"My Masculine Part": or, The Disappearance of the Female Body: The Shifting Boundaries Between Gender, Status, and the Body in the Writing of Aphra Behn

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ABSTRACT

"My Masculine Part": or, The Disappearance of the Female Body: The Shifting Boundaries Between Gender, Status, and the Body in the Writing of Aphra Behn

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Recent literary and cultural histories have refined our understandings of the categories that created identity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—the period leading up to the solidification of the modern concept of the self. Drawing on this scholarship, my thesis investigates the ways that Aphra Behn explores the categories of gender and status (both in transition during the Restoration period) as they relate to the physical body. Through readings of two pieces of short fiction, a play, and a three-part novel, I trace the ways in which Behn creates different situations to explore the complex interactions between gender, status, and the body in order to expose the often dramatic ways that these categories inflect one another. Ultimately, I argue that the potential for the disembodiment of female identity as it is portrayed in Behn's works (as opposed to the fully embodied identity of the male) allows for a radical re-imagining of female identity that is bound by neither traditional concepts of gender nor status.

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Introduction

A favourite technique of feminist critics for introducing Aphra Behn is through the words of Virginia Woolf, who wrote, "All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn [. . .] for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds" (2482-83). This tendency reveals two important things about the Behn who emerged as a feminist subject in the 1980s: Behn's feminist credentials needed to be justified by linking her to an iconic feminist figure like Woolf, and Behn's importance lay primarily in her life as an author, not necessarily in her literary works. Furthermore, as Woolf herself makes clear, only a select part of Behn's life was important—the "shady and amorous" (Woolf 2483) part was better left in the past.

A partial view of Behn—important as an author yet not really for what she wrote, useful as a "first" but only if we edit the more unladylike aspects of her behaviour—is part of what Jonathan Goldberg calls "the legend of good women" (5). This feminist approach towards Behn and other eighteenth-century female writers (which was, as Margaret Ezell observes, derived largely from nineteenth-century feminist literary criticism) succeeded in recovering a number of important women writers, and the importance of their recovery should not be underestimated. However, in the case of Behn, her early recovery too often came at the expense of the more "shady and amorous" aspects of her life and her writing.[1] These aspects, I would argue, reveal far more about the ways gender, sexuality, and status functioned in the social world in which Behn wrote

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[1] For a comprehensive discussion of the problems in applying the principles of nineteenth-century feminist literary history to women writing before 1700 see *Writing Women's Literary History* where Ezell argues that "the marginalization of early women writers in the Anglo-American tradition is in part the result of the early emphasis in feminist studies on nineteenth-century texts" (4).

than had hitherto been revealed in the efforts to make her a feminist forerunner. As Goldberg argues, "it is time to give up the project of making her a good woman or a good feminist. [. . .] Behn's writing allows for ways of thinking about gender—and for a feminist politics—that has no need for the legend of good women" (72).

While much recent criticism of Behn has abandoned the need to prove her a good feminist, many critics still pursue the types of questions raised by the earlier critical material. This is most evident in the interest in Behn the woman, piqued even further by the scarcity of historical information about her life, which is apparent in the many critics who study her works for the details they may reveal about the author.[2] That this is still a major part of Behn scholarship is clear from Janet Todd's 1996 biography, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, which combines the few known facts of Behn's life with her writings and a large amount of speculation to produce what is, admittedly, a fascinating picture of the Restoration author. The biographical approach to Behn's work has certainly provided valuable insight and provoked a great deal of critical debate; it will most likely continue to do so. However, the reduction of the works to their female author risks marginalizing Behn as a writer only interested in questions arising from her own gender. Given her wide experimentation in different genres and with different themes within those genres, to reduce Behn's *oeuvre* to solely gender-based interests is to ignore a large part of her work and her literary importance.

In combination with the interest in Behn's life, Jane Spencer cites two key texts that were integral to the survival of Behn's literary reputation (even through its darkest

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[2] While most recent criticism has moved away from simply equating Behn with her female characters or narrators, there is still a lot of interest in treating her texts as, in Ros Ballaster's words, "(auto)biographizing" (3) or, to use Jane Spencer's terms, "romanticized autobiography" (*Rise* 41).

moments during the 19th century) and that have continued to be the focus of Behn criticism. Unsurprisingly to any Behn scholar, these two works are Behn's novel, *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave* and her play, *The Rover: or, The Banished Cavaliers*.[3] While *The Rover* remained incredibly popular long after Behn's death, it is *Oroonoko* that has ensured her literary longevity and has driven her critical resurgence in the last thirty years. Taken up by abolitionists, dramatists, postcolonial criticism, feminist criticism, race-oriented criticism, travel-writing scholarship, and genre critics interested in the origins of the novel, *Oroonoko*, despite its brevity, has received attention across a wide spectrum of the literary field.[4]

Srivinas Aravamudan has attributed *Oroonoko*'s central importance in a number of different strands of literary criticism to its openness to the process of "virtualization," a term that "describes colonialist representations that acquire malleability because of a certain loss of detail, a process that enables readier identification and manipulation by readers" (17). Thus, for example, the initial adoption of *Oroonoko* by abolitionist discourse relied on Behn's sympathetic portrayal of her slave hero and heroine, Oroonoko and Imoinda, while ignoring her complicity with and acceptance of the slavery

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[3] In *Aphra Behn's Afterlife*, Spencer dedicates a full chapter to the critical fortunes of each of these works. For *The Rover* see 187-222 and for *Oroonoko* see 223-264.

