attaching this trans-historical phenomenon to early-modern anxieties about feminine consumption, she instead uses it to frame masculine poetics, as embodied in Swift’s poem, as efforts to compensate for physical impotence. In a sense, Montagu provides a feminine perspective on the fractured male consumer discussed in chapter 1. In doing so, Montagu also asserts that women, through embracing the material world, gain agency over male actors who attempt to frame them as consumable commodities.

Betty hovers between, on the one hand, male objectification and, on the other, a woman who embraces and thus subverts her culturally sanctioned status as object. If male subjects seek to consume and dominate a passive material world (including women’s bodies) through coin, force, or other means, then Montagu’s poem serves as a reminder that the material world of
objects pushes back. Objects do not function in the way that subjects want them to. Though a far cry from feminist efforts to assert political and social equality on the grounds of inalienable subjectivity - something Mary Wollstonecraft would argue for at the end of the century - Montagu’s assertion that women can subvert male prerogative through their very physicality reveals an early-modern forum of feminine resistance that embraced objectivity as a means of, if not emancipation, then at least increased agency within patriarchal institutions. In the next two chapters, which focus on Restoration and early eighteenth century English drama, I will explore how women, by embracing their physicality and that of the world around them, subvert masculine consumption prerogatives in the theater.
Chapter 3: Groping in the Dark: Masculine Consumption and Hindered Visibility

**Introduction: Dim Matter, Visualism, and the Failure of Masculine Performance**

Darkness is a condition in which the non-human material world asserts its dominance over the human subject. In his entry for January 23, 1660, Pepys takes note of this phenomenon when he describes a nighttime trip to Whitehall: “I paid Mrs. Michell, my bookseller, and back to Whitehall, and in the garden, going through to the Stone Gallery I fell into a ditch, it being very dark” (Pepys 9). This somewhat comical entry situates agency not in the human subject, Pepys, but in his material surroundings: “it being very dark” is the reason he ends up in a ditch. Darkness is no respecter of class or status hierarchies either; on March 8, 1669, during another trip to Whitehall, Pepys remarks on the appearance of the king: “and the King all dirty, but not hurt. How it come to pass I know not, but only it was dark, and the torches did not, they say, light the coach as they should do” (996). The diary is littered with references to hiring links and coaches for nighttime travel, stumbling around in dark environments, the difficulty of reading by candlelight, and other inconveniences associated with the absence of light. What was a very real, highly ubiquitous phenomenon in early modern England was highlighted and exploited in the comedies of the Restoration.

In this chapter, the first of two on drama, I will examine Aphra Behn’s *The Feign’d Courtizans*, Edward Ravenscroft’s *The London Cuckolds*, and William Burnaby’s *The Modish Husband* in order to describe how these plays emphasize the failure of the male consumer within late-17th century theatre. Each play features scenes that take place in “darkness,” which renders the male characters unable to see and, therefore, unable to consume female bodies. Furthermore, within these scenes, men experience a process of radical embodiment. Unable to deploy or
recognize visual signifiers of status and gender, male characters are reduced to their physical bodies, which bumble around in the dark like ping-pong balls, defined by sheer physicality, and thus, at least for the duration of light’s absence, largely interchangeable.

Onstage darkness threatens masculine consumption, at least that of the male characters, as opposed to the actors, because the matter with which these characters engage is simultaneously visible and invisible. This tension between visibility and invisibility that defines the relationship between actors and audience member who can see, and male characters who cannot see gives rise to what I will refer to as dim matter. Here I am revising Andrew Sofer’s concept of “dark matter,” which he borrows from quantum physics:

translated into theatrical terms, dark matter refers to the invisible dimensions of theater that escape visual detection, even though its effects are felt everywhere in performance. If theatre necessarily traffics in corporeal stuff (bodies, fluids, gases, objects), it also incorporates the incorporeal: offstage spaces and actions, absent characters, the narrated past, hallucination, blindness, obscenity, godhead, and so on. No less than physical actors and objects, such invisible presences matter very much indeed, even if spectators, characters, and performers cannot put their hands on them. (Sofer 3)

Sofer’s adaptation of quantum physics is illuminating, but I would like to question his use of the term “invisible”: invisible to whom? Because Sofer’s concept of dark matter relies on strict categories of visible versus invisible, it cannot account for onstage phenomena that may be visible to some but not others. What happens, I ask, when the onstage characters, who are visible to the audience, cannot see their physical surroundings, which are also visible to the audience, not to mention the actors? In the small, well-lit theatres of the Restoration, the audience and actors would have been able to see what was taking place in “dark” scenes, though the characters would not. In such a situation, unruly matter rears its head, this time in the form of dim matter, which is poised between the corporeal and the corporeal, the visible and the invisible. Because it cannot be known visually, it is hard to control, and thus dominate. As unruly matter, it pushes
back against the desires and actions of masculine human actants. When surrounded by dim matter, actors must consciously perform their character’s failure to achieve successful consumption performances, that is, they must physically demonstrate how men fail to fix their relationships to matter in widely recognized, ritualistic ways that bolster their masculine identities. Dim matter overtakes the agency of these characters, thus destabilizing any sense of superiority over the non-human and, within the context of these plays, non-male world. The physical world, when transformed from visual to dim matter, pushes back against the enactment of masculine desire; in keeping with one of the overarching claims of this study, Restoration masculinities, in this case those presented onstage, are thwarted in their consumption efforts by the a material world that is anything but passive.

As an onstage phenomenon, dim matter evokes the fraught process of self-identity discussed by Peggy Phelan in her Lacanian study of invisibility in performance. According to Phelan, “the process of self-identity is a leap into a narrative that employs seeing as a way of knowing” (5). Furthermore, “seeing is a (false) assertion that the world can be mastered by the gaze and a recognition of the world without oneself” (25). Phelan’s claims parallel critical accounts such as Kristina Straub’s study of Restoration and 18th-century actors and Laura Mulvey’s seminal work on the male gaze in film that have shown how gender is constructed through acts of spectatorship and looking, though this process of identity construction is never completely successful37. In Phelan’s words, “identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly” (Phelan 13,

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emphasis mine). I would suggest that on the Restoration stage, dim matter marks the presence of just such a failure, though it forces us to reconsider the material and physical dimensions of this process. Phelan’s notion of the body as the site of failure, and its relationship to seeing, to visibility and invisibility, is illuminating, but she does not consider the nonvisual aspects of identity formation. By non-visual I do not mean invisible; whereas the latter term negatively describes phenomena within a visual economy, the former describes those that exist outside of that economy. Identity formation – it’s failure, achievement, displacement, etc. – is often couched in terms of a visible/invisible binary, which is usually evoked in discussions of embodiment and materiality. Here I will expand this notion of embodiment, and attempt to detach it from purely visual dynamics, in order to frame what I have been referring to as the “radical embodiment” that male characters experience when they encounter dim matter in their consumption performances.

Focusing on how identities are construed, challenged, and policed on the Restoration stage via a Foucauldian focus on “the body,” Cynthia Lowenthal claims that “the argument - that early modern culture underwent processes that empowered men through progressive disembodiment, while it disempowered women through progressive embodiment - plays out in fascinating if not actually perverse ways in these plays: attempts to locate female identity in an interior realm almost always result in the further embodiment of female identity” (32). Lowenthal’s discussion of “interiority” and “embodiment” rests on a fundamentally visual understanding of theatrical bodies:

it is just this problem of exhibiting or manifesting the self through these appropriate cultural resources with which Restoration playwrights and seventeenth-century individuals struggle. Because looking activates this kind of meaning, the surfaces of bodies are preeminent: actors’ bodies in particular – their specular function, their heavy materiality – provoke insistent calls to look or gaze. (27)
Lowenthal’s focus on the visually accessed surface of the body evokes claims by a large body of scholars who focus on identity and performance. Judith Butler, for example, claims that “acts, gestures, and desires produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (Butler 173). Rebecca Schneider in Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Enactment, deploys the model of “re-vision” put forth by Adrienne Rich: “Rich was writing about texts, but the same sense of ‘re-vision’ – if coupled with re-gesture, re-affect, re-sensation – might be applicable to performances or enactments of what Judith Bulter has termed ‘sedimented acts’” (Schneider 7). Although Schneider’s study of American Civil War reenactments does not explicitly focus on visual dynamics of performance per se, her language frames her participation in these enactments in visual terms: “I did not participate, except as a witness to their actions. To witness a reenactment is to be a bystander, a passer-by, possibly out of step” (emphasis mine) – and yet she also evokes, however metaphorically, a tactile understanding of such performances, as what she witnesses is “the event that (some) participants hope will touch the actual past” (9). This study of Restoration drama will examine the role of touch, and other non-visual senses such as hearing and, in the case of The London Cuckolds smell, in a much more literal sense.

There is good reason for this critical and theoretical insistence on the visual aspects of the body. Visualism, or what philosopher David Levin refers to as “the hegemony of vision,” is a longstanding hallmark of Western thought: “long before Plato, not only in the extant fragments attributed to Heraclitus, but in fragments attributed to Parmenides (475 B.C.), philosophical thinking in the Western world was drawn to the tuition, the authority of sight” (Levin 1). And it is not only philosophers who uncritically accept visualist frameworks: “for those of us who can
see, vision is, of all the modes of perception, the one which is primary and predominant, at least in the conduct of our everyday lives. This does not seem open to much debate” (2). This emphasis on vision is also tied to the subject/object binary that informs modernity: “in the objectivist paradigm generated by traditional occularcentrism [a term analogous with what I refer to as visualism], the subject is invariably positioned either in the role of a dominating observer or in the role of an observable object, submissive before the gaze of power” (4). Anthropologist Walter Ong echoes this line of thought when he claims, whatever the case with anthropologists, most philosophers from Locke through Kant and many down to the present day not only accept the physical universe in exclusively visualist terms but also treat understanding itself by analogy with visual knowledge to the virtual exclusion of analogies with any other senses . . . The success of vision (observation) and quantification in the physical sciences has charmed the modern mind into considering its own activity as essentially that of sight. (Ong 636)

Vision, it would appear, has long held pride of place in the Western hierarchy of senses.

Visibility is, according to Lowenthal, particularly important in Restoration theater:

“Theater in any age demands that its spectators observe and look, of course, but the number of moments when looking and observing are staged on the Restoration boards, when looking is performed as a dramatic and self-conscious activity generating tension and complexity within the plot, leads me to suspect that something powerful is taking place” (20-21). Will Pritchard, in an analysis of Restoration identities, claims that “an ideal of female legibility . . . remained current in the Restoration. Inevitably, this ideal proved unattainable in practice; but it nonetheless exerted considerable force, conditioning both the way women appeared and the way men looked at them” (33). This source of anxiety, both for men who attempted to “read” women and for women who appeared in the many public spaces that flourished in the later half of the 17th century – coffee houses, playhouses, new shops, etc. – was also a source of desire: “female legibility,” Pritchard claims, “was a puzzle that Restoration culture both wanted to solve and
enjoyed being unable to solve” (30). The Restoration provides particularly fruitful ground in which to explore the connection between vision and identity formation.

I agree with Lowenthal and other critics who identify and describe the powerful cultural mechanisms surrounding visibility in the Restoration. I would, however, like to claim that playwrights and actors were also preoccupied with the nonvisual aspects of the body – its weight, tactile dimensions, and kinesthetic potential – especially in relation to processes of identity formation and embodiment. The process of embodying women while simultaneously disembodying men through looking, gazing, and visually consuming feminine bodies that Lowenthal and others identify as emergent during the early modern period was not universal, nor was it linear. In the plays I will discuss in this chapter, men are radically embodied while attempting to consume women’s bodies. They are placed in dim environments that preclude their visual dominance via the gaze and thus are forced to engage their material surroundings not through vision, but through their other sense such as touch, hearing, and smell. In these plays, embodiment is a matter of how men interact with their material surroundings and which senses they must rely on when vision is not possible, and radical embodiment occurs when their surroundings overtake any agency the male characters may possess.

Method:

In my discussion of how these men perform their radical embodiment, I will be practicing what Sofer refers to as production analysis, which he defines as “a ‘thick description’ of the stage event as best we can reconstruct it, using such cues as verbal and actual stage directions, visual records of historical performances, and (where available) eyewitness accounts” (The Stage Life of Props 4). Given the historical remove between the production of these plays and our own
moment, recreating a Restoration performance is an always already incomplete practice, but as
Sofer claims,

while production analysis is inevitably more conjectural than performance
analysis, we simply lack sufficient historical evidence to produce a thorough
performance analysis of (say) an Elizabethan or Restoration production. Failing the
discovery or more detailed historical evidence, production analysis – sensitive to
textual cues and to historical staging practices insofar as we understand them –
must suffice the text-based performance critic. (*Props 5*)

In the following analysis of three Restoration comedies, as well as a brief consideration of a
Renaissance precedent, I will pay close attention to not only spoken dialogue, but also to stage
directions, both implied and explicit. Particular attention will be paid to those elements of the
written text that alert us to how male characters experience their own material embodiment in
dim scenes, and how this embodiment thwarts their efforts to consume women’s bodies. In his
discussion of visualism Walter Ong acknowledges that “Of course, the physical universe is both
seen and heard and is touched, smelled, and tasted as well. But each of the various senses has an
 economy of its own, and each impinges on the human life world differently with regard to
 awareness of interiority and exteriority” (637) – how, then, does one examine non-visual
sensory economies as they are traced and enacted in Restoration drama?

In lieu of visual access to consumable matter, human actors must resort to other means of
knowing the physical world. Appropriately enough, one verb that these texts make use of, both in
dialogue and stage directions, is “groped.” The OED provides several definitions for this word,
two of which I would like to highlight, and which were both current during the later half of the
17th century. The first is “to attempt to find something by feeling about as in the dark or as a
blind person; to feel for (or after) something with the hand (or other tactile organ, rarely with an
instrument); to feel about in order to find one’s way.” In this context, “to grope” is associated
with a physically-enacted uncertainty: in certain physical conditions – such as darkness – one
must feel the material world, since one cannot see it. Rather than a locus of detached spectatorship associated with gaze-based masculinities, one’s body becomes an instrument that must *touch* its material surroundings in order to “see” what is going on. This element of uncertainty, associated with a loss of physical agency is also a lack of epistemological agency, as appears in the figurative definition for grope provided by the OED: “to behave as if blind or in the dark; to search blindly, tentatively, or uncertainly (*for, after*); to make a blind guess at.” Both these definitions are based on an understanding of how the body moves within a material environment that compromises its agency; and this refers not just to the “surface of the body” so prevalent in post-structuralist and feminist discourses, but also the gross, weighted material body that moves through time and space. The “surface” model implies a primarily visual understanding of the body and, while the onstage bodies I will discuss are certainly comprehended physically by the audiences, actors, and characters that perform and observe in the scenes discussed below, Restoration playwrights were more than willing to exploit these non-visual aspects of the body as well. In doing so, they reveal the masculine consumer’s compromised status as he tracks through time and space on the Restoration stage.

*Consuming Women’s Bodies in the Dark: The Physical Presence of the Actress*  
  
In the “dim” scenes that I will discuss below, male actors consciously perform their characters’ inability to consume women’s bodies, which are framed as physical objects that are interchangeable with material goods such as food, wine, and coinage. The female bodies onstage, both of the actresses and their corresponding characters, often exceed rigid boundaries of such objectification - and this, according to the sexual logic employed by the male characters, is precisely the problem. In a study of class and the sexual economy of Restoration comedies, Charles H. Hinnant argues that “in this economy, an ethic of pleasurable consumption is linked
by a perception of equivalences of value among people, services, and objects to short term liaisons considered as finite relationships between individuals,” which is why “the town gallant should be recognized as a signal precursor of the emergent consumerism depicted in the influential and important The Birth of Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England” (79). It is this notion of equivalences between consumable goods that I would like to highlight, especially the notion that it extends to human (read female) bodies: “What unites gallant and tradesmen in a hierarchy of getting and spending is not an acquisitiveness that is associated with property ownership but with the pleasurable consumption of objects, persons, and experiences” (79, emphasis mine). According to the masculine logic of the Restoration stage, both women characters and the actresses playing them, should have been objectified, consumable commodities, but they often exceeded this category, and this much to the potential comic delight of audiences. As I will show, male characters in a certain strain of Restoration comedy attempt to deploy this logic of woman-as-physical good, but female adeptness at manipulating the material world (what should be a masculine prerogative) prevents the successful performance or enactment of this logic.

Before discussing the Restoration texts, I will briefly analyze an early 17th-century precedent, Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, in order to consider how the failure of masculine performance is related to the presence of the Restoration actress and how the male and female characters in these plays represent different relationships with the material world. I do not offer a developed description of a historical trajectory - how dim matter “evolves” or develops from Shakespeare’s time to the later 17th century - but rather a consideration of an enabling condition for the later plays. This enabling condition, I claim, is the onstage presence of the actress in post-Restoration decades. Her materiality, absent in Renaissance theater, lends an
emphasis to the gendered dynamics surrounding masculine consumption and embodiment as they are articulated in later 17th-century dim scenes.

Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* contains an offstage dark scene that offers a stark and illuminating contrast to the Restoration dim scenes discussed in this chapter. This dark scene centers around the bed-trick that Isabella and the Duke play on Angelo, the play’s hypocritical, appetitive antagonist. In many ways, Angelo functions as a precursor for figures such as Rochester’s bishop in the *Satyr against Reason and Mankind*, that is, he is a masculine figure who hides his voracious sexual appetite behind a veneer of virtue. Like the libertines and rakes that populate the stage in the later 17th century, Angelo is characterized via his appetite, as is evident in the Duke’s initial description of him:

. . . Lord Angelo is precise,

Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses

That his blood flows, or that his appetite

Is more to bread than stone. (1.5.50-53)

Once Angelo experiences physical desire for Isabella, however, he displays the same kind of ontological fracturing seen in male consumers in Chapter 1 and in the male characters I will discuss later; his body is at odds with the identity he wishes to perform, that of a virtuous ruler. He hints at this when he appears on stage alone before revealing his intentions to Isabella:

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,

Making both it unable for itself

And disposessing all the other parts

Of necessary fitness?

So play the foolish throngs with one that swounds,
Come all to help him, and so stop the air

By which he should revive. (2.4.20-26)

Like Milton’s Satan and Rochester’s speakers, Angelo is the site of conflict between his own human intentionality and the quasi-human agency the matter of his body exerts over him. The result of this conflict is the ultimatum he gives Isabella: have sex with him or her brother will be executed for his own sexual transgressions. Angelo formulates his request in terms of appetite: “I have begun, / And now I give my sensual race the rein: / Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite” (2.4.161-163). In order to overcome this dilemma, Isabella will turn to the Duke, who in turn mobilizes a dark environment to thwart Angelo’s designs.

In order to save Claudio, the Duke proposes a bed-trick, whereby Angelo will sleep with another woman, Marianna, though he will think he is in fact copulating with Isabella. Later Isabella confirms what might appear obvious to some audience members, that the bed-trick will take place “upon the / Heavy middle of the night” (4.1.32-33). The bed-trick goes as planned, but while Angelo does believe he has sexually consumed Isabella’s body, he goes back on his promise to save Claudio. It isn’t until Mariana actually reveals what they have done that Angelo realizes he has been fooled. Standing before a crowd, Mariana tells him:

    . . . This is the body
    That took away the match from Isabel,
    And did supply thee at thy garden-house
    In her imagined person. (5.1.208-211)

Though Angelo initially dismisses her assertion, her words reveal that, in a situation in which men lose visual access to the physical world, they lose the ability to exert their intentional human
agency over their surroundings. When they are forced to feel instead of see, they can become subservient to the agency of their rivals.