[4] While a comprehensive review of *Oroonoko*'s influence and scholarship would require a chapter unto itself, I will provide some examples. Only seven years after its publication, *Oroonoko* was turned into a highly successful play by Thomas Southerne in which form, along with the original, it was taken up by early abolitionist discourse. For details see Spencer *Afterlife* 223-29. For an interesting discussion of how *Oroonoko* fits into the travel-writing tradition and early social anthropology, see Mary Baine Campbell's *Wonder and Science*, in particular 257-83. Margaret W. Ferguson provides an intriguing discussion of *Oroonoko* in *Dido's Daughters* where she traces the role of literacy in the colonization process; see 333-73. Finally, for a highly provocative if not entirely convincing reading of *Oroonoko* as providing proof for Behn's own racial passing, see Margo Hendricks's "Alliance and Exile: Aphra Behn's Racial Identity."

apparatus as a whole. Feminist criticism, to take another example, reads *Oroonoko* as "an important stage in the history of women's quest for literary authority" (Spencer *Rise* 47) by focusing exclusively on the narrator-Oroonoko relationship while ignoring the highly problematic portrayal of Imoinda that is highlighted by Charlotte Sussman when she writes, "The white woman speaks in the novel literally over the dead body of the black woman" (230). This is not the place for a full discussion of the critical debates surrounding *Oroonoko*; suffice it to say that the initial "virtualized" readings of Behn's text have sparked numerous debates as more and more contradictory details are added to the critical flames.

The most significant problem with the critical love-affair with *Oroonoko*, in my view, is that it overshadows Behn's other writing. Despite seven thick volumes of work, Behn criticism is still predominantly a one-text affair.[5] In consequence, while I do believe that there is still more ink to be spilled in the *Oroonoko* debates, I have chosen to try to open up the field of Behn criticism a bit more by discussing two texts that have been largely ignored in combination with two others that seem to be the most likely candidates to join *Oroonoko* in canonical importance in the near future. "The Unfortunate Bride" and "The Dumb Virgin," the subjects of my first chapter, are pieces of short fiction, both published posthumously, in 1698 and 1700 respectively, and most likely written around 1685 (Spencer *Rise* 44). Neither of these works has received much critical attention

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[5] This is slowly changing but progress has been very gradual. Of particular importance to the expansion of the critical work on Behn has been Janet Todd's seven-volume edition of Behn's *Works*. As well, influential critics like Catherine Gallagher, who includes a sustained discussion of Behn's *The Luckey Chance* alongside a chapter on *Oroonoko* in *Nobody's Story*, and Michael McKeon, whose *The Secret History of Domesticity* includes a full chapter on Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, are leading the way to more developed critical debate around a number of Behn's other, until very recently secondary, works.

despite containing difficult representations of the relationship between defect, gender, and social status. Alternately, *The Luckey Chance*, one of Behn's last plays, and *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, Behn's three-part novel, have both begun to attract significant critical interest and hopefully will continue to do so. These two works are the subjects of my second and third chapters respectively. Despite their complexity, they are still far from reaching the levels of academic discussion that they merit.

In addition to moving away from Behn's most canonical text, I have also tried to open up the categories through which I approach my readings to include more than those suggested by a belief in the primary importance of Behn's own gender. In this respect, I fully agree with Goldberg's "historicizing gesture," which he takes from Behn's narrative asides in *Oroonoko*, that leads to his "reading of Behn in terms of shifting historical contingencies and the contradictions of the Restoration" (45). In order to approach the categories of identity as they may have been understood at the time of Behn's writing, I have drawn on a number of cultural histories that shed light on identity construction in the transitional years before the rise of the modern self, yet after the destabilization of the cosmological picture of the individual as part of a larger coherent whole in which authority was based in religion and absolute monarchy.

Underlying much of my approach are Dror Wahrman's work on identity in the early part of the eighteenth century, what he labels "the *ancien régime* of identity," included in his wider study, *The Making of the Modern Self* and Thomas Laqueur's influential study of historical understandings of sex, *Making Sex*. Laqueur's insight that during the late seventeenth century, gender roles fixed social identity rather than biological sex, which was understood as potentially mutable, sparked my interest in

Restoration literary depictions of the body. Additionally, Wahrman's argument that a "significant convergence" between the development of personal identity and the categories of identity (such as class, race, and gender) took place during this period such that their development "*did* mirror each other, and moved in tandem" (xiii) allows us to reflect on the instability of identity in a time when all of its elements are in flux and to investigate what comes to ground identity when the body is not yet the essential foundation for identity categories such as gender and race. The work of these authors places Behn in a time of radically shifting understandings of just about every element of identity.[6]

Wahrman's view of the structural similarities between the development of identity and its key modern components falters with respect to class, which he tries to incorporate into his system of historical development through an analogy which claims that the political is to class what gender is to sex (147-48). However, as Michael McKeon has persuasively argued, class is a social category (as opposed to the biological category of sex) which itself replaced the aristocratic belief in status based solely on birth/biology. Because of the importance Behn (as a royalist writer) placed on status in her works, I have drawn on McKeon's more nuanced analysis of the categories of status and class which sees them as involved in a process of change fundamentally distinct from and even opposite to that being undergone by sex and gender: "sexual 'identity' became more rigidly defined, at the same time that socioeconomic 'identity,' freed of its traditional