Technically this does not constitute an instance of dim matter. The bed-trick, after all, takes place offstage, and so dim matter – which must be seen by the audience and players, but remain invisible to the characters – does not make an appearance. But the scene does reveal how masculinity, as constructed via performance on the stage relies on a visual economy of consumption. There are of course other glaring differences between the bed-trick in Measure for Measure and the later Restoration dim scenes. Notably, the bed-trick is formulated as homosocial conflict-by-proxy between the Duke and Angelo. The Duke is firmly in control of the action: he comes up with the plan and his language reveals that it is his agency that drives the plot, not that of the women characters. For example, when he introduces his plan, he frames Mariana as a prop for him to move about: “The maid [Mariana] I will frame and make fit for this attempt” (3.1.244-245). In the Restoration dim scenes that I will discuss, it is almost always the women characters who successfully inaugurate and navigate dim scenes. Their performances are, more often than not, self-directed, and any kind of masculine director, such as the Duke is absent in these plots. There is no necessary connection between dim scenes and the role of agentic women characters, but in the later 17-century English theater these phenomena feed off of each other to create comedic disruptions of masculine agency. The fractured male consumer, which in Measure for Measure is represented by Angelo, is recycled by Restoration writers who place him within dim scenes marked not only by dim matter, but also the physical presence of women characters played by the first generation of actresses in the English theater.

Several critics have commented on the physical and material status of women in Restoration theatre. The physical female body, placed onstage and consumed by hundreds of
theater patrons during the decades following Charles II’s return to England was linked to various ideological tensions and social anxieties. Kristina Straub, in a discussion of the commodification of the actress during the Restoration and 18th century claims that “the actress’s sexuality was a public commodity and for sale however privately virtuous she remained . . . the actual characters of actresses are not even so much the point as the simple fact of their physical display” (101). In a discussion of stage violence on the Restoration stage, Deborah Payne Fisk argues that “the presence of actresses did not suddenly give birth to stage violence against women; but actresses did make possible a more physical, less abstract, representation. This is true in Restoration drama in general, which tends to underscore the materiality of the female body, as if to emphasize the authenticity of the actress playing the part” (83 emphasis mine). As Straub and Fisk suggest, the Restoration actress, by her very presence, draws our attention to the gendered material status of bodies onstage, which is something that could not happen, or at least not to the same degree, in Renaissance theater. As Fisk puts it, “a theatre of female impersonation cannot afford the implicit comparison between a material, ‘authentic’ male body and an artificially represented female body; thus, the language of Greek or Noh drama directs the viewer towards the manifestation of movement or emotion – what the body produces, not what it is” (84). The presence of actress brought a more intense focus on gender difference in post-Restoration theater. Fisk argues that “in Restoration theatre, an insistent emphasis on the female, as well as the male body, accentuates sexual difference” (84). This preoccupation with sexual difference as inflected though physical bodies has special significance for the dim scenes I will discuss, because in the majority of them women are the ones manipulating dim matter in order to thwart the consumption efforts of male characters. With the advent of the actress, feminine bodies are given more material weight (pun intended), and though this may have contributed to
the processes of feminine embodiment discussed earlier, it also, I claim, created conditions in which emphasize the embodiment of men as well.

In a recent revision of Stuart-era theater history, Gillian Bush-Bailey remarks on the functional aspects of the Restoration actress’s body. “The actress’s body,” she claims, “is the canvas/paper on which she creates, her use of movement, gesture and voice, the colours she uses to demonstrate her skills, yet the objectification of her body has successfully deflected revisionist theatre histories from considering the actress’s body as the essential tool of her craft” (17). This juxtaposition of “objectification” and physical skill (“movement, gesture, voice”) parallels similar dynamics that I will show are at work in the dramatic texts discussed in this chapter, that is, the women characters, and the actresses who play them, are, by the onstage logic of the period, supposed to be consumable, physical, objects; and yet, though their very physicality - their ability to move through space and time, and their successful manipulation of matter - these characters exceed their status as mere objects. The material world, the female character and her dim surroundings, directly pushes back against the male consumer. If women are assumed to be more “material” or embodied than men, then the instances in which female characters cause men to perform their own radical embodiment are doubly troubling: first, by displaying their own agency, they exceed the objectified status granted them by male characters; second, by refusing to be consumed in a manner determined by male characters, they in turn highlight the materiality of men who wish to consume them. The trend that Lowenthal points to - that men experienced progressive disembodiment when women experienced the opposite - is radically inverted in the scenes in which male characters attempt to consume in the dark.

Subverting Masculine Scripts in Aphra Behn’s The Feign’d Curtizans; or, A Night’s Intrigue
Something a text-based critic would be sure to notice about Aphra Behn’s *The Feign’d Courtezans* is that it is very difficult to read. Jane Spencer acknowledges that the play is “confusing to read and difficult to summarize,” although it does contain “comic pleasures of a kind easily grasped in performance” (Spencer 95). The play is saturated with complex stage directions, misrecognitions, characters scurrying in and out of scenes, and general flurry of movement that pulls at the attention of even the most dedicated close reader. That the majority of the comedic action in *Feign’d Courtizans* takes place in the dark is significant because it allows Behn to stage men’s failure to consume the physical world simply because they cannot see what is going on. The play would originally have been performed in a well-lit theatre, so the actors who play the handsome Cavaliers Galliard and Fillamour or the foolish and less desirable Sir Signal Bufoon and Tickletext would have actually have seen what they are doing in “dark” scenes, although their characters would have been “blind.”

We first encounter “darkness” in *Feign’d Courtizans* in Act 3, as the setting changes from day to night. The audience is well aware of night’s impeding arrival, given the sheer excitement it causes for several characters: Tickletext and Sir Signal are waiting for the arrival of night to hide their intended assignations from each other; Galliard and Fillamour are waiting for the sun to set in order to enjoy their own planned rendezvous with the supposed “courtizans” they have been pursuing; those very feign’d courtizans, Marcella and Cornelia are looking forward to the night because it will allow them to “test” their intended lovers. Galliard, for example, makes this anticipation explicit when he admonishes the love-stricken Fillamour to “Come lay by all sullen resolves! For now the hour of the Berjeare [sic] approaches, Night, that was made for Lovers!” (3.1); he then informs Laura, who is dressed as a man, that he has “given order for Musick, Dark Lanthorns, and Pistolls” (3.1). In these two lines, Galliard sets up the
type of performance he hopes to enact - a performance in which men seek to consume women’s bodies - and refers to the material objects, or props, this performative event requires, most significantly for my reading, the lantern. This prop will allow the characters to dispel dim matter by translating it into visual matter and vice versa. Galliard is, in a manner of speaking, providing a script for the performance that he, as well as Fillamour, Julio, Tickletext, and Sir Signal all hope to successfully perform before the sun rises.

Here it is important to clarify exactly what role women play in the script that Galliard has outlined. If men are to play the consumers, women will play the consumed - men like Galliard perform roles based on satiating their appetites, while women act as consumable objects, with no agency or desires except for what serve the men’s appetites. In Act 1, shortly after he appears onstage for the first time, Galliard offers a quasi-Hobbesian justification for enjoying the favors of Rome’s prostitutes: “Lawful enjoyment! Prithee what’s lawful enjoyment, but to enjoy’em according to the generous indulgent Law of Nature; enjoy’em as we do Meat, Drink, Air, Light, and all the rest of her common blessings” (1.1). Women, according to Galliard’s libertine sexual logic, are material commodities to be enjoyed like food or other physical, nonhuman resources. Whereas Galliard and eventually Fillamour openly acknowledge their physical appetites, Tickletext and Sir Signal are more furtive about their intentions with the “courtizans” they hope to enjoy; they function much like the bishop in Rochester’s “Satyr against Reason and Mankind” as discussed in Chapter 1, as men who are aware of their physical appetites, but attempt to hide them. Tickletext hides behind a veneer of piety, while Sir Signal seems to divert his attentions towards non-bodily objects of desires: snuff-boxes, fashionable rapier swords, and cravats, just to mention a few. Also like Rochester’s bishop, Tickletext and Sir Signal try to perform their
physical desires in private, away from prying eyes. During the adventures of the night, however, the consumption performances of both Cavalier and fop will meet with failure.

Night is also the setting in which Marcella and Cornelia will enact their own, much more successful, performances. Cornelia foreshadows this feminine script at the beginning of Act 3, during the following exchange with Galliard, who still thinks she is a Roman Courtizan:

GALLIARD. . . . I love thee with a vigorous, eager passion,
- Be kind dear Silvianetta - prethee do,

Say you believe and make me blest tonight?

...........

CORNELIA. If I shoul’d be so kind-hearted! What good use wou’d you make for so obliging an opportunity?

GALLIARD. That which happy night was ordained for.

CORNELIA. Well Signor, ‘tis coming on, and then I’le try what courage the dark will inspire me with . . . (Behn 3.1)

Cornelia’s last line contains a double meaning: Galliard, hearing her say this from the balcony above the stage, probably believes she is referring to a sexual encounter, that is, a sexual performance in which he consumes her body as one would a commodity; the other meaning of Cornelia’s statement refers to her own intentions, the script she and Marcella intend to perform in the dark, that is, the comedic “testing” of the Cavalier male that attends so many of the “gay couples” on the Restoration stage.\(^{38}\) In this scene, Cornelia’s script is embedded, or hidden

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\(^{38}\) Examples of this dynamic are ubiquitous in Restoration comedy and can be seen in Sir George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*, Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, William Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, George Farquhar’s *The Inconstant: or, The Way to Win Him*, and Behn’s *The City Heiress*, just to mention a handful of examples. For critical commentary on this dramatic trope
within Galliard’s, which is appropriate for a play in which women must first stoke, and then
direct masculine desire. As Spencer acknowledges in her analysis of *Feign’d Courtezans*, “the
women in her [Behn’s] play are the better actors in all senses – better at dissembling than the
men and more actively shaping the plots of their lives” (Spencer 96). By successfully using
objects that illuminate their surroundings, such as lanterns and candles, Marcella and Cornelia
effectively determine what constitutes dim matter and where it occurs. The women characters do
what the men cannot, that is, they successfully control their material surroundings and in doing
so are able to avoid the traps of dim matter.

Despite these competing gendered scripts - and the gendered asymmetry of awareness of
them - all of the main characters are aware of the visual dynamics surrounding sexual
consumption. In Act 4, scene 1 this awareness is illustrated in an exchange between Marcella,
Fillamour, and Galliard. They are in a space described as “as in Silvianetta’s apartment” (39
[stage directions]), and Marcella - the supposed courtesan “Ephemia” - is “richly and loosely
dressed” (39 [stage directions]). In this scene, Galliard is trying to persuade Fillamour to
relinquish his idealized notions of love in order to enjoy the more physical favors of the
supposed courtesan, while Fillamour seems to waiver between these two modes of valorization.
In essence, he waivers between a romanticized version of patriarchal heterosexual relations and a
more Hobbsean, libertine impulse represented by Galliard. Marcella, in her Silvianetta person,
tells Fillamour that he may enjoy her in the latter mode:

MARCELLA. . . . Was all this Beauty given, for one poor petty Conquest:

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see Misty Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating
Marriage on the London Stage*, Nancy Copeland, *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women
and the Theatre*, and Scott Mackenzie, “Sexual Arithmetic: Appetite and Consumption in *The
Way of the World.*”
- I might have made a hundred hearts my slaves,
  In this lost time of bringing one to Reason –
  Farewell thou dull Philosopher in Love;
  When Age has made me wise – I'le send for you again.

GALLIARD. By this good light, a Noble glorious Whore!

FILLAMOUR. Oh stay, - I must not let such beauty fall,

- A whore – consider yet, the charms of Reputation:
  The ease, the quiet and content of innocence,
  The awfull Reverence, all good men will pay thee,
  Who as thou art will gaze without respect,
  - And cry – what pity ‘tis she is – a whore. (4.1)

Marcella, in somewhat masculine language, frames her sexual endeavors – or, more appropriately those of her “Silvanetta” persona – in terms that evoke an ethos of libertine consumption. Like offstage male libertines, such as Rochester, Sedley, and Charles II, her attitude towards sex is a matter of “the more the better.” She linguistically codes this attitude in a way that evokes libertine violence: Fillamour is a potential “Conquest,” and her lovers “slaves.”

Then, in a manner that evokes Rochester’s “Satyr against Reason and Mankind,” she dismisses Fillamour as a “dull Philosopher in love” (emphasis mine). In a response filled with pauses, Filamour begs her to consider the more immaterial aspects of her status, that is, her “Reputation” and the “Reverence, all good men will pay thee” – significantly, Fillamour stakes his argument on a visual metaphor, claiming that “as thou art [men] will gaze without respect, - And cry – what pity ‘tis she is – a whore” (emphasis mine). Of course, the rhetorical impact of these lines is compromised by Galliard’s preceding statement, which is in response to Marcella’s
“Conquest” speech; “By this *good light*, a Noble glorious whore!” (emphasis mine). Both men foreground the visual dynamics of Marcella/Silvianetta’s sexual status: she is an object to be visually consumed – something emphasized by the “loosly and richly” manner in which she has dressed herself. The stage directions in this scene also emphasize visibility as a key component of masculine consumption. Marcella’s physical movements, dictated by the stage directions, reveal how she is actually controlling the visual consumption of her own body. Marcella is “going out” (42 [stage directions]) presumably towards the side of the stage as though she is leaving the scene. Fillamour, as though waking from a trace, declares that “The Visionary pleasure disappears, - and I’me my self again” (4.1); by removing her body from his immediate proximity, Marcella reveals her control of the situation by momentarily relinquishing it; the fact that the audience can see her, distanced and yet still onstage, highlights the tension between masculine prerogative of consumption and the comedic disruption of this prerogative.

We first know that night has fallen when, in the middle of act 3, Marcella enters the scene in men’s clothing “*with a Lanthorn [sic]*” (33 [stage directions]). A few lines later, Tickletext enters the scene wearing “*a Periwig and Cravat of Sir Signal’s: A Sword by his side, and a dark [unlit] lanthorn*” (34 [stage directions]). Tickletext attempts to use material signifiers in order to visually recreate himself, which he admits soon after entering: “well *Certo* ‘tis a wonderful pleasure to deceive the World: And as a learned man well observ’d, that *the sin of wenching lay in the habit only*: I having laid that aside, Timothy Tickletext . . . Is free to recreate himself” (3.1). Much like the female leads, Tickletext embraces the possibility of self-creation through material signifiers, as does Sir Signal, who enters shortly after, “*with a Masquerading Coat over his clothes, without a Wigg or Cravat, with a dark Lanthorn*” (35 [stage directions]). These material objects have experienced a kind of slippage: they have moved from their proper owner -
a young, upper-class male - to his tutor, an old, lower class male. Though they are still technically visual matter, this slippage is similar to that which attends objects in the dark: they become unmoored from their cultural and social significations and float promiscuously between various male bodies.

The one prop that does not experience slippage, and which actually allows characters to navigate dark environments is the lantern. The women characters, especially Marcella and Cornelia, are far more adept at using this prop than the men, if only for the fact that they use it at all. Marcella first illustrates this when Tickletext enters - the stage directions read, “*she opens hers* [her lantern], *looks on him, and goes out*” (34 [stage directions]). Marcella, piercing the “darkness” surrounding her, translates Tickletext from dim matter to visual matter and, recognizing that this is not the man she is after, removes herself from the scene in order to enact the feminine “script” mentioned above. Galliard enters the scene shortly after Tickletext makes his entrance. The male characters, however, become mired in the darkness that Marcella deftly navigates. When Galliard enters this scene, with “*a dark lanthorn*” (34 [stage directions]), what follows is a scene of mutual mis-recognition between him and Tickletext.

Tickletext moves slowly towards the voice he hears, “*groping towards Gall*” (34 [stage directions]); Galliard, unlike the silly tutor, actually uses his lantern, but it is not enough for him to “read” Tickletext correctly: according to the stage directions Galliard “*goes toward him [Tickletext], and opens the Lanthorn - and shuts it straight*” (34). Galliard quickly shuts the lantern (“shuts it straight”), and while we cannot know exactly how this scene was performed at the Duke’s Theatre, the fact that the stage directions call for speed allows us to assume that Galliard has only caught a momentary glimpse of Tickletext. Galliard reinforces this with his reaction, “Oh ‘tis the Knight, - are you there Signior?” (3.1). Galliard believes that Tickletext is
Sir Signal, presumably because he has spied the dim figure in front of him just long enough to get a glance of the perriwig and cravat that Tickletext is wearing. Conversely, Tickletext believes that Galliard is “Barberacho,” a false identity adopted by Petro, Cornelia and Marcella’s servant, earlier in the play. In the dark *material signifiers, or dim matter, become unmoored from their intended signifieds*. The old, pedantic Tickletext becomes of the young fop Sir Signal; in the dark, the dim matter of his Perriwig and Cravat, as seen through the flash of the lantern, overtake Tickletext’s agency, that is, they force him to become Sir Signal, who Galliard perceives as a rival.

Galliard, as the stage directions indicate, draws his sword (34) in order to challenge Tickletext (who he believes is Sir Signal) to a duel in order to determine who will enjoy “Ephemia,” Marcella’s assumed courtisan persona. Galliard, his lantern apparently forgotten, then “gropes” (34 [stage directions]) for Tickletext: the dim matter of the stage prevents him from finding his rival, and the scene soon descends into farcical violence: “Tickletext retiring hastily runs against Octavio, who is just entering, almost beats him down, Oct. strikes him a good blow, beats him back and draws: Tick. Gets close up in a corner of the stage, Oct. gropes for him as Gall. Does, and both meet and fight with each other” (34 [stage directions]). None of these men - the rakish Galliard, the foppish Tickletext, or the overbearing brother Octavio - are able to successfully perform their masculine identities because onstage dim matter prevents them from doing so. Unable to see, none of the men are able to find, fight, and defeat their rivals and, thus, are no closer to consuming the bodies of the women they desire. Their loss of visual dominance over their material surroundings creates too much slippage between bodies, objects, and spaces for this to happen; ironically the lantern, the one physical object that would enable them to do this, goes unnoticed and unused.
Octavio then repeats these dynamics with Sir Signal who, as mentioned, has also tried to physically disguise himself. By this time, Galliard has left the scene. After Octavio, who Galliard believes is Tickletext, threatens Galliard with his sword, Galliard seems to acknowledge his compromised position: “one civil thrust will do’t: - And ‘twere a damn’d rude thing to disappoint so fine a woman, - therefore I’le withdraw me awhile” (3.1) - the stage directions then read “he slips out” (35). Galliard’s only option in the face of dim matter is to pull back and regroup. The stage is now set for the farcical re-enactment of the previous scene, but this time between Octavio and Sir Signal who “Advancing softly, and groping with his hands, meets the point of Oct. sword, as he is groping for Gall.” (35 [stage directions]). The exchange that follows mirrors that between Galliard and Tickletext: once Sir Signal reveals his presence via touch (“meets the point of Oct. sword”), Octavio admonishes him, “Traytor darest thou not stand my sword!” To which Sir Signal replies, “hah! Swords! No Signor - scusa mea Signor” (3.1). Sir Signal reveals himself to be an effeminate fop, something the audience knows, though Octavio does not; Sir Signal’s masculinity is further signified as lacking, as less martial and therefore, within the sexual economy of so many Restoration comedies, less desirable. Octavio, however, does not establish himself as a dominant masculine figure either, whether over his perceived rival or his material surroundings. Retreating from the masculine sword, Sir Signal “Hops to the door: And feeling for his way with his outstrecth Arms, runs his Lanthorn in Julio’s face who is just entering; finds he’s oppos’d with a good punch backward, and slips aside into a corner over against Tickletext: Julio meets Octavio and fights him, Oct. falls, Julio opens his Lanthorn and sees his mistake” (35 [stage directions]). In the presence of dim matter, identity slippage occurs yet again: from Octavio’s viewpoint, as opposed to the actor playing him, “Galliard” who is really “Sir Signal” becomes (is?) Julio. Masculine identities, those of more and less desirable and
virile males, blend together in the dark environment. Unable to see, these men are reduced to their blunt physicality; like billiard balls bouncing around a pool table, they are roughly interchangeable, notable only for their ability to move through and take up space. Julio does use his lantern, thus establishing momentary dominance over the scenery, but, as the audience knows, he has done so too late for the male characters to grasp what is “really” going on. Octavio sums up this phenomenon when he declares to Julio, “I find the Night has equally deceived us; and you are fitly come! To share with me the hopes of dear Revenge!” As though Behn is trying to highlight the lack of masculine agency that marks dark scenes contains dim matter, the stage direction following this declaration of visual impotence read, “[Octavio] Gröpes for his lanthorn which is dropt (35 [stage directions]).

As readers or viewers familiar with the Feign’d Courtezans may point out, there is one female character that does not successfully enact a feminine script, and who falls prey to dim matter much like the male characters. As Lisa Lowe acknowledges, Laura Lucretia, in contrast to Marcella and Cornelia, “does not win the man of her dreams, inserting an ambivalent note in an otherwise typical happy ending” (Lowe 93). Much like Angellica Bianca in Behn’s The Rover, which I will discuss in the next chapter, Laura not only pushes against patriarchal constraints, but openly defies them. As Lowe argues, “in contrast to Marcella and Cornelia, Laura refuses to accept the connections between social inclusion, feminine chastity, and marriage” (101); what the other women only “feign,” Laura practices. The crucial episode that illuminates this difference between the female characters is in Act 3, scene 1. In this scene, Laura enters “from the house in a Night gown” (38 [stage directions]); she has heard Julio, her betrothed from whom she has been trying to escape, and comes towards the voice, mistaking him for Galliard (3.1). Julio, mistaking her in turn for Cornelia, who is also using the name Silvianetta, replies “A Lover
and her slave” (3.1) while Laura “takes him by the hand” (38 [stage directions]) and enters the house with him. Relying on touch and sound, Laura commits a misstep similar to the male characters when they are immersed in dim matter. Although Octavio interrupts Julio and Laura before they can have sex, Laura experiences the kind of radical embodiment that attends masculine consumption in this play: she is forced to engage the physical world without visual access and, along with Julio, becomes interchangeable with another consumable object: he becomes no different than Galliard, while she is a physical substitute for Cornelia.

In the context of this Night’s Intrigue, Laura performs like a man, which evokes Lowe’s claim that “Laura’s sexual desire and contempt for conventional morality [is] more closely associated with masculinity than femininity within the play’s social context” (101). This is not to say, however, that Laura reaps the full benefits of being a man in Restoration culture: “in contrast to Marcella and Cornelia, Laura plays the game of courtship like a man, and is willing to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage . . . but Laura’s audaciousness exacts a price . . . Laura is paired off with Julio and must accept the arranged marriage she has tried to avoid” (102). Laura raises questions about the agency that women possess, and the social “cost” of exerting this agency. Like many other characters found in Behn’s corpus - The Rover’s Angelica Bianca or The City Heiress’s Lady Galliard - Laura openly pushes against the patriarchal constraints of her time, but in doing so meets with less success than her female counterparts, Marcella and Cornelia. What is the “proper” way of exerting agency as a women in Restoration theater? For women who consume bodies and objects, how can this agency allow them to perform self-directed scripts, and, when matter pushes back (as it does overwhelmingly for men), what costs are enacted against the would-be feminine agent? Does gendered authorship determine how
gendered agency is represented onstage? These are questions that I will take up in the next chapter, where I revisit Behn’s articulation of consumption, gender, and agency.

**Conscious versus Unconscious Performance in Edward Ravenscroft’s The London Cuckolds**

In one of the precious few critical pieces available on Ravenscroft’s *The London Cuckolds*, Douglas Canfield argues that “Restoration drama is one of the social institutions that continues the class warfare of mid-century England,” (114) and that “while Edward Ravenscroft’s *The London Cuckolds* is the least overtly political of these plays . . . There is no mistaking the class warfare” (115). I agree that class warfare - aristocratic male versus citizen husband - does inform the play’s action, but I would like to push back against the way Canfield argues this warfare plays out. He claims that:

> the conflict of those Restoration comedies featuring cit-cuckolding is related to the same class warfare, reinscribes the same ideology, and does so, in Foucault’s terms, not only through *language* but through the *body-language* of stage performance and, indeed, through the *bodies* themselves, where the perfect, potent bodies of Cavalier rakes dominate the impotent bodies of cits, and where the bodies of women become contested ground for class dominance and, ultimately, symbols of the contested land of England itself. (115)

It is true that in Ravenscroft’s 1681 comedy, the rakes have more success in their sexual misadventures than the cits, but not every rake is created equal in the play. The “perfect, potent bodies” of the Cavalier characters experience the same kind of radical embodiment seen in *The Feign’d Courtezans*, and for the same reason: dim matter subverts their efforts to enact masculine consumption performances.

While class does rear its head in *The London Cuckolds*, the inter-class conflicts are also complicated by intra-class differences based on how men consume women’s bodies. This difference is first detected in the opening exchange between Ramble and Townly, which evokes the ironic pedagogical tone found in Rochester’s “The Disabled Debauchee.” The relationship
between Townly and Ramble, as first presented in Act 1, scene 2, is framed as an ironic dialogue between master and pupil. In “The Disabled Debauchee,” Rochester’s speaker claims that:

Should any youth (worth being drunk) prove nice,

And from his fair inviter meanly shrink,

‘Twill please the ghost of my departed vice

If, at my counsel, he repent and drink. (Wilmot 25-28)

In similar fashion, Townly admonishes Ramble to “prethee leave hunting, that difficult game, and learn of me to divert thy self with a bottle, leave enquiring where there’s a pretty woman, and ask where the best wine is, take women as I do, when they come in thy way by accident; you will never be successful so long as you make it your business; Love like riches comes more by fortune than industry” (Ravenscroft 1.2). A schoolmaster in the libertine pastimes of drinking and whoring, Townly lectures his pupil to take a light touch in consuming women’s bodies, while he should be exuberant in consuming wine. Ramble proves to be a poor student, as evident by his decision to reply to Eugenia’s letter only a few lines later. Townly’s admonition to Ramble, especially in the context of the many sexual misadventures that the latter experiences through the rest of the play, lays out additional rules for performing masculinity in Ravenscroft’s London: conscious performance will necessarily result in failure; by extension, trying too hard to consume will result in one’s inability to do so 39.

39 Townly’s unconscious, always-successful performances evoke Butler’s notion of the apparent “naturalness” of gender (Gender Trouble 178). Through his unconscious and unintentional sexual consumption performances, Townly engages in the “sedimentation of gender norms,” (Butler 178) which parallel Douglass Canfield’s claim about the theatrical injunction in many Restoration comedies to portray Cavalier characters, such as Townly, as the “natural, better-bred betters” of the Cit cuckold (Tricksters and Estates 22).
The outdoor, nighttime environment of Act 2, scene 2 highlights the tension between conscious and unconscious masculine performance. The early return of Eugenia’s husband Dashwell has foiled Ramble’s assignation with Eugenia, and Ramble is waiting in the street in order to reenter the house once Dashwell falls asleep. Peggy, Wiseacres’s naive young wife, enters the scene with her Aunt, presenting herself visually to Ramble; he can see her because of the presence of link boy. Wiseacres and Doodle enter the scene to find Ramble flirting with her and their dialogue frames Peggy as consumable matter by comparing her to food. Wiseacres complains, “men already buzzing about her, how comes this?” To which Doodle answers “Where there is meat in summer, there will be flies” (2.2 emphasis mine). This metaphor provides a sexual double entendre to the following exchange between Wiseacres and Peggy:

PEGGY. I did not know but it might be the King, they say he is a fine man, Nuncle.

WISEACRES. This was a night-walker, a spy, a thief, a villain, he would have murther’d thee, and eat thee.

PEGGY. Oh grievous! I am glad you came then, Nuncle, he said indeed he could eat me. (2.2)

Ramble does indeed want to “eat” Peggy, and will do so successfully in a later act. In this scene, surrounded by but not yet immersed in hypothetical darkness, Ramble is framed as a typical libertine, who attempts to seduce married women and borrows some of his cultural capital from the figure of the king, Charles II, who was known for his libertine appetites. Wiseacres sees him

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40 The figure of the link boy contains sexual undertones, as evident in Rochester’s “The Disabled Debauchee.” In the poem, the speaker holds a contest with a women, in which “the best kiss was the deciding lot, / Whether the boy fucked you or I the boy” (39-40); the presence of the link boy in this scene, especially his proximity to Peggy, emphasizes her status as a sexual object.
as a threat to his masculine prerogative, which is his monopoly on the consumable matter of his wife’s body. According to implied stage directions in his dialogue - “I’ll step aside, and watch where they go” (2.2) - Ramble stands further away on the stage, listening to what they are saying and, visually speaking, this reminds the audience of the masculine libertine performance he intends to enact.

What happens next, though, destabilizes any sense of agency Ramble can claim over the scene: Ramble becomes mired in dim matter, which overtakes his agency to consume Peggy’s body. Wiseacres pays the link boy and tells him to put out his light before the rest of the characters exit the stage, leaving Ramble solus. In case the audience is in doubt of what kind of environment his character is in, he exclaims, “A crafty old Fox, he put out the Link that I might not see where they went in” (2.2). Townly then enters the scene, his vision impaired, but his spirits unperturbed, stating “Ha, the Light’s gone, and I can see nobody” (2.2). Eugenia’s maid Jane then enters the scene as from Eugenia’s house and, mistaking Townly for Ramble, the two “take hands” (24 [stage directions]), and she leads Townly to the sexual assignation designed for Ramble. Whereas Ramble cannot see in order to enact a conscious consumption performance, Townly is able to feel his way towards an unconscious one. In the dark, the unconscious performer has gained the right to consume a woman’s body. Here dim matter acts like quicksand: those who struggle against it simply sink faster, while those who ‘go with the flow’ can keep their heads up. According to the stage directions, Ramble then “goes and feels out the door and turns back” (25 [stage directions]); his motions (“feels out”) emphasize the fact that his masculine agency is physically compromised during this scene. He then orders his servant Roger to fetch a link boy, though the audience knows that he has done so too late. While Roger is gone on his errand, Ramble “walks about humming a tune, then feels at the door again” (25 [stage
directions]); though this stage direction only takes up a line or two of the dramatic text, it’s drawn out enactment onstage would have provided the audience with a humorous moment, as they would have been able to see the Ramble perform his sexual frustration in the dark, surrounded by dim matter – he must “feel” it rather than see it – and in expectation of a consumption performance that we, as spectators, know Townly is currently performing.

As Ramble waits in expectation, Townly reenters the scene with Eugenia, and the following encounter between the rakes further emphasizes how dim matter threatens Ramble’s conscious consumption performances. The stage directions read, “Enter Townly, Eugenia – in the street, embracing. Jane, half out, holding the door” (25 [stage directions]); Townly re-enters the stage, and thus the dim environment of the street, while Jane stands in a liminal position that emphasizes the barrier between dim and visible environments. Ramble realizes that another male has consumed what he had intended to: “Am I jilted then after all” he realizes, and then calls for “light” (2.2), which Roger, arriving at just the time Ramble calls out, promptly brings (25 [stage directions]). Roger’s entrance with the link boy fundamentally alters the material surroundings, turning dim matter into visually recognizable, and hence potentially dominated matter; but as happens so often in Restoration comedies, the timing is unfortunate.

Before Roger enters with the link boy Ramble must rely on his other senses – “I hear a man’s voice,” he exclaims while Townly and Eugenia are saying their goodbyes – but once the link boy enters the stage, Ramble is able to see his assumed rival, and thus is able to assert his supposed prerogative over Eugenia’s body. “Have at Traytor; ----- draw, and fight” (2.2) he exclaims, as the stage direction let us know that “He draws, and runs at Townly” (26 [stage directions]); in the dark, Ramble attempts to use perhaps the most ubiquitous of masculine objects, the sword, which I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, in order to re-assert his
dominance over the situation. However, given the temporal placement of dim matter – between his discovery of his “rival” and the moment he can visually “grasp” what is happening – he does not realize that he is about to harm his friend; he has been placed in a situation in which to use his sword, but the lingering effects of dim matter still affect his ability to “see” what exactly is going on.

Here the juxtaposition between Townly and Ramble’s performance styles, which in this case means their consumptions styles, comes into explicit focus, highlighted in the following exchange:

TOWNLY. . . . I guess, I am luckily fallen upon some of thy intrigues; prethee, who was this Wench, with whom I have had so sweet a satisfaction?

RAMBLE.: I perceive your innocence by your ignorance.

Come this way, farther from the house.

It is one of my two intrigues . I beat the bush, but thou hast catch’d the bird.

TOWNLY. I only shot flying – I did no great execution – next time she’ll be your game. (2.2)

Townly sees Eugenia as an object, something to be enjoyed physically, like food, wine, and the bodies of hunted animals; the fact that he has to ask who she is, and the fact that she has slept with him when she intended to have sex with Ramble raises the possibility that the lovers have not even seen one another. Townly’s actions indicate that, at least in the presence of dim matter, an unconscious, and therefore more likely successful performance involves the acceptance of one’s own radical embodiment; rather than struggling against dim environments, relinquishing control, however momentarily, allows one to consume matter in accord with masculine performance styles. It is Townly’s performance style – unconscious and unintended, as opposed
to Ramble’s “intrigues” – that allow him to consume women’s bodies, even when he is surounded by dim matter, which overtakes the action of Ramble’s conscious intended performances. He even admits that he “did no great execution,” and rather than bragging of his conquest, simply wishes his friend better luck next time.

Ramble’s conscious attempts to consume women’s bodies are overtaken by dim matter once again in Act 3. This time, Ramble attempts to sleep with Arabella and, significantly, he describes himself as a “half-famished Lover” (3.1). Following the generic early return of the would-be cuckold Doodle, Ramble once again finds himself in the street, waiting for a sign from his lover’s servant in order to enter the premises while Doodle is asleep. This time he gets himself stuck in a cellar window trying to creep in. Dim matter once again thwarts Ramble’s ability to perform: he finds himself “stuck fast” due to “some damn’d hook or staple on the inside [that] has got hold of my clothes” (3.1). Ontologically speaking, the matter that Ramble cannot see works against him in order to prevent a successful consumption performance. Things only go downhill for Ramble from here. A link boy soon enters and “as he passes by Ram. knocks his link on his head as by chance and exit” (31 [stage directions]). Not a moment later, the neighbor empties a chamber pot on his head “just as he looks up” (31 [stage directions]). Arabella’s maid Engine then explains that, rather than an instance of cruel humor or other intentional affront, this is a regular occurrence - “the roguish Prentice at the next house does so almost every night” (3.2), the implication being that, physically speaking, Ramble is simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Ramble has lost visual access to his surroundings, and in the process becomes mired not only in dim matter, but waste matter as well, which, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, presents a threat to masculine consumption prerogatives. Two chimney sweeps walk by and one who is “damnably full of wind” (3.2) then “stands with his back just
against Ramble’s face going to untruss” (32 [stage directions]). Ramble alerts them to his presence through auditory means, but rather than assisting the now abject rake, “they take his Hat and Perriwig off, clap on one of their old sooty hats on his head and run away – his face is all black’d with them” (32 [stage directions]). Just as Sir Signal’s objects slip from his body to that of Tickletext’s in The Feign’d Courtezans, objects experience class slippage when transformed into dim matter.

Much like the previous nighttime street scene, Townly enters drunk and singing (34 [stage directions]), just in time to witness his friend’s embarrassment. This time, Townly offers Ramble the same advice he did in Act 1: “This comes of your whoring still. — hereafter, Ned, be rul’d by me, leave lewd whoring, and fall to honest drinking” (3.2). Townly admonishes Ramble for his conscious intrigues, and explicitly advises him to change his consumption performance style to one less conscious, much like his own. At the beginning of Act 5, Ramble seems to have accepted Townly’s advice, or to at least have made a partial conversion:

RAMBLE. To night, Frank, I am for a Bottle, or anything, with thee; my own ill fortune and thy counsel have at last converted me.

TOWNLY. Do you think you shall not relapse?

RAMBLE. I have not the least inclination now to any intrigue, except it be with that foolish little innocent thing I told you I met last night; and the thoughts of her are transitory; one bottle will wash ‘em from my remembrance.

TOWNLY. Now I have hopes of thee.

RAMBLE. Henceforth I’ll never make love my business, if I find a Lady willing, and fair opportunity present; I’ll nick the critical minute, go my way and trust providence for such another.
TOWNLY. Right, so much I allow. (5.1)

Apparently fortune smiles on Ramble’s new found conviction, because only a few lines later, Peggy’s Aunt enters “with a Candle” (40 [stage direction]). The Aunt’s entrance functions as an implied stage direction: the stage directions explicitly read that this scene takes place in the street (39), and the series of recognitions that takes place after her entrance lets us know that the setting is also dark: Arabella recognizes Ramble, Engine recognizes Townly, and Ramble recognizes the Aunt when he says “This is the old Gentlewoman that was with that innocent little creature - I shall find her now” (5.1). The Aunt’s candle has transformed the onstage bodies from dim matter to visually recognizable - and thus potentially consumable - bodies. Townly exits the stage with Arabella in order to have sex with her while her husband is away, and Ramble, seeing that fortune has given him a way to consume Peggy, enters the house in search of her. Much to her husband’s mortification, and the audience’s comedic delight, Ramble finally launches a successful consumption performance. Thinking on his feet, he convinces Peggy that he is a magician who will teach her the “duty of a wife” (5.2). He ironically reverses her husband’s earlier language to her:

PEGGY. . . . They told me that such a one as you last night would eat me.

RAMBLE. But no Body shall eat you whilst I am with you to night and take pains to teach you the whole Duty of a Wife (5.2)

We the audience, as opposed to the naive Peggy, know that Ramble will indeed consume her body, just as Townly consumes wine and how myriad Restoration rakes consume women’s bodies, that is, as an object (interchangeable with food and wine) that men form relationships with in order to dominate and bolster their social identities.
Those familiar with *The London Cuckolds* are aware that Ramble and Townly are not the only libertine cuckold-makers in Ravenscroft’s play. Loveday is the third desirable rake in the play and, though his performances do not conform to the conscious-unsuccessful / unconscious-successful binary that structures those of the Town gentlemen discussed above, his interactions with Eugenia and her husband Dashwell illustrate how dim matter thwarts the masculine performances of lower status males as well. Ravenscroft clearly illustrates this in the whipping scene in Act 5. Earlier in Act 5, Eugenia concocts a plot to remove her husband from their house: claiming that she wants revenge on Loveday’s “Insolence” toward her, she bids Dashwell to “dress yourself in a Night gown and Pinners, and go down in the dark, take a good Cudgel in your hand and stay in the Summer-house till he comes, and rub him soundly, then turn him out of doors” (5.3). She also bids him to “have something White about your head” (5.3). Dashwell no sooner hears her plan but he agrees to it, exiting the stage to go collect the props necessary for the performance his wife has laid out for him. Loveday then enters the scene, praising her wit, and she assures him that “an hour is our own by this invention” (5.3). In concocting this plot to remove her husband from the scene in order to enjoy an hour’s sexual congress with Loveday, Eugenia consciously manipulates dim matter in order to subvert her husband’s masculine prerogative: by bidding Dashwell to wear something white, she manipulates material signifiers so that Loveday may more successfully navigate dim matter - as the later act will confirm, the scene takes place in darkness, and a white object would help Loveday’s make out his rival in a dim environment.