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[6] Wahrman provides an example of this shift with respect to sex and gender using subsequent translations of Juvenal's Sixth Satire: "In the mid-seventeenth-century text, sex is represented as mutable. In the early-eighteenth-century one, the key to the proposed mutability is shifted from sex to gender. And in the turn-of-the-century translation, the possible instabilities of sex *or* gender are muted or denied" (73). For Wahrman's sustained analysis of this example see 69-76.

subservience to biological criteria of blood, became more variable" ("Historicizing" 304). In light of McKeon's work, I have kept my main axes of investigation—status/class and sex/gender—carefully separate in order to appreciate the ways in which they inflect one another in Behn's writing.

If the body is itself merely another changing/changeable element that makes up identity during the late seventeenth century, then its choice as my focus may seem somewhat arbitrary. This is not the case, however, once we look at Behn's writing. In Behn's texts, bodies are both conspicuously odd and conspicuous in their absence; they routinely display strange, even eccentric behaviour: physical bodies transform unexpectedly, defy death, or become animated despite death; they are sometimes presented as being of the utmost importance and sometimes are of no consequence whatsoever (despite our expectations that they should be of vital importance); finally, they vary from extreme plasticity in the hands of social agents or in the face of societal expectations to complete rigidity. In Behn, there is no typical body, and there is no element of identity that is consistently embodied. Her representations of the physical and its relationship to identity are completely counter-intuitive from a modern perspective that sees the body as a stable foundation for our most important identity categories. Because of its very strangeness and its importance for understanding categories such as gender and status, the Restoration body seemed a logical starting place for this type of investigation.

While my investigations could have easily and productively been expanded to include other categories that were equally important to late seventeenth-century conceptions of identity (such as race, religion, or political affiliation), I decided to focus

on the interactions between the physical body and the categories of sex, gender, status, and class (only very tentatively emerging at this time) because these are the categories that most consistently run through most of Behn's works. In addition, while gender has been thoroughly explored with relation to Behn's writing, her use of status has been unfortunately neglected despite its obvious importance. And, as will be evident throughout my work, sex, gender, and status are categories that affect the body, and each influences the other's potential embodiment in ways that are not easily collapsed or separated out from one another.

There is no easy summation of the way that the body behaves in Behn, no simple statement of the one element of identity that is stable, embodied in Behn's work. Yet given Behn's literary output, which encompassed all manner of literary forms (plays, translations, poetry, short and long fiction) that were available to her, it seems wrong to expect her work to display consistently similar themes and ideas. Rather, Behn was an explorer—she did not just write poetry; she experimented with many forms and styles of poetry. The same is true of her work in other genres. As Goldberg has astutely noted, "somewhere in Behn's voluminous, generically various output there is a basis for virtually all the contradictory views about her that have been expressed" (44).

In the spirit of Behn's own exploration, I have approached each of her works with a thread to follow—the body and embodiment of particular identity categories—but with no overall theory of where that thread should lead.[7] I did not expect Behn's heroines or

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[7] In this respect, I am influenced by Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's description of following versus reproducing. They write: "Reproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of *view* that is external to what is being reproduced [. . .]. But following is something different from the ideal of reproduction. Not better, just different. One is

heroes to reveal consistent patterns, to be archetypal, and I was not disappointed. Each of Behn's works discussed here merits investigation on its own terms and reveals its own conclusions. Seen together, Behn's works only emphasize her ingenuity and her keen interest in exploring the myriad possibilities for men and women inherent in her literary forms. Living in a time of radically shifting understandings of the individual and his/her role with respect to society, Behn used her writing to test and to explore what these changing understandings and values might mean for women and men in Restoration England, always with an eye to potential futures.

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obliged to follow when one is in search of the 'singularities' of a matter, or rather a material, and not out to discover a form" (372).

Chapter 1 – Defective Roles: or, Falling Between Society's Cracks: Bodily Defect and Social Identity in "The Unfortunate Bride" and "The Dumb Virgin"

The Restoration and eighteenth century saw the birth of the modern conception of the individual and the modern understanding of sex and gender, which assumes a clear relationship between the sexed body and the particular gender that is defined by that body. However, these conceptions did not emerge fully formed; throughout the period of their emergence, older ideas such as the belief in one sex and in gender roles grounded in the cosmological order rather than in biology were still very much in circulation. Jonathan Goldberg argues, "much of the problem with understanding Behn comes from assuming that the female gender that she inhabited is transhistorically identical to a modern gender location" (45). As much recent historical work has shown, this is not the case.[8] It is within an environment of competing worldviews that Behn's writing must be situated in order to fully appreciate the complexity of her explorations regarding gender and identity.