The whipping scene itself functions as a post-coital “after piece.” By this point Loveday and Eugenia have already had sex and resigned themselves to parting once again. What happens in the garden then, serves as a final way for Eugenia to subvert her husband’s masculine
prerogative to consume her physical body. Unlike Ramble and Townly, there is no tension between conscious and unconscious performances - Loveday is fully aware of what is really going on - but his hyper-conscious performance is similar in that it incorporates dim matter, both that discussed above (Dashwell’s feminine clothing) and that of his own body. Neither character can see each other clearly, but Loveday is aware that the figure under the women’s clothing is Dashwell, his cuckold rival. The meeting of these two men is a clash of dim materials, which neither character can technically “see,” but which the audience can see. Loveday then enacts a double masculine performance: he is “actually” performing his dominance over Dashwell, while pretending to perform a potential rival. He addresses “Eugenia” in courtly romantic language: “Oh my Dear! Art thou here? Let me prepare my Arms to embrace thee, and give thee the sweet enjoyment of my Love! Receive it then in this kind, hearty salutation” (5.3). The stage directions then indicate that Loveday “Whips Dashwel” (57 [stage directions]) - this time the exploits of the husband, rather than the rake are met with humiliation and failure in an environment marked by dim matter. Once Eugenia enters “with a Light” (58 [stage directions]), dispelling dim matter and transforming it into visual, potentially dominated matter, Loveday then deftly switches his performance track: Dashwel, still being whipped cries out “Oh! Hold, hold you are deceived” (5.3), to which Loveday responds “No, Lewd Woman, ‘tis you who are deceived in your expectation; Now I will go to your Husband, and acquaint him with what a Chaste good Wife you are” (5.3). Of course, in true comic fashion, the transformation of dim matter allows everyone to see what is going on, but Dashwel, none the wiser, simply chalks things up to misunderstanding. “Well, well; talk no more of it,” Dashwel says, “he did it but to try my Wife for my sake” (5.3).
The cuckold remains ignorant, the lovers satisfied, and soon the curtain closes with all transgressions (with the exception of Peggy and Ramble’s) covered up. By examining the scenes in which unruly matter, in this case dim matter, overtakes the male character’s agency to consume, we can not so much move beyond class-based readings of *The London Cuckolds*, such as those provided by Canfield, but we can also see how gender and its attendant assumptions about human interaction with the material world informs the play’s comedic punch. As with Behn’s *The Feing’d Courtezans*, the audience has witnessed multiple failed attempts on the part of onstage men to consume women’s bodies, and we have seen how women and the non-human world push back against these efforts. While notions of class warfare may add to our understanding of Cavalier-vs.-Cit plays such as *The London Cuckolds*, an attention to dim matter shows how gender and matter inform such cultural productions as well.

**Domestic Dim Matter in William Burnaby’s The Modish Husband**

William Burnaby’s play *The Modish Husband* was known in its own time, if at all, as a resounding flop. The play lasted for only one performance, its debut in 1702. It is not my intention here to speculate on why exactly this was so, but one could do worse than offer the suggestion that the play’s action and thematic content were by that time somewhat outdated. Although it does incorporate some of the elements of the newer post-Collier theater such as the reform ed spouse and domestic harmony, the overall action of the play deals mainly with cuckoldry, sexual intrigue, and the efforts of married couples to fulfill their sexual desires out of wedlock. The play’s unpopularity may also explain the lack of critical attention surrounding it. Of course, *The Modish Husband* is not unique in these respects, but I mention this in order to draw attention to the fact that, well into the shift to what many critics have referred to as
“bourgeois” or “sentimental” theatre\textsuperscript{41}, many of the aristocratic elements of the earlier Restoration remained intact including, significantly, the use of dim matter in order to highlight the failure of masculine consumption of women’s physical bodies.

Unlike the dim scenes in \textit{The Feign’d Courtezans} and \textit{The London Cuckolds}, the dim scenes in \textit{The Modish Husband} all take place within indoor domestic spaces. In the middle of Act 3, scene 1, the stage directions read that the “\textit{scene changes to Sir Lively’s. A Dressing Table and Candle. Enter Lady Cringe and Maid}” (Burnaby 56 [stage directions]). These objects hold within them the potential for comedic movement; like Newton’s apple still hanging on the branch, their physical presence denotes kinetic potential, and the audience can bet with some assurance that a comedic dark scene hovers on the immediate theatrical horizon. Lady Cringe is preparing herself for her lover Lionel by staging a highly conscious performance of extra marital courtship: she gazes in her mirror (57), states that “I like myself mightily tonight” (3.1.187), and consciously displays her body, “now for a careless posture, that he mayn’t think I’ve put myself in this order for him, this will do” (3.1.192-193). Like Marcella and Cornelia in \textit{The Feign’d Courtezans}, Lady Cringe recognizes that masculine consumption relies on visibility.

Lionel is obviously aware of his “role” when he enters shortly after, as evident by the playful, sexually-tinged flirtation between the lovers:

\begin{quote}
LIONEL. Did you take me for your Husband, Madam?

LADY CRINGE. No, Sir — but why shou’d I be afraid of him?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} For more on the late-seventeenth century, post-Collier shift in English theater, see: John Brewer, \textit{The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century} (1997); Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, \textit{The Politics and Poetics of Transgression} (1986); and Gillian Bush-Bailey, \textit{Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late-Stuart Stage} (2006).
LIONEL. Because a Husband’s a Niggard of his Wealth, and might prevent your bounty to your Lover.

LADY CRINGE. Then to give away another’s Riches is not Generosity, but Plunder.

LIONEL. But these, Madam, are Riches that dwell only in the Imagination, and a Wife is a Miser Chest; while he thinks all within it safe, he is as happy as if it were so. (3.1.213-223)

What is significant about their flirtatious banter is the use of material metaphor to describe the sexual economy of cuckoldry that is, presumably, about to play out. Even though Lionel claims that these “Riches dwell only in the Imagination,” referring to notions of honor and chastity expected of married women, he nonetheless frames them as material goods. What must be emphasized here is that the “Riches” he refers to evoke the physical nature of wealth so prevalent in the early 18th-century, something that modern readers, so familiar with digital readouts of account balances and electronic transfers of money may not immediately grasp. And by framing the “Riches” of chastity, honor, etc. as “only in the Imagination” he uses the immaterial nature of one type of good in order to justify his consumption of a purely physical good, Lady Cringe’s body, which is visible both to him and to the audience. Lady Cringe hovers between agentic subject - she has manipulated events so that she can perform her extra-marital tryst with Lionel in the manner of an earlier Restoration sex comedy - and consumable, visual object. The two soon exit the stage, in order to perform their intended consumption of each other’s bodies.

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42 For more on the cultural and social responses to the early 18th-century tension between physical wealth and newer, immaterial forms of wealth, such as credit, see Deborah Valenze, The Social Life of Money in the English Past (2006).
Lord Promise then enters the scene, as the stage directions tell us, “in a Footman’s dress” (38). His disguise is apropos of his intention, which is to consume Lady Cringe’s body via sex. In order to do so he relies on not only on his class-based disguise, effected through status-based clothing, but also by plunging the scene into theatrical darkness: “So! I have put out the Lamps, the better to conceal myself,” he states, letting the audience know his intentions explicitly, even thought the audience can still see the actor/character on the stage. He soon realizes that another young gallant has beat him to the prize, cursing “Cankers eat their Lips off” (3.1.230). Rather than beating a hasty retreat he “listens again” (38 [stage directions]), long enough for him to become trapped by both Sir Lively Cringe, returning home too early as can be expected from would-be cuckolds, as well as the dim matter of the stage that he himself has created.

As in the Feign’d Courtezans and The London Cuckolds the scene quickly descends into violent farce. Sir Lively, expecting nothing amiss, says “I wonder how the Lamps come to be out, ‘tis scarce eleven —” (3.1.231), and then, as we can gloss from an implied stage direction - “We must grope our way to the door” (3.1.233) - he physically demonstrates his, and by implication Lord Promise’s compromised agency in an environment marked by dim matter. When Lord Promise tries to escape the scene, the unruly effects of dim matter rear themselves fully, much to the potential comic delight of an audience that still retains visual control over the scene. The stage directions read that, “going along, he pushes Sir Lively down, and is seized by the Man [Cringe’s servant], and beaten” (38 [stage directions]) and a few lines later, confused in the dim kerfuffle, Sir Lively “rises and strikes his man instead of the Thief [Lord Promise]” (38 [stage directions]). The audience can keep things straight, but the onstage male characters are not so fortunate.
Class and status slippage attends this loss of masculine prerogative, as should by now be expected during dim scenes. Lord Promise becomes a Thief, then Sir Cringe’s Man becomes the Thief who is actually Lord Promise; the lord and the servant switch places by becoming the same illusionary character. In Act 4, Lord Promise complains that due to the beating he has received, he “shall be under a Necessity of wearing my Perriwig like a Citizen” (4.1.9). This masculine class slippage occurs again later towards the end of the Act: in the dark, Harry, the son of a pimp, is given Lionel’s sword and halter, because Lady Cringe’s maid cannot physically see Harry waiting outside the balcony window (40 [stage directions]). Lionel has left these items behind in his efforts to escape, after having experienced *coitus interruptus* due to the noise made by Sir Lively and Lord Promise; the unruly effects of dim matter have radiated outward and have compromised his own masculine consumption performance, even though it was to take place in a lighted environment.

Despite the night’s occurrences, Sir Lively does not seem to suspect any marital transgression. He is described in the published version of the play as “one that is not so wicked as to believe ill of Women” (4), and he functions as the clueless husband type found in Restoration comedies such as *The London Cuckolds*, although he does not share the same class status as many of these characters. To return to Lionel’s earlier metaphor about “Riches,” it could be said that for Sir Lively such “Riches” - feminine honor (chastity), his wife’s physical body - are *not* “only in the Imagination” and that they can be kept safe even when without his field of vision. His fault, according to the sexual ethics of the play, results from trusting his wife even when he cannot physically see her - Ravenscroft’s Wisacres in *The London Cuckolds* would cringe as such an attitude indeed. The other male characters tease him for this in Act 4. Discussing the previous night’s misadventure, Will Fanlove hints to Sir Lively that “there are a
sort of familiar Robbers that will come at all hours by Day as well as by Night! And plunder you sometimes before your face, without touching your Money; and if you woul’d search that Closet, by what we have heard, you might find one of those Thieves there at this time” (4.1.65-69). Sir Lively’s response to this jab - “no body can get into that Closet, without my Wife lets ‘em in, for she keeps the Key of it her self” (71-72) - drives home the double entendre that fuels the comic nature of this scene and which Sir Lively does not notice. The “Closet” refers both to Lady Cringe’s actual private room as well as her vagina, and the Key, refers to both the physical key to said room as well as Lady Cringe’s honor, which Lionel has referred to as “Riches.” The three men, two cynical and one blissfully ignorant, then agree to go and ‘inspect the goods’ in person.

A few scenes later, the result of this wager between Sir Lively, Lord Promise, and Will results in yet another instance of dim matter’s deleterious effects on masculine performance. The scene begins with “A Table and a Candle. Enter Lady Cringe and Lionel” (47 [stage directions]). As with the play’s previous dim scene, it is tempting to guess just how many audience members would expect, correctly, that the scene will be plunged into darkness when the would-be cuckold arrives earlier than expected. The lovers begin this scene as they did their last assignation, with a highly generic courtship performance. Lady Cringe plays the coy lover: “No, no, no! I dare not venture myself one moment longer with you” (4.2.175-176); while Lionel plays the aggressive rake: “Come, Madam, throw off this disguise, fit only for a Husband, and put on Sincerity to meet your Lover” (4.2.177). Lionel is eager to get through the exposition and to the main piece: “this struggling is worse than a Battle, I shall be routed before I come to the Field” (4.2.195-196)43. Of course, it is Sir Lively who unknowingly “routs” the performance: the lovers hear

43 Lionel’s language here evokes two tropes also found in Rochester’s poetry: an association of violence with masculine sexuality as seen in “The Disabled Debauchee” when the speaker refers
him coming and Lady Cringe directs Lionel, almost on cue, “into this Closet” (4.2.211). Sir Lively then enters, and the dramatic irony of the scene is heightened when Lady Cringe unknowing repeats his language from the last scene: “How shou’d a Thief come in my Closet, when you know I always keep the Key of it my self?” (4.2.225-227). Believing his wife, but determined to prove his friends wrong, Sir Lively then “Takes up the Candle” (49 [stage directions]), and proceeds to examine the Closet, but what happens next illustrates, yet again, how women characters in Restoration drama seem more adept at manipulating dim matter, and how dim matter causes masculine performance to fail.

Just as Sir Lively is about to enter the closet, Lady Cringe “Blows out the Candle” (50 [stage directions]), translating the matter of the closet into dim matter. In doing so, she transforms the environment from a visual field in which her husband can assert his dominance over his rival, Lionel, into a more feminine space in which she holds agency over the sexual economy of the scene. Standing in darkness, surrounded by dim matter, Lady Cringe’s actions further highlight her control over this scene: she “Holds her Husband with one Hand, and feeling about, delivers her Lover with the other” (50 [stage directions]). Three line of dialogue pass before “Lionel kisses her Hand and steals off” (51 [stage directions]). What exactly happens between these two stage directions? Since the characters are surrounded by dim matter, which they cannot see, we can reasonably guess that for the space of the three intervening lines, Lady Cringe maintains contact with Sir Lively and Lionel. Visually speaking, the audience sees the rakish lover and would-be cuckold linked by the body of the woman over whom they are

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to “whores attached, their lords at home; / Bawds’ quarters beaten up, and fortresses won” (33-34); and an attendant, however comically expressed anxiety over a failure to perform, such as that found in “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” which I discuss in Chapter 1. I will consider the role that violence plays in representations of masculine consumption more fully in Chapter 4.
competing. Unlike a normal homosocial triangle, however, the presence of dim matter gives the contested female of the triangle full agency over the threesome’s actions. Her body simultaneously separates her lover from her husband, thus keeping the husband unaware of the real situation, while physically guiding the body of her lover, whose performance has already failed, out of harm’s way. No masculine performance has succeeded here (although Sir Lively is unaware of this), but Lady Cringe’s feminine performance, aided by dim matter, has allowed for a clean escape. As in Behn’s *Feign’d Courtezans* and Ravenscroft’s *London Cuckolds*, dim matter rears its head and, by compromising men’s visuals dominance over their environments, assures that masculine consumption remains unconsummated, while giving the consumable matter, the bodies of women, the upper hand.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown how unruly matter - both women characters who refuse to act as passive “objects” and the dim matter that they manipulate much more skillfully than men - precludes the successful enactment of onstage masculine consumption performances. Furthermore, these men become radically embodied, that is, they are forced to engage the material world without relying on vision. Onstage, as these men attempt to consume the bodies of women, they find that the material world pushes back against their desires, and, when this happens, the matter that composes their own bodies asserts itself against their masculine intentionality. Though through very different means, and for different purposes, the playwrights discussed in this chapter display a preoccupation with presenting male consumers that are ontologically fractured and, however momentarily, impotent. In this, we can see a direct link with the material discussed in chapter 1.
When masculine consumers are thwarted onstage, however, there are additional dynamics at play that are not found in the poetic texts discussed in this study. Gender and consumption, as portrayed in the theater, are the products of sensory engagement, of which vision is, admittedly, the most prominent. Within a sexual and ethical economy based on vision, and in which men are framed as the gazing subject and women the gazed-at object, what counts as feminine resistance to male desire, or the male prerogative to consume the material world? As I have shown, when forced to operate outside of a visual economy, men often fail to perform their identities via engagement with the material world; what should be a relationship between active men and passive matter becomes an agonistic (and often quite humorous) clash of materials that often precludes men’s successful consumption. Furthermore, women characters such as Lady Cringe, and Marcella often appear more adept at navigating dim environments and exerting their own agency over the course of events onstage. I would suggest, then, that what counts as resistance in Restoration theater is not “resistance” as modern individuals would conceive it - the assertion of the oppressed as a “subject” - but rather the strategic manipulation of oneself as object. After all, as I have discussed at length in the introductory chapter to this study, objects do not always function the way that “subjects” want them too. Working within the visual economy of consumption that marks Restoration drama, women characters do indeed resist male prerogative but do so by displacing themselves within the ontological and ethical confines presented to them. In the next chapter, I will explore how the two most commercially successful female playwrights of the Restoration and early-18th century, Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre, articulate the emergence of the feminine consumer and, in doing so, reveal changing attitudes towards what may be referred to as feminine resistance to patriarchal prerogatives. Behn has her heroines manipulate themselves within an occularcentric economy of consumption; years later, Centlivre
recycles these dynamics and, through her heroine Miranda, actively broadens the category of feminine resistance by asserting a feminine subjectivity that functions outside of an occularcentric frame.
Chapter 4:

Courtship by Design: Behn, Centlivre, and the Emergence of the Feminine Subject

Introduction

As two of the earliest professional female playwrights for the English theater, the relationship between Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre - as playwrights, professionals, and as women - has been the focus of a significant strain of early-modern literary criticism and theater history. As Nancy Copeland succinctly notes in her reading of four late-Stuart plays, including *The Rover* and *The Busie Body*, for each playwright gender was a central and oftentimes inescapable component of their theatrical practice:

> Gender roles and gender play are also central components of the comedies and their pre-twentieth-century history. They were first staged during a time of dramatically changing gender roles and their lengthy production histories subsequently placed them in dialogue with radically different ideas of appropriate and permissible behavior for both women and men. The gender of the playwrights was also a persistent issue, and attitudes toward Behn and Centlivre as women playwrights, including their defenses of their right to write, form an important part of the context in which these plays have been staged. (1)

The similarities between Behn and Centlivre are evident not only in the textual details of their work, which constitute the main focus of this chapter, but also in the institutional positions they held within the English theater. In a feminist revision of late-Stuart theater history, Gilli Bush-Bailey claims that in the early-eighteenth century, “Centlivre joins an already established body of theater women: she is part of a continuum of theatre women living and working, writing and performing in the commercial theatre . . . Centlivre does mark a rising generation of new theater women but it is a generation building on an already established theatre practice” (191). Given *The Rover’s* continued popularity in the first decade of the eighteenth century, as well as Centlivre’s own awareness of her position as a woman playwright following in Behn’s footsteps,
it is reasonable to assume that Centlivre quite intentionally borrows from and reformulates the representation of gendered consumption dynamics found in Behn’s play.

In the previous chapter, I read Restoration dim scenes in order to elucidate how certain Restoration comedies display a preoccupation with the failure of the masculine consumer. Following this analytical thread from the earlier decades of Restoration comedy into the early-eighteenth-century, I will discuss how Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre, arguably the two most significant female playwrights of this era, offer dramatic articulations of resistance to masculine consumption in two of their most commercially successful comedies, *The Rover* and *The Busie Body*. Behn and Centlivre both frame masculinity in terms of sword usage; their male characters use swords to metonymically display and physically perform masculine consumption. Their female heroines, in turn, use specific objects to manipulate the occularcentric dynamics associated with courtship and thus gain agency over their male counterparts. While Behn’s heroines use objects, most notably masks, in order to manipulate themselves as objects and thus achieve increased social mobility and sexual agency, Centlivre’s heroine Miranda deploys the physicality of documents in order to move beyond occularcentric consumption dynamics, and thus assert herself as an agentic subject. Where my analysis of these two plays, so often compared and contrasted in modern scholarship, differs from scholarly precedent is in my insistence on reading how these texts present characters who utilize the physical design of objects, in addition to their symbolic and ideological connotations, in order to enact gendered performances.

**Design and Performance: How Objects Work**

I will read both *The Rover* and *The Busie Body* in terms of how each play articulates gendered consumption through the use of specific objects, while paying attention to how material
design informs how those objects are used within a gendered economy of consumption.

Archaeologist John Robb offers a provocative rationale for using the notion of design in order to understand “how objects actually work” (Robb 166) in their social and cultural contexts. Robb resists the impulse to read objects as one would linguistic signs, claiming that “in a purely symbolic view, things are assigned meaning conventionally; they have no meaning in themselves. We encounter a thing, what follows is a mere act of decipherment, not of engagement. This deprives us of any purchase upon understanding how material objects (as opposed to linguistic signs) work” (167). While things may have symbolic meaning in certain contexts, and humans certainly do impose meaning on otherwise ubiquitous objects (red baseball caps may never be seen the same way again after the 2016 U.S. Presidential election), Robb follows a New Materialist trajectory and claims that efficacy or agency is not an attribute of privileged subjects, but rather an effect of the interaction between subjects and objects, or, what is not quite the same thing, between humans and nonhumans. What allows material objects to regain some hold over efficacy is their physical design:

the material thing is not merely an arbitrary symbol of some external, pre-set meaning. Rather, it contains a built-in logic of material features and anticipated responses, a logic which means there is a close fit between something’s design features and its effect upon the people using it. The design hypothesis locates efficacy in the material things themselves and how they incorporate and guide anticipated responses. It is a way of pinning down exactly how material actants are active. (169)

The props used in both The Rover and The Busie Body are certainly ideologically and symbolically charged, but paying attention to how design informs the action of the play reveals how the objects used by characters determine both the course of action and, thus, articulations of gender.

Objects can provide their users with specific material scripts by virtue of their design, how they physically work in a “flow of action” (168). This is not to claim, however, that objects
unilaterally determine the course of action in any given context. As Robb concedes, the ability to direct action, to cause something to happen, emerges from the interaction between subject and object: “design choices are also informed by symbolic environments, as for instance when outfits are designed to create a feeling of seriousness, purity, or hygiene. Similarly, design choices anticipate the requirements of performance, of transformative material acts, as when a contract is signed before a witness” (169) Performance emerges as a category to describe this interaction between subject and object, human and nonhuman. As I have shown throughout this study, however, performance need not be a harmonious interweaving of the subject’s more abstract intentionality and the object’s material efficacy. Controlling the way objects work can be difficult or even impossible for the subject in question; what this means in the context of this study is that the subject’s attempt to consume the material world has failed. Robb intimates this in his discussion of agency: “the agency of people acting upon things is different than the agency by which things act on people”. Perhaps the most compact way of expressing it is to say that people tend to have the agency of ‘why,’ of intentional acts and effects, while things tend to have the agency of ‘how.’” Robb’s notion of these different agencies, both “how” and “why,” can be seen in the way both Behn and Centlivre deploy certain objects – swords, masks, and documents – in order to frame historically specific articulations of gendered consumption. By virtue of their design, objects both allow and partially determine action based on “how” they physically work; by virtue of their cultural and symbolic connotations, these very same objects are used by characters for the social work of courtship, which corresponds to the more anthropomorphic, intentional “why” agency that Robb discusses. At times the physical design (“how”) and the human actor’s intention (“why”) work in tandem to create desired outcomes; at other times, these agencies conflict, creating a tension between them. The performances in which these agencies
interact are sometimes successful, while at other times the objects thrust human actors into situations that are unintended and, as I will show, quite dangerous. In what follows, I will delineate how male characters consume via their sword props, while female characters use masks and later documents in order thwart the more violent tendencies of sword-based consumption.

In theatrical terms, my analysis of The Rover and The Busie Body will examine how props are used by characters in specifically gendered ways. To date, the most comprehensive study of props as material, physical stage phenomena is Andrew Sofer’s The Stage Life of Props, in which Sofer defines a prop as “a discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly triggered by an actor in the course of performance” (11). Sofer’s insistence that text-based critics take seriously the materiality of props (as opposed to their materialist connotations and meanings), dovetails conceptually with Robb’s claims about purely linguistic analyses of objects: according to Sofer, “the distinction between props and other kinds of stage object, then, is a matter neither of diminutive size nor potential portability, but actual motion. The props must physically move or alter in some way as a result of the actor’s physical intervention . . . Irrespective of its signifying functions (s), a prop is something an object becomes, rather than something an object is” (12). Put another way, “props do ‘speak’ in the theater, but they also perform” (16).

For both Robb and Sofer, objects are defined by the way they function within performances, theatrical or otherwise. Unlike the New Materialist work that informs most of this study, however, Sofer posits a strict demarcation between subjects and objects as they appear onstage: “Although they can and do take on some of the functions and attributes of subjects, which accounts for their uncanny fascination onstage, props remain objects, not subjects. Stage props are ‘motivated’ - literally put into play - by actors but are not themselves animate, although they are often said to ‘animate’ the plot” (20). In a sense this is quite true - a sword, mask, or
document cannot literally move around the stage without some kind of human intervention - but I will complicate Sofer’s claim by pointing out that what he refers to is in fact a human/nonhuman binary rather than a subject/object binary. The Restoration actress who manipulates a mask or fan onstage has, as several scholars have pointed out, a more troubled road to subjectivity than her male counterparts. Is she, then, a subject or an object? I would suggest that in speaking of props and actors, the ontological difference is one of human versus nonhuman. Subjectivity, as I will discuss in the following analysis, is reserved for those humans who successfully enter into relationships with non humans in order to assert their own gendered subjectivity. In other words, subjectivity is not a given status for any human, but rather a prize for those who consume objects appropriately.

**Boys and Their Swords: Violence and Masculine Consumption in Pepys’s Diary**

The sword is one of the most ubiquitous masculine objects extant in the late seventeenth century, at once a fashionable object and a deadly weapon. Pepys makes note of the sword’s dual nature throughout the *Diary*. In many of these entries, especially those involving his own swords, he frames these nonhumans as fashionable status markers, rather than weapons. For example, Pepys records a shopping trip he made on March 22, 1660: “I went forth about my own business to buy a pair of riding grey serge stockings and swords and belt and hose” (Pepys 30). After dining with several acquaintances, he then expresses a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety over his changing status position: “Strange how these people do now promise me anything; one a rapier, the other a vessel of wine or a gun . . . I pray God to keep me from being too proud or too

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44 For more on the subjectivity of Restoration actresses, see: Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*; Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*; and Anita Pacheco, “Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn’s ‘The Rover’.”
much lifted up hereby” (31). Anxieties aside, Pepys marks another instance of his changing status position on February 3, 1661: “This day I first begun to go forth in my coat and sword, as the manner now among gentlemen is” (116). Swords are also associated with classed masculine competition: in 1662, Pepys describes a status competition with Sir William Batten performed via servants and swords: “our boy waiting on us with his sword, which this day he begins to wear, to outdo Sir W. Pen’s boy, who this day, and Sir W. Batten’s too, begin to wear new livery; but I do take mine to be the neatest of them” (193). Joseph Roach, citing an entry in which Pepys fails to use his sword when attacked by a dog, claims that

once Pepys begins to think of himself under the role-icon marked “gentleman” and to perform in fulfillment of its conventional expectations, he doesn’t feel well dressed without his sword. He doesn’t think to defend himself with it in an emergency, however, because that isn’t what it’s for. It has other work to do. It works as a prop to support his performance as he fights his way across the threshold of gentlemanly status and claims the social spaces beyond as his own. (Roach 53)

For Roach, Pepys’s sword is primarily a fashionable accessory, though Roach does draw attention to the ambivalence of swords: “increasingly ornamental rather than practical, the rapier draws attention to a revealing problem of classification: intended for use, a sword is a particular kind of tool – a weapon; intended for show, it is an objet, inessential except to add intangible symbolic value to the ensemble” (51). Just because swords were more often than not fashionable accessories in the late seventeenth century, however, does not mean that their potential for violence – determined by their physical design – takes a back seat to their fashionable associations; just because an object means something, does not mean it fails to do what its design allows it to, as Pepys was well aware.

Pepys displays an awareness of the sword’s darker side, that is, its potential for violence. In January 1660, Pepys makes a journey to Westminster, where he sees “Captain Okeshott in his silk cloak, whose sword got hold of many people in walking” (Pepys 5); much like the nail that
snags Rambles’s clothing in *The London Cuckolds* as discussed in chapter 3, Okeshott’s sword exerts an agency of its own over those passing by its wearer. While the captain attempts to perform a status-based masculinity via his apparel (“his silk cloak”), his accessory compromises this performance. It is tempting to imagine Westminster pedestrians avoiding Okeshott or crying out in surprise when their clothing or skin is “got hold of” by his sword - I raise this purely conjectural image to point out that the sword here is caught between two performances: that which Okeshott is trying to perform and the potentially violent performances that swords - weapons designed to physically cut, stab, and slash - enact on the bodies of others.

This scene is somewhat comical, but Pepys also records more troubling masculine performances that include swords, in which violence moves from potentiality to reality. On May 15, 1663, Pepys mentions such a performance: “there being my Lord of Abermarle, Lynsey, two of the Porters, my Lord Bellasses, and others, where there were high words and some blows, and pulling off of Perriwiggs; till my Lord Monk took away some of their swords, and sent for some soldiers to guard the house till the fray was ended. To such a degree of madness the nobility of this age is come!” (275). In this episode, masculine potency and violence are metonymically concentrated in the sword: even though the actual fight includes “high words and blows,” Lord Monk destabilizes this masculine performance by taking away some of the men’s swords. Pepys’s evaluative pronouncement on the scene - “To such a degree of madness the nobility of this age is come” (emphasis mine) - alerts readers to the fact that swords are here associated with a status-based masculinity, as well as anxieties surrounding upper-class masculine prerogatives.\(^\text{45}\)

\(^{45}\) In her analysis of duels on the English stage from 1664-1707, Kathleen Leicht claims that “dueling is a practice reminiscent of older, chivalrous orders, and English monarch were apt to frown on it as a challenge to their authority. Nonetheless, dueling became increasingly popular and fashionable during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England precisely
Years later, on May 10, 1667, Pepys records an actual death associated with the sword: “a sad spectacle and a broad wound, which my hand now shakes to write of it. His brother intending, it seems, to kill the coachman, who did not please him, this fellow stepped in, and took away his sword; who thereupon took out his knife, which was of the fashion with a falchion blade, and a little cross at the hilt like a dagger; and with that stabbed him” (Gyford, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*). Although the smaller blade does not contain the same class associations as the sword that is taken away from the gentleman - it is not even his first choice of weapon to attack another - in terms of design it acts as an effective substitute for killing. Pepys even makes note of the blade’s fashionable qualities - its single-sided falchion blade and the “little cross at the hilt” - but what overwhelms him is the violence associated with the weapon. Here the blade’s ability to kill other men overtakes its fashionable qualities.

*Swords as Material Metonyms in Aphra Behn’s The Rover*

In the decade following the events of the *Diary*, Aphra Behn would graft the double valence of the sword, both its symbolic fashionable associations and its violent, body-harming design, onto her representations of masculine consumption. In her most commercially successful play, *The Rover*, Behn associates men’s heterosexual and homosocial prowess with this most phallic of stage props. In the play’s sexual economy, swords function as material metonyms for masculine potency, as is evident in the following exchange between Helena and Willmore:

WILLMORE. Faith child, I have been bred in dangers, and wear a sword that has been employed in a worse cause than for a handsome kind woman – name the danger – let it be anything but a long siege and I’ll undertake it.

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because it did enable individuals to take action to guard their own reputations” (272). Leicht’s comments on duels evoke both the fashionable and classed connotations of duels that inform Pepys’s understanding of these objects.
HELENA. Can you storm?

WILLMORE. Oh most furiously. (1.2.162-167)

Men, especially attractive rakes such as Willmore, consume via their “swords,” both their weapons and their penises. Willmore makes the connection between traditional images of masculine consumption (eating, drinking, etc.) and sexual consumption a few lines later: “Oh, I long to come first to the banquet of love, and such a swinging appetite I bring! Oh, I’m impatient. Thy lodging, sweetheart, thy lodging, or I’m a dead man!” (1.2.190-193). Just as in Behn’s *Feign’d Courtezans* and Ravenscroft’s *The London Cuckolds* (see chapter 3), desirable libertines frame women as physical objects that are consumed in much the same way as food or wine. As he stands in from of Helena, asserting himself as a libertine consumer, Wilmore’s sword hangs by his side, serving as a material metonym for the violence that attends masculine consumption.

*The Rover* is saturated with sword play, and the male characters are all very willing to whip out their blades in the presence of a potentially consumable woman. The first scene featuring Angelica Bianca, Naples’s most sought-after and expensive courtesan, evokes the ocularcentric consumption dynamics discussed in Chapter 3. While Willmore, Blunt, Frederick, and Belvile are standing in the street, the stage directions let us know that two men enter with “*a great picture of Angellica’s against the balcony, and two little ones at each side of the door*” ([stage directions] 86). Angelica’s use of pictures evokes Roach’s claims about the “public intimacy” associated with celebrities: “their images circulate widely in the absence of their persons — a necessary condition of modern celebrity — but the very tension between their widespread visibility and their actual remoteness creates an unfulfilled need in the hearts of the
public” (Roach 17). The succeeding dialogue and stage directions emphasize the visual nature of masculine consumption:

BELVILE. See there, the fair sign to the inn where a man may lodge that’s fool enough to give her price.

*Willmore gazes on the picture*

BLUNT. ‘Sheartkins, gentlemen, what’s this!

BELVILE. A famous courtesan, that’s to be sold. (2.1.91-94)

Still gazing at the picture ([stage directions] 86), Willmore exclaims, “How wondrous fair she is. A thousand crowns a month - by heaven, as many kingdoms were too little ; a plague on this poverty - of which I ne’er complain but when it hinders my approach to beauty which virtue could never purchase” (2.1.102-105). Willmore laments his inability to consume Angellica’s body through coin, but what he lacks in money, he seeks to make up through his sword; put another way, Willmore does not have access to one prop - coin - so he uses another.

Within the sexual economy of consumption that Behn articulates, the sword is a much more effective prop than the coin. Willmore makes this explicit when Antonio and Pedro are in the midst of their own sword-fight over Angelica. Coming between them, Willmore admonishes “Tilting for the wretch, I’m sure - nay, gad, if that would win her, I have as good a sword as the best of ye” (2.1.193-194). After he pulls down one of the smaller pictures of Angellica ([stage directions] 91), Antonio commands him to return it. Their dialogue then evokes the competing masculine consumption styles that inform this scene, sword versus coin:

WILLMORE. Nay, do not show your sword; if you do, by this dear beauty [Angellica’s picture] - I will show mine too.

ANTONIO. What right can you pretend to’t?
WILLMORE. That of possession, which I will maintain - you perhaps have a thousand crowns to give for the original. (2.1.217-221)

Unsurprisingly, the swords soon come out; four lines later the stage directions read “They fight; the Spaniards join with Antonio; Blunt laying on like mad” ([stage directions] 92). Angellica soon bids the men to stop fighting, and the Spaniards are eventually “beaten off” ([stage directions] 93), but traces of masculine violence still linger. The stage directions indicate that Willmore’s shirt is covered in blood (93), and he admits to Frederick that he has received a slight wound (2.1.248). Willmore’s bloody shirt evokes masculine violence both visually - the audience and other characters can clearly see that he has been wounded by a sword - and through allusion to a high profile act of libertine violence committed by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham in 1668. According to Roach, “the most vivid anecdote concerning Buckingham’s clothing, however, has little to do with fashion, and it involves the expenditure of blood, not money” (Roach 101). Willmore’s shirt evokes that worn by Buckingham during his well-publicized duel with the Duke of Shrewsbury, who died following a stab-wound from Buckingham. The duel, significantly, was over the Duchess of Shrewsbury, Buckingham’s mistress. According to Roach, “Buckingham’s bloody shirt emblemsizes an icon, which, like Caesar’s red cloak, attracts sensational images and anecdotes to itself as a magnet draws iron filings, whether the nominated figure, the ‘rake’ in this instance, is historic or fictive” (102). Willmore’s violent consumption style wins out over Antonio’s; the performance enacted via the sword is successful, while the currency-based performance ends in failure. Angelica, apparently seduced by Willmore’s violent defense of her picture, invites him into her home and, in the succeeding act, agrees to have sex with him.
Willmore’s conception of masculine consumption, including sexual performances enacted via women’s physical bodies, is so overdetermined by sword imagery that he even reads this onto Angellica’s desirability. Right before the scuffle that leaves him wounded and bloody, he tells her that “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” (2.1.231-234). Willmore frames his occularcentric desire for Angelica as a battle in which he is the one who is stabbed, pierced, and ran through, a metaphor which is emphasized by the sword wounds he receives just moments later. As Angelica and Willmore retire into the house, the characters’ dialogue further emphasizes this sexual-consumption-as-sword-play trope:

BELVILE. Pox, she’ll as soon lie with thee as kiss thee, and sooner stab than do either - you shall not go.

ANGELLICA. Fear not sir, for all I have to wound with is my eyes.

BLUNT. Let him go. ‘Sheartkins, I believe the gentlewoman means well.

BELVILE. Well, take thy fortune; we’ll expect you in the next street — farewell fool, — farewell. (2.1.273-278)

As the men see her, Angellica presents a threat to Willmore in much the same way that the Spaniards do - she might stab him. Angellica attempts to divert this anxiety into a Petrarchan trope (she can only wound with her eyes), but the anxiety she evokes in Belvile parallels a larger masculine anxiety surrounding consumption and gender, that is, the ability of women to enact their own consumption performances that subvert those of the men. These men fear women’s ability to complicate their culturally sanctioned status as object and exert agency as quasi-
objects, entities that are viewed through a patriarchal lens as passive objects and yet exert agency over the intentionality-driven agency of male subjects.

While Willmore successfully consumes Angellica’s body - and is rewarded with new clothes and money - Belvile’s anxiety is ironically vindicated through Blunt’s experience with Lucetta. In one of the play’s more comical scenes, Blunt attempts to enact a highly generic consumption performance. Playing the coy maiden role as Blunt undresses, Lucetta exclaims “Should you be false or cruel now!” To which Blunt replies, “False! ‘Sheartkins, what dost thou take me for? A Jew? An insensible heathen? A pox of thy old jealous husband; an he were dead, egad, sweet soul, it should be none of my fault if I did not marry thee” (3.3.7-11). This dialogue seems to place Lucetta and Blunt in the realm of Restoration sex comedy: the rake is about to cuckold the husband. Of course, it is at such a time that the would-be cuckold would return too early, thus thwarting the rake’s sexual consumption (see chapter 3), but Behn adds another twist to this generic script. Once Blunt is naked and stripped of his possessions, Lucetta directs him to put out the light. Blunt then “puts out the candle, the bed descends, and he gropes about to find it” ([stage directions 117]. Like the men in Behn’s Feign’d Courtezans, Ravenscroft’s The London Cuckolds, and Burnaby’s The Modish Husband, Blunt’s masculinity and ability to consume are thwarted by the dim matter that he has to “grop” rather than see.