Acknowledging this instability of worldviews is particularly important if we are to fully appreciate Behn's use of the physical body in her works. Writing of Behn's three-part novel, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*, Ellen Pollak argues that the

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[8] For the seminal work on the constructedness of the sex/gender system see Rubin, who defines the "sex/gender system" as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (159). For a comprehensive discussion of the differences between pre-modern, transitional, and modern identity categories (with a focus on the eighteenth century), see Wahrman whose work delineates the changes from a Renaissance conception of identity, through a transition period in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century characterized by fluidity of identity, to the fixity of the late eighteenth-century, modern view of identity categories. While his analysis of the latter part of the century may be somewhat problematic (see McKeon's critique in "Recent Studies" 713-718), his work provides valuable insight into the transition period between the two identity systems.

physical body "finally emerges as the most unstable of all sites of meaning" (179). This claim can be extended to a number of Behn's prose, dramatic, and poetic works. Rather than being a solid ground for organizing gender, the body is depicted in Behn's writing as fluid, malleable, and ultimately unstable. Furthermore, this malleability of the physical is often used to undermine the rigidity and expose the artificiality of the gender roles that structured late seventeenth-century society. The contrast between rigid gender roles and the malleable body is most apparent in Behn's stories of defect, "The Unfortunate Bride: or, The Blind Lady a Beauty" and "The Dumb Virgin: or, The Force of the Imagination," both of which feature physically deformed heroines and consciously consider the gender roles allowed these heroines by their society. Before turning to these texts, however, it is important to appreciate the ways in which the late seventeenth century understood the body with respect to sex and gender.

Thomas Laqueur's historical work on the changing understandings of the sexed body provides vital insight into the shifting attitudes towards sex, gender, and the body that were at play within the Restoration and early eighteenth century.[9] He argues that the modern understanding of gender as a category, somehow embedded in a foundational sex or body, cannot unproblematically be applied to texts before the eighteenth century. It is Laqueur's contention that prior to the rise of what he terms the "two-sex model" the categories of sex and gender were constructed according to a "one-sex model." In the one-sex model, the sexual organs of both men and women were understood to be the same and thus "women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of

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[9] Goldberg also draws on Laqueur for his reading of Behn. While he discusses a number of her works, his focus is on *Oroonoko* and the shifting gender perspectives displayed by Behn's narrator. See Goldberg, pp. 42-72.

perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside, of the structures that in the male are visible without" (Laqueur 4). There is only one sex but there are less and more perfect specimens of it. Because one sex gives rise to two genders, gender cannot be grounded in biology as both genders are derived from the same body. Laqueur argues that under the one-sex model it is gender, not sex or the body, that is the "primary or 'real.'" He goes on to write: "To be a man or woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to be organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes" (8). In what seems to be a reversal of modern notions of the sex/gender relationship, gender, defined by cultural roles and positions, defines man and woman, and the body appears malleable and changeable within these socially defined positions.

Karen Harvey, in her work on eighteenth-century erotica, takes issue with Laqueur's idea that, during the eighteenth century, a female body defined by difference simply replaced an earlier female body defined by sameness.[10] Rather, she emphasizes that during this period and even earlier both the one-sex and the two-sex models are at work within literature. Following Anthony Fletcher, she modifies the timing of Laqueur's shift and describes "sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England as 'a curious transitional world of neither one sex nor two'" (102). She goes on to argue that if "the themes of difference and sameness were not mutually exclusive, then the exemplary female body of the past must be plural, not singular" (105). While Harvey refers specifically here to the

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[10] In Laqueur's defense, he does state many times that he is not suggesting that one model replaced the other wholesale at a particular moment during the eighteenth century: "one sex is, and always has been, in tension with two [. . .]. Specific social, political, and cultural circumstances, revealed in anecdotal moments and rhetorical contexts, favor the dominance of one or the other view, but neither is ever silent, neither is ever at rest" (114). However, Harvey is right in that, while acknowledging their overlap, Laqueur never really investigates the models together but keeps them separate throughout his discussion.

female body, it is important to note that she also believes that the male body was just as unstable during this period. Against Laqueur who describes "a problematic unstable female body that is either a version of or wholly different from a generally unproblematic, stable male body" and argues that "it is always women's sexuality that is being constituted" (22), Harvey seeks to destabilize the claim for an "unproblematic" male body. She writes, "Male bodies were represented in erotica [. . .] and such representations demonstrate that male bodies were not imagined as monolithic and unchanging entities" (125).[11] If we combine Harvey's view of the body of this period as plural with Laqueur's emphasis on the malleability of the body under the one-sex model, we have a useful way of approaching Behn's depiction of female and male bodies within her texts. In fact, I will argue that within Behn's novels there is an exploration of relationships between bodies and gender roles that is situated within a "transitional world of neither one sex nor two." Her use of physical bodies exploits the fact that within this period "so-called biological sex does not provide a solid foundation for the cultural category of gender, but constantly threatens to subvert it" (Laqueur 124). Behn's texts display characteristics associated with both models of sex and exploit the fluidity of bodies to push the boundaries of identity and gender, particularly (but by no means exclusively) with regards to women.

A central tenet of the one-sex model is the belief that women, while substantially the same sex as men, were inferior versions. As Laqueur describes it, "men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along

[11] For a full discussion of the categories of representation through which male bodies were envisioned in eighteenth-century erotic writing (including nationality, fertility, beauty, and race), see Harvey 124-145.

an axis whose telos was male" (5-6). Rather than being regarded as merely underdeveloped, women were believed to be flawed or defective because their genital organs remained on the insides of their bodies. In Aphra Behn's "The Unfortunate Bride: or, The Blind Lady a Beauty," the association of women with defect is explored and called into question through the blind lady of the title, Celesia, who is doubly flawed in her gender and her blindness. By exaggerating and manipulating the bodily defect associated with women in her text, Behn highlights the socially constructed nature of this association. As Felicity Nussbaum argues in her book on the treatment of the anomalous in eighteenth-century literature, "It is precisely that constructedness that Amazons, eunuchs, ugly women, or deformed persons of any sort make visible" (35). By demonstrating the artificiality of the restrictions placed on Celesia as a result of her physical blindness, Behn is also commenting on the artificial restrictions placed on women as a gender and highlighting the space between bodies that are conceived as changeable and gender roles that are rigid. She does this through her portrayal of the interactions between Celesia, her cousin Belvira, and the two men, Frankwit and Wildvill. With these four characters, Behn examines the interchangeability of bodies located within rigid gender roles, and the malleability of the individual body.

The story opens with a description of the friendship between Frankwit and Wildvill: "so true a warmth their fires could boast, as needed not the effusion of their breath to make it live" (325). Despite the fact that the two male characters are never depicted together within the story until the fateful swordplay at the end, they are clearly linked in the opening. Their complementary characteristics do not end with the tale's introduction, however, as both come into their inheritance through the death of their

fathers, both love Belvira, and both are engaged to her. Furthermore, seen together, they embody all of the characteristics of the ideal male of the time, in that they are portrayed as possessing opposite, yet equally desirable masculine traits. Wildvill is rich; Frankwit is noble. Wildvill is characterized by his "strength, and manly proportions," while Frankwit is described as a "much softer beauty" (325). Despite their differences, they are set up by Behn as similarly desirable and even, I would suggest, interchangeable within the economy of courtship and marriage created by the text. At the beginning of the novel, however, it is the softer Frankwit who has the more desirable position as the focus of the female rivalry between Belvira and Celesia.

The rivalry between Belvira and Celesia for Frankwit, however, does not create a traditional erotic triangle because it is a pseudo-rivalry. As a blind woman, Celesia is barred from participating in any sort of romantic exchange or competition. However, the reader is not immediately aware, upon meeting Celesia, that she is the blind woman of the title. The narrator in "The Unfortunate Bride" downplays Celesia's defect within the text by literally framing its revelation within parentheses as an afterthought:

> (I had forgot to tell my Reader that *Celesia* was an heiress, the only child of a rich *Turkey* Merchant, who when he dyed left her fifty thousand pound in Money, and some Estate in land; but poor creature, she was blind to all these riches, having been born without the use of sight, though in all other respects charming to a wonder.) (327)

The offhand tone adopted by the narrator serves two functions. It reveals her attitude towards the defect as something that should be unimportant in our overall feelings towards Celesia. Conversely, it highlights the exact thing, the defect, that the narrator

seems to downplay and thus underlines its importance in the text. This is a strategy often employed by Behn to underhandedly draw the reader's attention to something while at the same time maintaining the appearance that the thing "forgotten" is truly negligible.[12] Furthermore, although the narrator implies that Celesia's defect is negligible, the text itself treats her blindness as her defining quality.

Harvey claims that the language of sight was clearly linked to female sexuality in the erotic writings of the eighteenth century. She writes, "the primary purpose of [women's] eyes was to signal willingness and attractiveness" (215). It is Celesia's inability to see that allows her to be a confidante to Belvira and Frankwit, in that she cannot truly be in competition with her cousin. While "Celesia's blindness, unlike ugliness or physical deformity, does not detract from her charms" (Nussbaum 31), it does prevent her from participating in the romantic rituals enjoyed by Belvira and Frankwit. The importance of sight for these rituals is emphasized in the text by Behn's heavy use of sight-related language and imagery. Frankwit's Cupid is described as one who "could not be reputed blind" while all women who lay eyes upon him are made "the sighing captives of his Eyes" (325). In addition, when Belvira is not literally within his sight "her beauteous Image danced before him" (326). Behn further emphasizes the importance of sight for romantic communication when she describes Belvira preparing to speak to Frankwit: "e're she consented to her Lover, preparing him first with speaking looks, and then with a fore-running sigh, applied to the dear charmer [. . .]" (327). What Harvey

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[12] For another example of this narrative strategy, see the narrator's belated description of the markings (significant of nobility) on Imoinda's and Cæsar's bodies in *Oroonoko*, about which she claims she "had forgot to tell you" (92), thus signalling their integral importance to her view (though not the text's or community's) of the lovers. For a full discussion of Behn's narrators and various narrative strategies see Pearson's "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn."

describes as the "ocular language of pleasure" (215) is fully exploited and enjoyed by Belvira and Frankwit.

While Behn uses the language of sight to characterize the amorous communication between Belvira and Frankwit, she also implies that this form of sight does not necessarily allow one to see clearly. As G. Gabrielle Starr argues, "Physical sight leads to knowledge more of affect than of the greater world, and thus is in no way superior to imagined vision" ("Objects" 506). Belvira's and Frankwit's all-consuming focus on the visual language of love and courtship is shown to be a form of blindness with respect to the rest of the world. This is demonstrated in the text by the ease with which Moorea deceives the lovers, easily intercepting their letters and, through a forged letter of her own, convincing Belvira of Frankwit's death. It is further shown by Belvira's blindness to some of Frankwit's less desirable qualities—a blindness that the narrator herself is complicit in as she quickly glosses over these qualities (which should immediately rouse her reader's suspicions and point to the importance of the glossed over information). For example, when Frankwit has to leave Belvira shortly after their engagement to mortgage one of his estates, the narrator comments (in another parenthetical remark): "(strange! That he should have make [sic] such haste to fly from what so much he lov'd!)" (329). His suitability as a romantic hero (and husband to the heroine) is further undermined when the narrator claims that, had Moorea's maid not been intent on stealing his letters, "she had warmed [his bed] *by his intreaties* in a more natural manner" (322 my italics). This hardly seems like the Frankwit of the beginning who only had eyes for Belvira.