Once Blunt falls into the trap, Lucetta and her pimps, Phillippo and Sancho take an inventory of Blunt’s possessions. Phillippo, enthusiastically cataloging the stolen goods, takes note of the sword amidst the other expensive commodities that Blunt has lost along with this ability to successfully consume Lucetta’s body. “A rich coat! Sword and hat — these breeches, too, are well-lined — see here, a gold watch! A purse — ha! Gold! At least two hundred pistoles! A bunch of diamond rings! And one with the family arms! A gold box - with a medal of his king!
And his lady mother’s picture! These were sacred relics, believe me! See, the waistband of his breeches have a mine of gold!” (3.3. 36-41). The thieves frame Blunt’s sword as an expensive commodity, rather than as a weapon; unlike Willmore’s sword, Blunt’s is merely a fashionable accessory, notable only for its placement within a catalogue of valuable stolen goods. Phillippo, according to the sexual and gendered economy of the play, holds Blunt’s stolen masculinity in his hands, and he empties it of any masculine potency it may have had. Lucetta has thwarted Blunt’s enactment of masculine consumption and given the essential prop to his rival.

By stripping him of the material objects that allow him to perform his masculine identity, and to consume in a style apropos thereto, Lucetta objectifies Blunt and removes his ability to function as a consuming subject, something of which the audience is reminded the next time Blunt appears onstage. Once the scene changes, the audience “discovers Blunt, creeping out of a common shore, his face, etc. all dirty” ([stage directions] 119); naked, dirty, and abject, Blunt here embodies the ultimate failure of masculinity, as it is constructed through the male subject’s relationship with his physical goods. Cut off not only from the objects that display his social status and allow him to perform his masculinity, he is also cut off from re-establishing these connections - he laments that “had she left me my clothes, I have a bill at home would have saved my credit — but now all hope is taken from me” (3.4.19-21). In Act 4, scene 5, the opening stage directions read, “Scene changes to Blunt’s chamber; discovers him sitting on a couch in his shirt and drawers, reading” ([stage directions] 155). Blunt’s first lines are a lament for his stolen goods and his inability to replace them: “a pox on this tailor though, for not bringing me home the clothes I bespoke; and a pox of all poor cavaliers; a man can never keep a spare suit for ‘em; and I shall have these rogues come in and find me naked, and then I’m undone” (4.5.2-5). His dialogue reveals his anxiety over homosocial relations with the other
cavalier characters, and his actions reveal how this anxiety is inflected through his perceived inability to consume women.

In the light of his objectification, Blunt’s understanding of masculine consumption becomes similar to Willmore’s, that is, more inflected through competition and violence. Midway through his opening soliloquy, he “puts on an old rusty sword, and buff belt” ([stage directions] 155), and then communicates through dialogue a new understanding of how to use this masculine prop. He is aware that he can no longer perform a fashionable masculine consumption script, but he can still use the sword to perform the violent form of masculine consumption that Willmore flirts with in the scenes discussed above. He acknowledges his now unfashionable status - “how like a morris dancer I am equipped” (4.5.7) - and hints at his now violent attitude towards women - “Oh, how I’ll use all womenkind hereafter! What would I give to have ‘em within my reach now” (4.5.11-13). He does not explicitly mention that he wants to consume women’s bodies by committing violence against them, but the rusty sword hanging by his side acts as a metonymic signifier of his intention.

Once Florinda enters the scene, Blunt’s violent understanding of masculine consumption becomes explicit through both stage dialogue and stage directions. Addressing Florinda directly, he threatens to “kiss and beat thee all over, kiss and see thee all over; thou shalt lie with me too, not that I care for the enjoyment, but to let thee see I have ta’en deliberated malice to thee, and will be revenged on one whore for the sins of another” (4.5.49-52). With his rusty sword at his side, Blunt articulates a masculine consumptions script that synthesizes sexual imagery and

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46 In her reading of Willmore’s treatment of Angellica and Florinda, Dagny Boebel claims that Willmore’s cavalier attitude towards sexuality “does not displace the male/female hierarchy, nor does it liberate women from a moral code designed to deny them desire and to keep them in their place. In fact, Willmore and Blunt think and act in nearly identical ways” (59).
physical violence - “I will kiss thee and beat thee all over” - and he has done so in order to
revenge himself on all women, who he now sees as a threat to his masculine identity. The stage
directions emphasize the violence inherent in Blunt’s script; twice he “pulls her rudely” ([stage
directions] 156;157). Combined with his dialogue - “I will . . . Kiss and see thee all over,” his
costume, accessories, and actions all frame Blunt as a primarily violent consumer who conflates
the occularcentrism that informs masculine consumption in the theatre with the violence that
men brought to their sexual consumption both on- and offstage. By using a prop that emphasizes
the violent design of the sword, instead of its fashionable qualities (precluded by the fact that it is
“rusty”), Behn is able to engender this violent masculinity that is based on the consumption of
women’s bodies.

If Behn uses Blunt’s unfashionable sword to emphasize the violent nature of masculine
consumption, then she intertwines the two aspects of the sword, its fashionable and violent
connotations, in the succeeding scene. Once Blunt traps Florida in his chamber, the other
cavaliers enter and, soon discovering what Blunt is up to, insist on sharing the spoils. After
teasing Blunt for his appearance and his failed attempts to hide Florinda from them, Willmore
proposes a method for determining who will consume Florinda’s body first: “Damn propriety -
then we’ll draw cuts - [Belvile goes to whisper to Willmore] nay, no corruption, good colonel.
Come, the longest sword carries her” (5.1.90-92). Belvile has discovered that is it actually
Florinda they are haggling over, but his warning is lost in Willmore’s dialogue, which directs
masculine desire towards its metonymic stage embodiment, the phallic sword. Following the
dictates of a violent masculine consumption script, “They all draw, forgetting Don Pedro, being
a Spaniard, has the longest” ([stage directions] 165). In what amounts to a “bro”-ish dick
contest, the longest sword seems to give Don Pedro the right to consume Florinda’s body; he
simply has the best prop for the role. Here Behn combines the sword’s fashionable qualities - its regional design differences based on national taste - with its potential for violence. Willmore seems to acknowledge this when he says in an aside “Pox of his Toledo; I had forgotten that” (5.1.96). Don Pedro, following Spanish fashions, has the longest sword, and thus wins the right to perform violently sexual consumption. Following the dictates of comedy, Behn makes sure that her heroine eventually escapes unharmed, but for the duration of this scene she insists on using the sword to show how physical objects, specifically swords, engender dangerous and violent scripts.

In the above scenes, Behn articulates how men use their swords to perform masculine consumption according to both violent and fashionable scripts. Later in this chapter I will discuss how women use objects (masks and documents) to thwart the violent consumption performances of male characters that are engendered by the sword, but here I would like to draw attention to how masculine consumption in *The Rover* fails when the sword performs its part too well, that is, when during the course of masculine performance, the sword overtakes the agency of the male character who is using it. To use Robb’s language, Willmore’s sword asserts its agency of “how,” which subsumes Willmore’s agency of “why.” Despite their “bro” status, Belvile expresses exasperation with Willmore’s impulsivity through the play including the scene following Willmore’s drunken attempt to rape Florinda in Act 3, scene 5. In an attempt to justify himself, Willmore asks, “Why, how the devil should I know Florinda?” To which Belvile answers, “A plague of your ignorance! If it had not been Florinda, must you be a beast? A brute? A senseless swine?” (3.5.1-3). Much like Rochester’s “poor king” and libertine speakers, as well as Milton’s Satan as they are discussed in chapter 1, Willmore seems unable to control his physical appetites, instead adhering to a Hobbesean “rule of nature” by which he thoughtlessly
consumes resources. Later in the scene, Willmore’s impulsive consumption style, along with the prop with which is so often bound up, the sword, causes further troubles for Belvile. Willmore sees Angellica’s servant Moretta speaking with Antonio and, without much thought to the matter cries out “How is this! A picaroon going to board my frigate? Here’s one chase gun for you” (3.5.49-50). After this the stage directions tell us that Willmore is “drawing his sword, justles Antonio who turns and draws. They fight, Antonio falls” (127). Here Willmore displays the same ontological fracturing that marks most masculine consumers discussed in this study; his reaction to this episode reveals the extent to which his agency is divorced from his intentionality, and how the sword he so often uses exerts its own agency over his actions. Only after the masqueraders exclaims “Ha! A man killed!” does Willmore seem to have any idea of what he has done: “Ha! A man killed!” he exclaims in turn, “Then I’ll go home to sleep” (3.5.54-55). Caught up in the heat of the moment, Willmore’s apparent surprise evokes Bruno Latour’s comments about guns:

> Which of them, then, the gun or the citizen, is the *actor* in this situation? Someone else (a citizen-gun, a gun-citizen) . . . If I define you by what you have (the gun), and by the series of associations you enter into when you use what you have (when you fire the gun), then you are modified by the gun - more so or less so, depending on the weight of associations that you carry. (Latour 179)

Substituting sword for gun, we can see that Willmore is not the sole source of agency when it comes to sword-play. Duelling is, after all, much harder to do without a weapon. By having easy access to his sword, as well as a clear ease in using it, Willmore becomes a different kind of masculine subject than he would be without the weapon. What this means is that when he tries to consume - enter into relations with physical objects in order to perform his masculine identity - the sword can thwart and redirect his action. The sword’s violence-inducing design here overtakes Willmore’s actions and the consequences are near fatal, not only for Antonio, but for
Belvile as well, who suffers the blame and subsequent imprisonment for the Willmore-sword’s actions.

Later in the play, Belvile seems to realize that the sword, though an effective means to consume women’s bodies, has to be treated carefully so that it does not overdetermine the action of the masculine actor. After Belvile bests Pedro in a dual, Pedro refuses to relinquish the spoils - Florinda - because he has thought that the previously masked Belvile was actually Antonio. Belvile then reasserts his masculine prerogative to consume via the sword: “Nay, touch her not. She’s mine by conquest, sir; I won her by the sword” (4.2.93-94). Willmore, ever the willing second then agrees, “Did’st thou so - and egad, child, we’ll keep her by the sword (4.2.95) as he “draws on Pedro” ([stage directions] 137). This time, however, Belvile refuses Willmore’s aid: he “goes between” Pedro and Willmore ([stage directions] 137), and addresses his friend, rather than his rival, “Stand off! Thou’rt so profanely lewd, so curst by heaven, all quarrels thou espousest must be fatal” (4.2.96-98). Belvile implicitly recognizes that when it comes to consumption, men’s intention and their efficacy are not always the same thing. He knows that Willmore’s sword is not always under Willmore’s control and thus, the potential violence associated with masculine consumption may rebound on the actor or bystanders.

**Taming the Masculine Consumer: Centlivre’s Reluctant Sword-Fighter, Sir George Airy**

The violence associated with masculine consumption and it’s embodiment in the sword informs the sexual economy of *The Rover* and evokes the violent nature of masculine consumption in Restoration culture. Years later, after the Collier controversy and the shift to a newer, more “moral” theatrical ethos, Susanna Centlivre would recycle and reformulate the violent model of masculine consumption that informs Behn’s comedy. One scene from her most successful comedy, *The Busie Body*, concisely lays out the ways in which Centlivre launches a
program to tame the male consumer. Facing defeat yet again in his attempts to woo his beloved Isabinda, Centlivre’s Sir Charles resolves to confront Don Diego Babinetto, the man Isabinda’s father has selected for her to marry:

SIR CHARLES. He dies, yes, by all the Wrongs of Love he shall; here will I plant myself, and thro’ my Breast he shall make his Passage, if he enters.

PATCH. A most heroick Resolution. There might be ways found out more to your Advantage. Policy is often preferr’d to open force. (Centlvire 50; Act 4)

Patch’s response to the disappointed young lover not only functions as a way to introduce the next plot device – Charles will switch places with Babinetto in a wedding ceremony – but also evokes the way gender and consumption inform Centlivre’s play. As Cynthia Lowenthal claims, one “substantive reason for the less threatening atmosphere of Centlivre’s plays, which all seem to have the hallmarks of danger and intrigue, is the more profound change one sees in Restoration and eighteenth-century definitions of masculinity, a new movement towards ‘feminization’ and away from the violent and hyperaggressive” (Lowenthal 402). This is not to say that masculine violence is entirely absent from Centlivre’s comedy, as I will show through my reading of Sir George. If the specter of violence attends images of male consumption in earlier Restoration plays such as The Rover, then Centlivre’s post-Collier laughing comedy signals its departure from earlier theatrical tropes in its presentation of a more tamed masculine consumption style that relies on evoking, yet ultimately denying the potential violence that swords engender in male characters.

Sir George displays a quasi-libertine consumption style throughout the play, one which evokes the violence of earlier rake heroes, while simultaneously differentiating himself from said consumption styles. In the first act of the play, Sir George, mostly through his dialogue with
Charles, frames women as consumable objects. For example, he evokes the woman-as-food trope discussed in the previous chapter: while speaking to Miranda, who is disguised with a mask, he compares her to a “Dish of Chocolate in the Morning,” and a “set Meal” (11; Act1). Sir George also frames his desire in visual terms: after he reveals that he is fact in love with two women – one he has seen and one he has only heard – he tells Charles, “I prefer the Sensual Pleasure, I’m for her I’ve seen, who is thy Father’s ward Miranda” (2; Act 1). Like rakes such as Willmore and Blunt, Sir George frames women as visual consumable commodities. Just like Rochester’s male consumers in “The Disabled Debauchee” and “A Ramble in St. James Park,” and Blunt in The Rover (just to name a few examples), Sir George’s enactment of masculine consumption threatens to turn violent. Sir George explicitly frames his masculine identity in terms of how he uses his sword. Sir George makes this explicit through dialogue: meeting Marplot for the first time, he admires the wounds Marplot has received in a tavern brawl, claiming, “Oh, I honour Men of the Sword; I presume this Gentleman is lately come from Spain or Portugal – by his Scars” (4; Act 1). To use Sofer’s language, Sir George “triggers” his sword via his dialogue, directing the audience’s attention to the fashionable, yet still potentially dangerous object that hangs by his side. Assuming that the actor playing Sir George for early 18th-century audience would indeed have had a sword prop by his side, the prop’s continued presence serves as a metonymic reminder that George is at once a fashionable gentleman and also a potentially violent masculine actor.

Despite the similarities between Sir George and earlier libertines figures, he also differentiates himself from these earlier models. Centlivre stages the difference between Sir

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47 Copeland claims that Sir George both resembles and differs from earlier stage libertines: “Centlivre flirts with sexual impropriety in her portrayal of Sir George . . . But his aim in buying
George and figures such as Behn’s Wilmore through Sir George’s use of the sword. Despite his explicit evocation of violence throughout the play, Sir George only draws his weapon once in Act 5, and this after he has already married Miranda ([stage directions] 68). For the most part, Sir George follows “policy” to use Patch’s phrase, rather than overt violence, and this when he is not merely a playing a part that Miranda has laid out for him. For most of the play, Sir George merely gestures towards his sword, its violent potential simmering beneath the surface of the stage action, never boiling over into open conflict. One example of this violent potentiality occurs during his dumb interview with Miranda. As Sir George attempts to woo Miranda, Sir Francis hovers over the couple, much to Sir George’s annoyance. The first time Sir Francis interrupts Sir George, for kissing Miranda’s hand, Sir George replies, “Death, Sir, Keep your Distabnce, or I’ll write another Article in your Guts” (20; Act 2), while he. “Lays his Hand to his Sword” ([stage directions] 20). Sir Francis backs off, but soon he offers another interruption, to which Sir George replies “More Interruptions — You will have it Sir” (20; Act 2) as he once again “Lays his Hand to His Sword” ([stage directions] 20). Again, Sir George doesn’t actually draw the weapon and throughout the entire play never commits actual violence on another character’s body, but this scene is indicative of how Centlivre keeps the threat of violent male consumption clearly on the horizon of possibilities throughout the play. During the dumb interview, the audience is aware that Sir George’s violent potential - currently sheathed, much like the sword at his side - could erupt not only towards a perceived rival, but toward the object of his potential consumption.

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Time with Miranda is to discover if she cares enough for him to marry him, and the two central scenes of their courtship suggest that his rakishness is a pose” (101). Anderson goes further, claiming that “George was not a very masculine leading man by contemporary standards; Miranda controls the plot, tells George what to do, and releases herself from guardianship” (116).
Women Wearing Masks: How Restoration Women Seize Control of Occularcentric Consumption

In both *The Rover* and *The Busie Body*, the heroines use another ubiquitous object, the mask, to counter masculine consumption scripts that are deployed via the sword. Masks allow women in *The Rover* and *The Busie Body* to enact their own gendered performances, but much like the swords, masks contain a dual potentiality that these women sometimes struggle to direct. For the woman wearing it, the mask can simultaneously provide a mobility and social freedom not available to the unmasked women, but it can also mark them as objects available for male consumption and thus expose them to the violence that attends masculine consumption. During the Restoration the mask, like the sword, was a both a fashionable accessory, while also associated with violence - though unlike the sword, it attracted violence rather than committed it. The violence that the mask attracts is the violence of thwarted privilege. Men who gazed on the mask could impose their own readings on it in order to situate women within a sexual economy in which women are available objects up for grabs. For these men, the mask becomes a tantalizing obstacle to be removed, often through violent means. The mask’s dual social script arises from its design, which physically blocks the wearer’s face and, thus, precludes successful occularcentric consumption of the wearer’s body.

Several critics have commented on the mask’s cultural and social associations in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, noting its dual abilities to increase women’s social mobility as well as the beholder’s desire for the masked woman. Terry Castle, in her seminal *Masquerade and Civilization*, claims that it was the mask in particular, that indispensable element of masquerade disguise, that was thought most powerfully aphrodisiacal – for wearer and beholder alike. Masks had always carried risqué associations. Conventional wisdom held that someone donning a mask, especially a woman, experienced an abrupt loss of sexual inhibition. Anonymity,
actual or stylized, relaxed the safeguards of virtue. Thus one critic of masking wrote, “The mask secures the Ladies from Detraction, and encourages a Liberty, the Guilt of their Blushes would betray when barefac’d, till by degrees they are innur’d to that which is out of their Vertue to restrain. (39)

Furthermore, although Castle is mainly interested in the mask’s symbolic qualities and how they relate to the Bahktinian carnivalesque ethos of eighteenth century masquerade, she specifically mentions how the mask, a physical, portable accessory, granted wearers increased social mobility because of its occularcentric design:

Masks are an example of what one modern behavioral scientist has called the ‘involvement shield’ – a portable bodily accessory that, by obstructing visual contact, promotes an unusual sense of freedom in the person wearing or using it. Anything that partially hides a face, writes Erving Goffman – whether mask, fan, newspaper, sunglasses – may act as a shield ‘behind which individuals safely do the kinds of things that ordinarily result in negative sanctions.’ The mask signified a certain physical detachment from the situation, and by implication a moral detachment. (39)

Because the mask, by virtue of its physical design, blocks the wearer’s face from view, it provides the physical and “moral” detachment necessary for women such as Behn’s Helena and Centlivre’s Miranda to disrupt and manipulate male desire for their physical bodies. Within an visual economy of consumption, masks allow women to manipulate their own culturally sanctioned status as consumable objects.