Even more importantly, a complete disregard for worldly matters is demonstrated

by Frankwit's indifference towards his quickly dwindling fortune: "All this while the young Gallant wash'd himself clean of that shining dirt, his Gold; he fancied little of Heaven dwelt in his yellow Angels, but let them fly away as it were on their own Golden wings, he only valued the smiling Babies in Belvira's Eyes" (327). The pastoral language used to describe the gold in this passage combines with the amorous sight-related language to emphasize the couple's blindness to the society around them. Yet it is suggestive of something further if we consider that Frankwit is "of the noblest" (325). The seemingly light, unimportant combination of money and babies in this passage combined with Frankwit's need to mortgage one of his estates in order to pay for his wedding, serves as a mild criticism of an aristocratic mentality that views only noble blood and its continuation as important and as a result neglects all questions of money. While many of Behn's texts unproblematically privilege status over all other defining factors for identity, her narrative strategy here serves to undermine the traditional aristocratic attitude of her hero (who is akin to the rakes of her dramatic works in his attitudes but not in his textual portrayal).[13]

In contrast to Belvira's and Frankwit's seeing blindness, Celesia is described by Behn as seeing "clearly in her mind" (327). The fact that Belvira applies to Celesia for advice on her marriage is testament to Celesia's judgment. Furthermore, Celesia's ability to manage her fortune left to her by her father is implied in the description "she was blind

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[13] For examples of Behn's narrative privileging of status see *Oroonoko* where the narrator repeatedly emphasizes Oroonoko's nobility over his race. Also see "The Wandring Beauty," which follows the adventures of the lady Arabella. Despite her lowly disguise as a family servant, her quality is sufficiently apparent to attract a noble suitor for her hand. In some of Behn's other works, the relationship between money and status and their impact on identity is far more complex than the mild criticism presented in "The Unfortunate Bride," as will be seen in my discussion of *The Luckey Chance* and *Love-Letters*.

to all these riches" (327). Celesia is depicted as being more seeing with regards to her role in society than either Belvira or Frankwit who "have am'rous looks to feed on" (328), perhaps even because of her blindness and inability to participate in the ocular language of love. However, despite the fact that she seems more fit to fill the place of a wife than Belvira in terms of judgment and understanding, the text makes clear that she is not regarded as a potential wife for Frankwit while she is blind. That her own admiration for Frankwit is discussed between the three of them openly and innocently clearly indicates that she poses no threat to her cousin's place in Frankwit's esteem, despite her fortune and beauty. While Celesia remains blind, she is not in a position of interchangeability with Belvira. Even with their closeness as cousins, their fortunes and their beauty, Celesia's double defect keeps her outside the romantic plot of the novel.[14] This changes when her sight is restored.

The full impact of the restoration of Celesia's sight is not apparent until the end of the novel. However, what is even more noteworthy is the way that this change is treated as completely ordinary. Belvira attributes it to "charms unknown" and yet does not express any wonder or amazement, while Frankwit "blest his eyes which discovered to him the much welcome news" (331) but also seems to take it as a common occurrence. The lack of surprise that follows this physical transformation is reasonable under a worldview that regarded the body as potentially malleable.[15] Within a system that

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[14] Ballaster also describes Celesia as outside of the romantic economy but does so through a psychoanalytic perspective. She argues that "women's 'value' [. . .] lies in their capacity to reflect and enlarge male desire"; but because Celesia is blind, "she is incapable of reflecting [Frankwit's] desire" (91). For further details see Ballaster 90-93.

[15] Discussing Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, Laqueur writes, "He speaks as if the body is unable to resist the pressures of blurred gender and can at any moment change to

emphasized and feared the ability of the body to transform under the influence of its environment, the ability of Celesia's eyes to physically change and regain their sight is assumed as a blessed yet commonplace event. What is not commonplace is the way in which this physical change affects her station in society. As Nussbaum notes, "regaining her sight allows Celesia to become a legitimate competitor for Frankwit" (32). Once Celesia becomes singly defective, she can reclaim her role in society as a woman. The seemingly unimportant information about her fortune provided earlier gains new significance as it allows her to easily take her cousin's place after Belvira is accidentally killed. Behn's depiction of Celesia's quick change in social status after her blindness is restored begs the question as to why such a thing as blindness kept her from that social role in the first place when everything else fits her perfectly for it. This is demonstrated by her easy transition from outsider at the beginning of the story to wife at the end.[16]

Although Celesia ends the novel with the man that she loves, the tone of the narrator is ambivalent when she concludes with "he [Frankwit] perform'd his promise" (334). While this is the happy ending of marriage expected in a romance, the last line is not one of love or even necessarily happiness. This is partially due to the tragedy of Belvira's and Wildvill's deaths but the ambivalence is also due to the text's portrayal of its characters as ultimately interchangeable. While remaining coy about the exact timeline, the narrator claims that Belvira "soon surrender'd" to "the impatience of her

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match its social perversion" (125). While much of the fear associated with bodily malleability focused on the potential degeneration of the male sex to the female, this plasticity is also evident in other areas.