During the Restoration, women and masks were often conflated on a linguistic and symbolic level, especially in the context of the newly reopened theaters. Laura Rosenthal, in an examination of both the onstage and offstage connotations of the mask claims that “while various garments have become synecdoches for women at various times, ‘mask’ calls attention to women specifically as spectators by naming them after an accessory that covers the area around their eyes but not the eyes themselves” (206). Rosenthal’s comments emphasize the physical design of the mask, that is, its essential function of blocking a woman’s face from view while letting her participate in the visual consumption of the world, thus triggering a “tension between
subjectivity and objectification” (206). For women, masks were objects that could offer them increased mobility and social freedom, or objects that could, by blocking occularcentric male consumption, attract unwanted and potentially dangerous male desire. As Rosenthal claims, “an object that conceals, however, also calls attention to the obscured region as an object of scrutiny. If the mask protected its wearer from too discerning a gaze, it nevertheless, as Mr. Pinchwife well knew when he disguised his wife as a boy rather than letting her appear at the theater in a mask, attracted attention by creating an air of mystery” (207). Despite the masked woman’s actual social status, “the covered face could be identified with prostitution and sexual availability” (207). Ultimately, for Rosenthal, “the mask, then, signifies two contradicting forms of sexual positionality: it signifies a sexual being in control of her identity and seeking her own pleasure, as well as an infinitely replaceable visual object whose individual identity and desire have no relevance” (207). Offstage women such as Elizabeth Pepys, and onstage women such as Florinda were equally liable to fall into the script that the mask’s physical, vision-blocking design lays out for them: sexually available object that attracts male violence. Behn, however, is equally insistent on having her heroine Helena emphasize the liberating possibilities for women via their use of the mask within a occularcentric field.

Ever the consummate consumer, Pepys notes these intertwined phenomena, the mask’s ability to simultaneously heighten and thwart male desire. He first mentions the mask as a fashionable object for high-status women. On June 12, 1663, he writes that while at the theater, he “saw my Lord Falconbridge, and his Lady, who looks as well as I have known her, and well clad; but when the House began to fill she put on her vizard, and so kept it all the play; which of late is become a great fashion among the ladies, which hides their whole face” (Pepys 286). Noting both the physical design (“which hides their whole face”) and status associations (“a
great fashion among the ladies”), Pepys frames the mask as a desirable, fashionable commodity. That very same day Pepys makes a trip to the New Exchange “to buy things with my wife; among others, a vizard for herself” (286). Much as he uses the sword to display his own rising status position, Pepys outfits his wife with a corresponding fashionable accessory for women.

Pepys records how masks blur the line between “woman of quality” and “available commodity,” and how this phenomenon is connected to the social mobility masks offer women. Once again at the theater, Pepys records the following episode:

Vexed all the while with two talking ladies and Sir Charles Sedley; yet pleased to hear their discourse, he being a stranger. And one of the ladies would, and did sit with her mask on, all the play, and being exceeding witty as ever I heard woman, did talk most pleasantly with him; but was, I believe, a virtuous woman, and of quality. He would fain know who she was, but she would not tell; yet did give him many pleasant hints of her knowledge of him, by that means setting his brain to work to find out who she was, and did give him leave to use all means to find out who she was, but pulling off her mask . . . But by that means lost the pleasure of the play wholly. (728-729)

Though he claims to be “vexed” with the exchange between Sedley – a widely know libertine or “court wit” – and the masked woman, their semi-flirtatious performance enthralls Pepys, even causing him to ignore the play he supposedly journeyed to the playhouse to see. What enthralls him, among other things, is how she uses the physical design of the mask (“which hides their whole face”) in order to best Sedley in an epistemological contest: she knows him, but won’t let him know her. By disrupting the occularcentric consumption of her face, the woman, somewhat paradoxically, heightens Sedley’s desire for her and visually stokes Pepys’s desire as well. The fact that Pepys includes an assurance that she “was, I believe, a virtuous woman, and of quality” alerts us to the fact that, while consuming masks in order to construct their identities, women would have to grapple with the mask’s dual connotations and, if they failed to direct the mask’s performative possibility correctly, they could end up performing the role of the prostitute, available for male consumption and, thus, exposed to potential violence.
Another entry from the *Diary* hints at what happens when women lose control of the mask’s power to simultaneously attract and repel the male gaze, or, when the mask’s agency overtakes the intentionality of the woman wearing it. On September 6, 1667, Pepys records the following episode:

So we ended, and took a link, the women resolving to be dirty, and walked up and down to get a coach; and my wife, being a little before me, had like to be taken up by one, whom we saw to be Sam Hartlib. My wife had her vizard on: yet I cannot say he meant any hurt; for it was as she was just by a coach-side, which he had, or had a mind to take up; and he asked her, “Madam, do you go in this coach?” But, as soon as he saw a man come to her (I know no whether he knew me) he departed away apace. (Gyford, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*)

Though Pepys is quick to note that nothing really went amiss here – “I cannot say he meant any harm” – his self-assurance as to Hartlib’s intentions itself evokes the possibility that, in this or a similar situation, harm may very well indeed have been meant. In the poorly-lit London streets, a masked woman could very well attract masculine violence. Male actors attempt to exert their own agency over the masked women by violently reframing the relationship between the woman and the physical accessory on her face. The quasi-object becomes, for them, an object that must be violently consumed because it dares to exert its own agency and frustrate their visual prerogatives.

The mask has the power to block occularcentric consumption as well as increase the desire of the gazing male. By wearing this accessory, women such as Elizabeth Pepys and, as I will discuss, onstage heroines, court a very real danger. Within a field of occularcentric consumption practices, the feminine actor’s ability to control the dual nature of the mask can grant her freedom of movement or expose her to physical violence. The presence of the consuming male’s sword emphasizes his potential for violent consumption, and when it exists in the proximity of masks, a highly charged competition between consumption scripts – that
controlled by the male consumer versus the female consumer – plays out in complex ways. Comparing this competition between the mask and the sword in *The Rover* and *The Busie Body* reveals how Behn and Centlivre trace feminine responses to violent male consumption. Whereas Behn champions female engagement in occularcentric consumption performances, Centlivre critiques the efficacy of such performances and, as I will discuss later, introduces a document-based strategy for women to achieve subjectivity.

**Masks in The Rover: Manipulating Oneself as Object Within an Occularcentric Field**

Since the late 20th century, a significant number of literary critics have read *The Rover* through a feminist lens, commenting on both the agency and consequent danger that objects such as masks, costumes, and pictures – objects that are designed to manipulate vision - offer heroines such as Helena and Florinda. Ashley Bender, in an examination of how Behn uses miniatures as props to critique patriarchal prerogatives in *The Rover*, claims that “the men in *The Rover* control the movement of female bodies by controlling the movement of miniatures that depict those bodies. Behn demonstrates how the men – especially Willmore – deny Angellica and Florinda ownership of their pictures and, more importantly, of themselves once they make their pictures public” (Bender 27). According to Bender, Behn’s critique of gaze-based courtship strategies necessarily involves a critique of violent masculinity: “Behn suggests, then, that this new type of masculinity that Wilmore 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” (33). Behn also “furthers her critique with the example of her heroine Helena by suggesting that women can maintain some autonomy, even within the confines of marriage, by controlling the movement of their images and their bodies” (27). Significantly, Helena is able to retain this autonomy because she adeptly manipulates herself as object within a visual field:
rather than settle for the limits placed upon her, Helena 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. Helena does not rely on mediating texts; she circulates no miniature. Although Helena demonstrates a wariness of showing herself too much in public from the outset of the play, her discretion does not stop her from going public. She instead creates signs out of costumes that hide her “true” self. (39)

But, as Dagny Boebel points out, the manipulation of visual signifiers within a visual economy of consumption is the very thing that places other heroines, namely Florinda, in very real physical danger, such as the attempted gang rape, which, as I have shown, is metonymically framed via swords: “Willmore shares the attitude . . . that rape is a crime against property. Only a ‘woman of quality,’ a virginal daughter or a wife of a propertied man, is subject to rape. Other women are common property. Carnival masquerade, of course, makes it impossible to tell a gypsy or a prostitute from an aristocrat” (66).

Helena deploys herself as a quasi-object: something that, according to the patriarchal logic of Restoration culture should be a passive object of male desire, but yet exerts an agency of its own over those who wish to consume it. She effectively uses visual technologies - masks and men’s clothing - in order to manipulate herself as object and navigate a violent economy of consumption. Whereas Florinda often finds herself in a potentially violent situation when she wears masks (she is wearing one in the gang rape scene discussed earlier), Helena manages to retain control over the object and, thus, over the men in the play. Not only does she use the mask to sneak out of her brother’s home early in the play, thus subverting his role as stand-in father figure, she also uses it to manipulate Willmore, one of the play’s most violent and appetitive men. This is evident in several scenes throughout The Rover, including the first meeting between herself and Willmore, when she displays an awareness of how male sexual consumption is associated metonymically with sword play by asking him “Can you storm?” Another scene that

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emphasizes her control of the mask and of Willmore occurs in Act 3, scene 1, when she actually unasks for Willmore. Aware that Willmore has just slept with Angellica, Helena confronts him outside Angellica’s home, and accosts him:

WILLMORE. . . . I see thou nearest a conscience — come then, for a beginning show me thy dear face.

HELENA. I’m afraid, my small acquaintance, you have been staying that swinging stomach you boasted this morning; I then remember my little collation would have gone down with you, without the sauce of a handsome face — is your stomach so queasy now? (3.1.143-148).

Here Helena borrows and mocks Willmore’s earlier language frameing male sexual consumption as food consumption. Willmore’s request for her to show him her face also emphasizes the visual nature of masculine consumption. He will repeat or imply this request several times throughout their exchange. Helena decides to test the power she has over Willmore after he professes, “I have a heart with a hole quite through it; no prison mine to keep a mistress in”; she decides to grant his request to see her face, stating, “I see our business as well as humors are alike; yours to cozen as many maids as will trust you, and I as many men as have faith — see if I have not as desperate a lying look as you can have for the heart of you” (3.1.179-185). The stage directions then read that she “Pulls off her vizard: he starts” (109). After removing her mask, she asks him “How do you like it, captain?” (186). The stage directions indicate that her actions cause an equal and opposite reaction in Willmore - “he starts” - thus emphasizing the control Helena exerts over the situation. Whereas Willmore’s actions toward Florinda are assertive and violent, here they emphasize his lack of agency; he is simultaneously object and subject of the male gaze. Helena, significantly, frames her own face as an object, asking Willmore “how do you like it?”
as though her face is an object ontologically detached from herself. She then replaces the mask, re-covering her face, but Willmore is still under her control. The stage directions indicate that “He seems to court her to pull off her vizard: she refuses” (110), and she offers to unmask only if he will tell her what he was doing in Angellica’s house (3.1.225). Unlike Florinda, Helena effectively uses the mask to increase her own mobility and social freedom: by physically blocking and unblocking her face, she is able to achieve a freedom not available to herself otherwise, while avoiding the potential violence that haunts Florinda’s masked escapades. And, yet, given the play’s insistence on emphasizing the dangers faced by masked women, Helena’s control over her status as self-directed object remains troubled. As Misty Anderson points out,

In a dark comment on what can happen beyond the ending, The Second Part of the Rover opens with Helena already dead after only a month of marriage, and the sexually voracious Willmore on the prowl . . . In this sequel, Behn questions her ability to create comic plots that reflect enduring material changes for female subjects; she proves that she can trick her way through the courtship plot with a witty heroine, but maintaining her authority after marriage is another matter. (Anderson 79)

Helena can exert agency during courtship, but her status after the curtain closes is problematic. She sails off into the sunset with Willmore, the ludic yet violent rake, and her status as agent is now compromised by her status as wife. Years later, in 1707, Centlivre would craft a more secure ending for her heroine Miranda.

Recycling Restoration Transgression: Masks in Centlivre’s The Busie Body

In the first act of Centlivre’s The Busie Body, Miranda appears in a park, masked and mobile, and her situation is similar to Helena’s. She is a young woman in a mask who achieves social mobility not allowed her otherwise, and at first the courtship plot seems to follow the trajectory found in Behn’s play. Miranda explicitly comments on her social mobility in a comparison with Isabinda: “I have Liberty, Wench, that she wants; what would she give now to be in this dissabillee in the – open Air, nay more, in pursuit of the young Fellow she likes; for
that’s my Case, I assure thee” (9; Act 1). Her liberty is partially the result of her dress, which includes a mask, and which blocks her from the sight of Sir Francis and Sir George. Right before she sees these two men haggle over Sir George’s interview with her, she states “Ha! My Guardian with him; what can be the meaning of this? I’m sure Sir Francis can’t know me in this Dress” (9; Act 1). As these men bargain over the right to speak with Miranda, of which I will have more to say later, they are unaware that she is listening in because she exists outside of their visual field. The fact that the audience can see her heightens the dramatic irony of the scene, while emphasizing her ability to manipulate the course of the plot. Once she does enter Sir George’s visual zone, thus exposing her person to potential danger, she must manipulate herself like Helena, that is, as a quasi-object of visual consumption.

The witty exchange between Sir George and Miranda evokes those between Wilmore and Helena in The Rover, but also plays up the masculine violence that Helena is able to deflect. In this scene, Miranda’s mask simultaneously thwarts and thus paradoxically heightens Sir George’s desire for her body. His initial request for her to unmask underscores his desire for her body: “Were they [women] more brittle than China, and drop’d to pieces with a touch, every Atom of her I have ventur’d at, if she be but mistress of thy Wit, balances Ten times the Sum – Prithee let me see thy Face” (11; Act 1) He repeats his request a few lines later, in a manner that evokes the sexual violence that haunts Restoration courtship in plays such as The Rover. Before he leaves her, he resolves “to know who you are, where you live, and what kind of Flesh and Blood your Face is; therefore unmask and don’t put me through the trouble of doing it for you” (11; Act 1). In what follows, Sir George evokes the potential violence that hovers around the figure of the male consumer, something he has hinted at earlier in his comments about the sword. The stage directions read that Sir George is “taking hold of her” (18) as he tells her “The Ladies
Favours are always Welcome; but I must have this Cloud withdrawn . . . Remember you are in the Park, Child, and what a terrible thing would it be to lose this pretty white Hand” (11; Act 1). It is here that the double valence of the mask – its potential for increased mobility and its ability to attract the violence of thwarted privilege – comes into focus. Miranda, like Helena, increases her desirability by wearing the mask and physically blocking her face from sight, but this rebuke of occularcentric male prerogative also stokes Sir George’s desire to remove the physical barrier between himself and Miranda’s face.

Miranda manages to escape this situation in a manner that evokes both Helena’s manipulation of Willmore in The Rover and the unnamed woman’s manipulaton of Charles Sedley’s desire as recorded by Pepys. In other words, though she is still trapped in an occularcentric consumption performance – and thus exposed to physical danger – she manages to wrest control away from the unruly accessory on her face, and direct the consumption script enough to get away. She offers to reveal to Sir George her name, where she lives, and why she has pursued Sir George so far (12; Act 1). Once he turns his back, she displays the same epistemological privilege that the unnamed woman does in Pepys’s entry: “First when it was my unhappy Lot to see you at Paris (Draws back a little and speaks) at a Ball upon a Birth-Day; your Shape and Air charm’d my Eyes; your Wit and Complaisance my Soul, and from that fatal Night I lov’d you” (12; Act 1). The mask allows her to maintain this privilege over Sir George because it hides her face – Sir George, after all, already knows what Miranda looks like, and the mask allows her to manipulate his desires via sound while denying his desire to consume her through vision. Like Behn’s Helena, Miranda manages to control the situation by successfully manipulating the consumption of her face within a visual economy of consumption, but unlike Helena, she experiences the potential violence that these consumption practices expose her to.
For the remainder of the play, Miranda distances herself from ocularcentric consumption practices, as she enters into relationships with objects that exist outside of an visual economy.

**Documents and the Assertion of Feminine Subjectivity**

Whereas Helena relies on visual technologies in order to manipulate Willmore – most notably the mask and breeches – Miranda moves beyond these items in order to secure her happiness and economic agency after marriage. In the dumb interview between Sir George and Miranda, the audience sees her not so much bare-faced as she is un-masked. The dramatic irony that infuses this scene results from our knowledge that Sir George has just unknowingly assaulted Miranda in the park, and that he is now attempting to woo her in person. The sword that hangs by his side, which the stage directions reveal that he reaches for twice in this scene, both emphasizes the dramatic irony while simultaneously reminding us that Sir George is associated with a potentially violent consumption style. As we see Miranda and George move towards a generic happy ending, i.e. marriage, we are aware that the Restoration mask haunts the subsequent action.

Miranda’s decision to abandon her mask-based strategy is at once a decision to abandon feminine consumption practices as they are framed in *The Rover*, and also an effort to assert herself as a fully agentic consumer. In his reading of *The Rover*, Sofer claims that because Behn was “a realist rather than a feminist, she may have suspected that liberating women from objectification was an impossible task given the economy in which she operated. But Behn’s acts of unmasking nonetheless imply that women might wrest control of the sexual signification even as they burst out of the picture frame and onto the stage” (*Dark Matter* 89). If Behn’s Helena deftly manipulates her status as a consumable object, then Miranda insists on her own recognition as a consuming subject. Miranda distances herself from an economy of consumption
in which women are viewed as consumable objects, and enters an economy of consumption that is inflected through an early whiggish ideology that champions the rights of the autonomous individual to assert him- or herself financially and socially. Miranda is not so much looking to consume specific things, per se, but rather the agency to act as a self-directed consumer. If Behn has Helena use the mask to thwart violent masculine consumption, then Miranda subsumed this tactic into a larger, consumption based strategy that seeks, among other things, to change the very field in which gendered consumption plays out. Centlivre thus reconfigures what gendered consumption means in a post-Collier, whiggish ideological environment.

*The Busie Body*, like other plays in Centlivre’s corpus, displays a preoccupation with the notion of contract, and documents are the objects through which several of her heroines assert their own subjectivity in the face of masculine consumption, albeit with mixed results. In a comparison of Congreve’s *The Way of the World* with Centlivre’s *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, Vivian Davis claims that while Congreve upholds a masculine version of legality and contract that trumps social corruption, Centlivre questions the model of subjectivity that such contractual logic offers women: “By imaginatively dramatizing the negotiation of the marital contract as a multipronged plot concerning histrionic and highly constructed relationships between men, Centlivre’s play launches a critique of the gendered logic informing the conjugal contract as it is staged in Congreve” (520). Centlivre hesitates to fully embrace legal contractual engagement because of the troubled status of married women as they are framed by Lockean contractual logic and in plays such as Congreve’s: “Equally problematic is the model of personhood resulting from Mirabell’s contractual solution, a situation in which Millamant becomes both negotiator and negotiated, both subject and object, a reflexive condition birthed from the ashes of masculine anxiety, constituted not under the heading of equivalency, but under conditions of duress” (524-
525). Davis makes a convincing argument for Centlivre’s reservations about masculine contractualism, but her claim that in “favoring theatricality over legality, Centlivre’s play celebrates self-conscious performance in the social sphere as Fainwell becomes the skilled architect of a multiparty stratagem in which he dupes the string of guardians into signing away their charge” (520) reveals that Davis’s reading is primarily a symbolic reading of the play. To claim, as Davis does, that Centlivre critiques contractualism, per se, requires that we overlook Fainall’s clear success in manipulating contractual technologies, the physical documents through which he pursues the right to wed Lovely. The fact that Fainall “dupes the string of guardians into signing away their charge” (emphasis mine) alerts us to how design informs Centlivre’s play in addition to symbolic or linguistic associations. Documents, by virtue of their physical design - portable pieces of paper with largely unchanging text and legal standing - do indeed give characters such as Bold Stroke’s heroine Lovely a way of circumventing masculine prerogative, provided all the proper signatures can be physically inscribed on the appropriate page. It is this aspect of contract - the physically embodied authority of law on documents - that Centlivre uses to grant her heroine social and financial agency in The Busie Body.