[16] Considering that Frankwit has spent most of his inheritance by the end of the novel, Celesia is actually a much better marriage prospect than Belvira as she comes with "fifty thousand pound in Money, and some Estate in land" (327).

new ardent Lover" (333) Wildvill, after she is tricked into believing that Frankwit is dead. And when Frankwit comes back to find Wildvill and Belvira married, which leads to Wildvill accidentally killing Belvira, and then to Frankwit killing Wildvill, it is only "some months after [Belvira's] internment" (334) that Frankwit marries Celesia. This easy movement between the romantic partners calls into question the attractiveness of the society in which Celesia now holds a role. What initially seemed like a positive movement for Celesia—from outsider to the gender-female social role—looks less attractive at the end of the novel where any belief in her happiness in this new role is severely undermined through the narrator's last description of her: "Poor *Celesia* now bemoan'd her unhappiness of sight, and wish'd she again were blind" (334). This description of her response to the tragedy before her can also be read as her ultimate response to the role now expected of her as Frankwit's wife, a position, it must be noted, that is decreed for her by her dying cousin. The narrator is silent as to Celesia's desire and, as previously discussed, has been coy throughout about Frankwit's husbandly merits. In the end, the reader is left to decide whether this is also what Celesia actually wants for herself.

While "The Unfortunate Bride" has attracted scant critical attention, it is a notable example of Behn's use of bodies to undermine and question the rigidity of late seventeenth-century gender roles. As a rich and beautiful young woman whose only fault is in her inability to see, Celesia proves an excellent illustration of an individual excluded from a legitimate role in society for a seemingly arbitrary reason. Her blindness in no way affects her wealth or her beauty but, because it is a defect, it blocks her completely from occupying a female gender role. By restoring her heroine's eyesight, Behn

demonstrates Celesia's ability to be a wife and, simultaneously, questions the desire to fit into the role ascribed to women within her society.

These themes are further developed by Behn in her other tale of defect, "The Dumb Virgin: or, The Force of Imagination." The association between the female body and defect is made clear early in text, initially through the body of the mother of Belvideera and Maria, referred to only as Rinaldo's Lady. Behn opens the story by invoking a fear of the combined power of female defect and maternity. Harvey argues that "much of the fear inspired by female bodies arose from their reproductive capacity" (121) and Behn heightens this fear when she pairs it with the belief that the passions felt by the maternal body are imprinted on the body of the child. Thus it is the mother's "frights and dismal apprehensions" that cause the deformity of Belvideera and her "silence and melancholy" that cause Maria to be born dumb (344). Behn is playing here on a belief that continued well into the eighteenth century and even further, namely that "the defect of womanhood that is concentrated within the womb may migrate to other parts of the body and even to other bodies" (Nussbaum 25).[17] The two daughters are not only depicted as bearing the defect of being women; they also embody the defects created by the passions of their mother and so, like Celesia in "The Unfortunate Bride," they should not be able to occupy the female gender role. However, the differences between Belvideera and Maria, and the different ways in which they compensate for their defects, allow Behn to explore the defect-female relationship far more fully in this text than she was able to through the character of Celesia.

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[17] "Even Mary Wollstonecraft couples what she believes to be a cultural tendency toward effeminacy with a high incidence of mental retardation among the privileged classes, and she asserts that championing women's virtue produces healthy babies for the middling classes" (Nussbaum 25).

Belvideera, the elder daughter, is introduced by the narrator with the following description: "'twas a Daughter, its limbs were distorted, its back bent, and tho the face was the freest from deformity, yet had it no beauty to recompense the dis-symetry of the other parts" (344). Were the word "Daughter" not used in the passage, there would be no indication of the child's gender as the pronoun "it" is used rather than "she." This is appropriate considering that Belvideera's deformity causes her to behave far more like a male than a female. She is described as being "indefatigably addicted to study" and possessing "a piercing wit, and depth of understanding peculiar to herself" (344). She adjusts for her lack of beauty and deformity of body by becoming accomplished intellectually. While this is a traditionally male form of accomplishment, it is the only one allowed to her and, at least for most of the novel, it seems to be effective.

The effectiveness of Belvideera's accomplishments is demonstrated at the masquerade when she approaches a gentleman, whom she mistakenly believes to be an Englishman whom the sisters wish to encounter. The narrator describes the gentleman's reaction:

> he turning about, and viewing her person, the defaults of which were not altogether hidden by her disguise; Sir, (said he) if you are a man, know that I am one, and will not bear impertinence; but, if you are a lady, Madam, as I hope in heavens you are not, I must inform you, that I am under a vow, not to converse with any Female tonight. (346 font reversed)

Despite his obvious aversion, the gentleman (Gonzago) is quickly won over by Belvideera and becomes one of her suitors. Though she has no beauty to commend her, she charms him, much as a man might impress a fellow gentleman, with her wit alone.

Although she and Maria, as Senator Rinaldo's daughters, are both rich and of good family, her identity is completely hidden from Gonzago until later in the story and so can have no role in his attraction to her. Thus, it is her "ingenious and smart repartees" that cause him to be "entirely captivated with her wit" such that he quarrels with Dangerfield (the aforementioned Englishman) over her (346).