Contract does inform the action of The Rover, but in a very different way than in Centlivre’s later play. As Stephen Szilagyi claims in an analysis of the sexual politics of The Rover, “prostitution, a kind of commonwealth, readily becomes, therefore, an image of the body politic because women and men are associated in both prostitution and marriage with sexual access and property to be contractually engaged” (449). In Behn’s play, contract is primarily sexual rather than legal. Furthermore, all of the contracts made between parties, such as Helena and Willmore, are far from engagements made between equal and equitable partners: “as heroic lovers, each [Helena and Willmore] seeks to exert power over the other. Thus, they view
themselves and their impending married life in terms of strife between worthy opponents” (441). Furthermore, all of the contracts made in *The Rover* are verbal contracts, without the authority of documents or other material technologies to back them up. In a sense, swords function as vehicles to determine the right to consume women’s bodies, but as I have shown these are volatile objects, and their use is associated with a violent occularcentric masculine consumption style that denies women any subjectivity of their own. Documents, on the other hand, can operate outside of an occularcentric economy and, in the early years of the eighteenth century, held the possibility of letting women exert their own claims to legal and social subjectivity.

I am not the first to comment on how Centlivre deploys documents in *The Busie Body*. As Anderson claims, “In *The Busie Body*, secret letters, charms, and missing papers create comic disruption of fatherly prerogative that allow her heroines to make their own contracts . . . Centlivre maintains that words and contracts are not only the domain of men” (Anderson 111). Anderson’s work on *The Busie Body* convincingly lays out how Centlivre uses “stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments” in order to represent the economic agency available for women in the early years of the eighteenth century:

Stocks and other short-term financial contracts created highly mobile forms of ownership that subordinated other categories of legal identity to the functional and economic category of ‘shareholders’: the stock market welcomed men and women equally as contractual agents, provided they could pay. Stocks also bridged the gap in the legal identity of women who moved from the category of *femme sole* to *femme covert* by preserving a woman’s right of ownership in her married state. (109)

In *The Busie Body*, Miranda makes use of these “highly mobile forms of ownership” in order to thwart Sir Francis’s consumption of her body and fortune. As Anderson notes, Miranda “uses the materiality of these papers against him when she urges him to ‘sign Articles’ that will free her from the age restriction of her father’s will and allow her to marry by choice” (118). Miranda’s use of the “materiality” of documents allows her to manipulate Sir Francis, just as her use of the
mask allows her to test Sir George. Her use of documents also differentiates her from Restoration heroines such as those deployed on the stage by Behn: “unlike Behn’s Angellica,” Anderson claims, “Centlivre’s heroine understands contracts and can manipulate them across the boundaries of private and public, erotic and commercial” (114). While Anderson lays out the economic and social stakes of Centlivre’s heroines manipulating the “materiality” of documents, she does not consider how the physicality of documents frames Miranda as a new type of feminine consumer: a woman who enters into relationships with physical documents in order to perform her identity as an autonomous economic and social agent.

Much like Behn does in The Rover, Centlivre also uses coinage to represent ocularcentric consumption dynamics, and documents to represent the possibility of women acting outside said consumption dynamics. Coins make an appearance in the first and second acts of The Busie Body and are associated with the symbolic and real transfer of women’s bodies between men. In Act 1, where Sir George is making a deal with Sir Francis to speak with Miranda for an hour, he pays for this privilege in Guineas, and his dialogue and actions emphasize the physical nature of this exchange medium. With Miranda watching the exchange from afar, Sir George “Takes ‘em out of a Purse and chinks ‘em” ([stage directions] 9), saying “Ha! They have a very pretty Sound, and a pleasing Look — But then, Miranda — But if she should be cruel —“ (9; Act 1). Before he exits the stage, Sir Francis kinesthetically mocks George’s payment, saying “Ha, ha, ha, take the last sound of your Guineas, Ha, ha, ha” (10; Act 1), as he “chinks ‘em” ([stage directions] 10). Sir Francis will repeat this action in the next scene, right before the dumb interview. These two male consumers, haggling over Miranda, do not realize that she is watching them in disguise, and she fully realizes that they are exchanging rights to proximity to her body. Patch, who is watching with her, raises the possibility that they
are haggling over first rights to her body: “I wish it ben’t for the first Night’s Lodging Madam” (9; Act 1), and Miranda is willing to entertain that it is in fact droit du Signor represented by the passing of coins from one man to another: “The Favor! Oh my Life! I believe ’tis as you said, Patch” (9; Act 1). For Miranda, this coin-based exchange has the potential for sexual violence to be committed on her body, which is then emphasized by her exchange with Sir George in the last part of the act.

For individuals in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, documents represented both increased flexibility in financial transactions and provided a way to combat the ubiquity associated with traditional currency, i.e. physical coinage. As a textual technology, financial and legal documents allowed individuals to manipulate the more disembodied aspects of money and value, as noted by historian Deborah Valenze, who connects this phenomenon with early-modern projects of the self. According to Valenze,

The abstracting power connected to money, particularly as it related to imaginative activity and self-fashioning seems to have had a marked impact on British culture in its widest sense. Literary critics have led the way in illuminating this subtle reticulation of economy and culture, race align how, for example, a conceptual distinction between persons and commodities was highly permeable in an age when language and custom eluded the two. This was particularly true in the case of women, whose legal persons were surrendered upon marriage, as wealth, goods, and identities were transferred from household to household within a culturally specific system of exchange. (3)

Valenze’s claims about the abstracting power of money dovetails conceptually with Anderson’s claims about how documents are deployed in Centlivre’s corpus, that is, how documents, especially as contracts, could offer women agency even in the face of the legal and financial non-personhood they faced upon marriage. Documents as money, or as bearers of value also allowed individuals to counter the historical instability associated with physical coins. The lack of standardization in physical coinage during this period, as well as a general shortage of coinage in England placed the onus of determining value on those actually engaged in transactions. As
Valenze points out, “A heterogenous supply of money schooled an active population in a particular form of technical virtuosity in exchange relations. Underweight coins dating from earlier decades circulated alongside newer issues, requiring users to discern denominations of all sizes and metals” (38). Given this instability associated with coinage, “A great deal was left up to the individual in determining the actual value of any given coin” (39). In this light, documents that acted as bearers of value constituted a material technology that at once emphasized the more abstract nature of value that money supposedly bore, while at the same time providing a solid material basis - the light, highly mobile pieces of paper - for the capacity to use this value. For example, documents “signaled the ability of parties to carry out exchanges at greater geological distances and transfer debt to unknown third parties” (22), thus offering individuals a form of mobility not possible when dealing with heavy coins and goods. This mobility, as Centlivre realized, could be extended to women, thus offering them a freedom not found in economies that rely on physical coinage. By utilizing documents, Centlivre’s Miranda is able to exercise a form of mobility not offered to her by the Restoration mask.

Centlivre grafts Miranda’s self assertion as an agentic consumer onto the generic marriage plot that structures The Busie Body. Each of her potential husbands, Sir George and Sir Francis, begin the play seeing her as an object to be consumed, that is, bought, sold, and haggled over. This method of consumption, as I have pointed out, is inflected through older models of male violence, something Sir George constantly evokes but never actually deploys. In the first

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48 The physical constraints of wealth often plague Daniel Defoe’s eponymous character Roxana. For example, when Roxana decides to relocate from Amsterdam back to England, she must first translate her various jewels – “the fine Diamond Ring . . . the Diamond Nacklace . . . “a Pair of Extraordinary Ear-Rings . . . “a small Case with some Rubies and Emeralds” (Defoe 162) – into cash, and then figure out “how to get this Treasure to England” (163). Roxana often wields agency over her social environment via her wealth, but she is often forced to confront the literal, physical constraints that come with amassing such a fortune.
act - though dialogue, stage directions, and the presence of gendered objects, the mask and the sword in close proximity - Miranda is framed, much like Helena, as a quasi-object: something to be consumed but yet which also displays an agency of its own. Both Sir George and Sir Francis continue to view Miranda as an object, including in terms of how she is to consume commodities. As an object, Miranda is not supposed to act as a self-directed consumer, but rather as something that is to be consumed. Any relationship she forms with nonhumans is supposed to be a reflection of her husband’s status as agentic subject, not her own. Sir Francis, for instance, brags that “if thou do’st prefer me thy Gardy before these Caperers of the Age, thou shalt outshine the Queen’s Box on an Opera night; thou shalt be the envy of the Ring (for I will Carry thee to Hide-Park) and thy Equipage shall Surpass, the what — d’ye call ‘em Ambassadors” (14; Act 2). When Miranda then asks him to “make me Mistress of my Estate to Day, and I’ll make you Master of my Person tomorrow” (14; Act 2), he replies, “No Chargy, I’ll settle it upon thee for Pin-money; and that will be every bit as well, thou knows’t” (15; Act 2). Sir Francis even makes a show of uncharacteristic generosity towards Miranda when he gifts Sir George’s money to her at the end of the dumb interview: “There, my Girl, there’s the Hundred Pound which thou hast won” (23; Act 2). It may seem odd for such a miserly character to shower Miranda with the promises of expensive equipage and a hundred guineas, but not if we keep in mind that Sir Francis insists on policing the consumption of others, rather than hoarding money like a traditional miser. For Sir Francis, Miranda’s status as object means that her consumption, of commodities, money, etc. is a reflection of his own status as masculine subject.

At the beginning of the play, Sir George views Miranda as an object, but what differentiates him from Sir Francis, besides his physical desirability (he is younger), is his apparent generosity with his own considerable fortune. He is willing enough to provide
financially for Miranda; he guesses that she is uneasy about forfeiting her fortune to Sir Francis and tells her “make me happy with your Person, let him enjoy your wealth” (21; Act 2). He still does not, however, recognize Miranda’s status as a consuming, agentic subject - this will have to wait until Act 4. During the garden scene, Sir George frames their relationship in ocularcentric terms: “Ha! The Voice of my Incognita! — Why did you take Ten Thousand ways to captivate a Heart your Eyes alone had vanquish’d?” (52; Act 4). Intent on moving beyond the ocularcentric economy of consumption that informs Sir George’s residual libertine masculinity, Miranda replies “Prithee, no more of these Flights; for our Time’s but short, and we must fall into Business: Do you think we can agree on that same terrible Bugbear, Matrimony, without heartily repenting on both sides” (52; Act 4). Dismissing Sir George’s overtures as “flights,” she instead frames their betrothal as a contractual engagement, freely entered into by two agentic parties. Much like a business arrangement, Miranda has established that Sir George has the proper credit: “Sir George is what I have try’d in Conversation, inquir’d into his character, am satisfied in both. Then his Love; who would have given a hundred pound only to have seen a Woman he had not infinitely loved?” (51; Act 4). Rather than delve into witty or romantic dialogue with Sir George in the garden, Miranda frames her engagement as an investment, something that will continue granting returns even after the wedding ceremony: “if you have such Love and Tenderness, (since our Woing has been short) pray reserve it for our future Days, to let the World see we are Lovers after Wedlock” (52; Act 4). Unlike Helena, who simply sails off into the sunset with Willmore at the end of The Rover, Miranda seeks security for herself after courtship has ended and she must face the economic and social realities of wedded life. Part of this contract with Sir George, significantly, involves the physical documents that ensure Miranda’s autonomous financial status. She refuses to marry Sir George until Sir Francis has left the house and “I and
my Writings, the most material point, are soon removed” (53; Act 4). Miranda’s use of the mask, which she has used to test Sir George “in Conversation,” gives way to her use of documents, objects that allow her to wield economic agency in a patriarchal environment.

Miranda refers to her documents as the most “material point” in her marriage contract. The OED offers two kinds of definitions for the word “material”: definitions that emphasize the relevance or importance of something, such as “full of sense, meanings, or pertinent information” or “Pertinent, relevant; essential. With to, for.” They other definitions of “material” emphasize the physical and sensual aspects of the adjective: “senses relating to physical substance” or “of physical objects: bulky, massive, solid.” In The Busie Body, Miranda’s use of documents evokes both senses of this word, and her physical manipulation of documents reveals how feminine consumption, as portrayed in The Busie Body, moves beyond the ocularcentric dynamics established in Behn’s The Rover. It is reasonable to assume that an onstage document may not garner as much attention as, say, a sword or mask. Documents are not fashionable, like the other two items I focus on in this study, nor do they allow for conflict or dramatic tension as immediately as a sword or mask. And yet these physical objects are very important in The Busie Body both in terms of plot and in terms of the agency Miranda possesses. Part of their efficacy is, in fact, tied up in the fact that, somewhat paradoxically, they are usually not seen. Despite the fact that documents are very much visual technologies – they must be seen and read in order to perform their functions – they are simply not as noticeable as other kinds of objects and, what is more, they do not have to exist in close physical proximity to other actors, human or nonhuman, in order to exert this efficacy.

Documents offer women such as Miranda a form of mobility that circumvents the violence associate with masculine consumption, unlike the form of mobility offered by the mask.
The same mobility that allows Helena to consciously manipulate her status as consumable object within an ocularcentric economy of consumption is the very same mobility that lands Florinda in a potentially violent situation. The mobility that documents offer Miranda represents, for Centlivre, an improved version of mobility because it circumvents the risks associated with women’s use of masks. It is not for nothing that Miranda abandons the mask-based strategy after Sir George’s potentially violent outburst in the park. Documents allow Miranda to exert her own agency beyond restrictive physical proximities. Whereas in order to manipulate Sir George’s desire in the park she actually has to be close to him - he has to see her, and thus her body is in a dangerous space - documents allow Miranda to physically circulate her agency in spaces where her body is not present. Although her wealth is not physically present in the final scene, the document that delineates her legal right to it stays safely by her side.

The physical design of documents - relatively light, highly mobile pieces of paper - allows women such as Miranda to extend her agency beyond their bodies and to move outside the gendered economy of consumption as it is articulated in Behn’s *The Rover*. Robb claims that “much material culture is invisible” and offers the following heuristic for determining how they function:

> with such objects we commit a principle analytical error if we try to drag them into the light of day, into discursive consciousness: even if we manage to state ‘what they mean,’ ascribing them a discursive meaning not only feels overstated and artificial; it distorts any sense of their real social function. We should instead ask why their invisibility is so central to their functioning. By and large, invisible objects accomplish the jobs of creating the appropriate settings for foregrounded social dramas, and of asserting the standards and rules implicit to such settings. (170)
Although a document is in a very literal sense a visual technology, it can also function outside of an ocularcentric field\(^49\). I do not, for instance, have to have my renter’s lease with me in order to claim the use of my apartment. In *The Busie Body*, Miranda’s documents function behind the scenes – she sends Sir Francis to get a wedding license, the document that grants her access to her fortune only makes its appearance in the final scene of the play, and the document that keeps her legally and financially dependent on Sir Francis never makes an appearance onstage. For the most part, these documents are merely cited through dialogue. But there are times when the traces of their activity is dragged “into the light of day,” to use Robb’s phrase.

Although “highly mobile” and often out of sight, the documents that grant Miranda the legal right to her own fortune are still physical, concrete objects that must be, to some extent, physically manipulated by human actors. Like the other objects discussed in this chapter, masks and swords, documents must enter into physical relationships with human actors in order to have any efficacy, and their physical design determines what kind of efficacy the human subject can exert on her social environment. In the final scene of the *The Busie Body*, Miranda legally and physically grants Charles his independence from Sir Francis. Thwarted in his designs to consume Miranda’s body and retain control over her fortune, Sir Francis vows to retain control over Charles’s inheritance:

SIR JEALOUS. Ha, ha, ha, ‘tis some comfort at least to see you are over-reached as well as myself. Will you settle your estate upon your Son now?

SIR FRANCIS. He shall starve first.

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\(^{49}\) Of course, there are exceptions to this, for example, documents such as passports or state-issued identifications cards, which must be physically present in order for the subject to utilize their efficacy. On the other side of this spectrum, however, exist documents such as government tax bills, which exert agency over wide swaths of a populations, even though citizens and, in some cases, politicians have not actually read them in their entirety.
MIRANDA. That I have taken care to prevent. There, Sir, is the Writings of your Uncle’s Estate, which has been due these three Years (70; Act 5)

As she speaks the last line to Charles, the stage directions read that Miranda “Gives Char. Papers.” (70). Just as she has Sir George gesture towards his sword, here Centlivre briefly brings documents into “the light of day,” to use Robb’s language. This subtle physical action transfers to Charles the financial and economic independence that Centlivre valorizes in her depictions of courtship. Despite his dialogue and intent, the physicality of this document thwarts Sir Francis’s intentionality because of the simple fact that it now rests in Charles’s hands. The physicality of documents, as opposed to physical coinage, allows for such simple transfers of economic rights.

**Conclusion:**

As I have shown through my reading of their most popular plays, Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre display a preoccupation with the violence surrounding male consumption, as it is metonymically embodied in the sword, as well as ways in which women can counter said violent consumption, and assert themselves as agentic subjects. By reading these plays with an attention to notions of design, in addition to symbolic associations, we can gain a better understanding of how concepts such as agency, gender, and consumption played out on the Restoration stage.

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50 Here Miranda’s actions constitute an example of Brechtian “gestus,” which Elin Diamond uses in her analysis of *The Rover*, which focuses on the Willmore’s decision to take on of Angellica’s pictures. Diamond claims that “we might read Willmore’s gesture as a Brechtian Gestus or “gest,” a moment in performance that makes visible the contradictory interactions of text, theater apparatus, and contemporary social struggle. In the unraveling of its intrigue plot, Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* not only thematizes the marketing of women in marriage and prostitution, it ‘demonstrates,’ in its gestic moments, the ideological contradictions of the apparatus Behn inherited and the society for which she wrote” (519).
By paying attention to how these playwrights articulate their character’s gendered consumption of specific objects, they offer modern scholars a means of historically situating what counts as “resistance” in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. For Behn, manipulating oneself as an object of desire counts as resistance; for Centlivre, resistance involves challenging ocularcentric consumption itself. Consumption emerges as a playing field on which different performances, masculine and feminine jostle with each other in a competition for agency. By concentrating on how women, even fictional characters such as Helena and Miranda utilize the physical design of objects in their quests for agency and subjectivity, we can see how resistance to male dominance, in this case masculine consumption, involves, quite literally, picking up the tools available. This is also a reminder for scholars of literature, history, and culture that while the symbolic aspects of objects are certainly relevant in discussions of gender, consumption, and political resistance, the physical nature of these objects is equally as important to consider. Perhaps one way of phrasing the larger question that this chapter points to is, thus, “how does the physicality of the world, so often taken for granted, impinge upon our representations of gender, consumption, and political resistance?”

This is not an admonition to privilege one side of the “symbolic/physical” binary over another. To speak of feminine resistance, such as Miranda’s, which involves an assertion of oneself as consuming subject, is not to speak solely to the “disembodied” or more abstract aspects of an individual or group’s character. Instead, I would suggest that, in the (always incomplete) quest for subjectivity, those phenomena traditionally viewed as symbolic and those viewed as physical are often intertwined and blurred. Rather than privileging the material, physical object over the symbolic, internal realms of the subject, we as scholars of culture should instead ask how various actors navigate environments made up of both symbolic and material
components, how actors positions themselves on a subject-object spectrum, and how the assertion of subjectivity is often bound up with humanity’s relationship to nonhuman actors. To study consumption as a project of the self, or the assertion of identity reveals how the gendered nature of subject-hood changed during the Restoration and early 18th century. One aspect of this change involves the shifting conceptions of feminine agency seen in Behn and Centlivre, that is, the shift from feminine agency as an attribute of an agentic object, to that of feminine resistance as an assertion of female subject-hood propped up by the legal and financial apparatus already available to men. Unlike the depth model of subjectivity often associated with the later novel, this model of subjectivity does not oppose the interior realm of the subject with the passive outside world-as-object, but rather articulates subjectivity as a matter of human interaction with specific nonhuman entities (in this case documents) in order to assert an agency over one’s social and cultural surroundings.
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