Nussbaum claims that "Belvideera's femininity is lost because of the unmistakably obvious crippling of her body" and she goes on to argue that Belvideera "typifies the learned, peculiar man-woman whose femininity throughout the eighteenth century is questioned, and she is placed outside the usual sexual traffic" (28). This is true in terms of her appearance, and also in terms of the accomplishments that are usually associated with the female role. However, as the scene at the masquerade demonstrates, her deformity does not block her from participating in a female role in relation to a man. While manly in relation to a female, Belvideera is still allowed enough femininity in Behn's story to participate in the sexual economy and not merely in a masked capacity. Gonzago's attraction towards her continues after the masquerade, as demonstrated when he dines at Rinaldo's house with her and her father; he is described as achieving "his wished for Opportunity of entertaining his Mistress" (356).

Where Belvideera is cast as a manly woman because of her deformity, Maria is brought to the extremes of femininity through her defect. Described by the narrator as "the most beautiful Daughter [. . .] that ever adorn'd *Venice*, but naturally and unfortunately dumb" (344), Maria is positioned in the text as the exact opposite of her sister. Her inability to speak means that she relies entirely on her beauty and her body both as means of communication and participation in the sexual economy. As Ros

Ballaster notes, "Maria's body is her only means of signification" (87). While this is literally true, it is not quite true in the sense that Ballaster describes it. She argues that "Maria's entry into subjectivity/speech is [. . .] coterminous with her death" (89) in that she speaks her first words immediately prior to stabbing herself with Dangerfield's sword. However, while this is her first entry into vocal speech, "Maria's subjectivity is not confined to speech" (Nussbaum 29). Throughout the text, Maria uses a form of sign language to communicate with her sister, and when she finds herself alone with Dangerfield, she writes a note to inform him of her mute condition. Like Belvideera, Behn portrays Maria as able to adapt and, at least potentially, to enter the social role of female despite her disability. In direct contrast to Belvideera's, Maria's strategies for adapting emphasize her female qualities, as even her language involves the use of her beautiful body. She figures "the very state of being woman in her embodiment of the disturbing contrast between her remarkable external beauty and her interior flaw" (Nussbaum 29). From the point of view that saw women as internally flawed by nature, Maria is the archetypal, fully embodied, female.[18]

Behn portrays the two sisters as at opposite ends of a spectrum of female defect. Maria is the perfect female whose use of her body to create speech (both through sign language and body language) makes her appear even more desirable than a woman with the power of speech, while Belvideera is a masculine woman, whose deformed body necessitates a mastery of speech in order to compensate for her appearance. One's

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[18] Ballaster also describes her in this manner but through the lens of psychoanalysis. She writes, "Maria is the consummate female object, the immaculate mirror to the masculine self since she cannot speak and therefore, to the male gazer, has no autonomy, no separate subjectivity" (87). While Ballaster's focus is on the relationship between Maria and Dangerfield, I am more interested in the relationship between Maria and Belvideera.

strength is the other's weakness, and this is played upon within the text when Dangerfield falls in love with both sisters at the masquerade purely on the basis of Maria's beauty (he not knowing yet that she is dumb) and Belvideera's wit (her appearance being somewhat masked by the masquerade costume). He says to Belvideera, "if you have the beauty of that Lady, or if she has your wit, I am the most happy, or the most unfortunate man alive" (347 font reversed). Catherine Craft-Fairchild describes the sisters as "two complementary halves" that "seem to constitute one 'complete' woman" (30). Together, however, they are even more than a "complete woman"—they are the epitome of the desirable woman in that they embody the full spectrum of feminine perfections. They do this despite, or perhaps because of, their defects.

Unlike Celesia's blindness, Belvideera's and Maria's defects are not depicted at the beginning of the novel as impediments to the sisters' full occupation of the gender female position. Both are clearly shown as desiring and being desired by men. Though Nussbaum claims that the story "inspires women to believe that physical handicaps, handicaps that exceed the defect of being a woman, need not be an impediment to love but almost certainly preclude marriage" (29), Behn's tale does not preclude the sisters from marriage but rather calls into question its very desirability through their divergent fates and through the depiction of Dangerfield, the 'hero.'

The events that lead up to the final tragedy and revelation are set into motion when Dangerfield is invited by Senator Rinaldo to his house and then left alone when the senator is called away on business. As Belvideera is also out of the house, Maria is alone and manages to accidentally enter the library where Dangerfield is waiting. This leads to the revelation of Maria's dumbness and her love for Dangerfield, which causes her to flee

to her own chamber and him to follow. Belvideera's arrival forces Dangerfield to hide and stay hidden while Rinaldo, Belvideera, and their guests supper downstairs. The secrecy and intimacy are taken advantage of by Dangerfield:

> [Maria] held out against all his assaults above two hours, and often endeavoured to struggle from him, but durst make no great disturbance, thro fear of alarming the Company below, at last he redoubling his passion with sighs, tears, and all the rest of Loves Artillery, he at last gained the Fort. (357)

At this point, it seems that Dangerfield has chosen Maria, the beautiful sister, and honestly means to make her his wife. The narrator claims that "he endeavoured to comfort [Maria] by making vows of secrecy, and promising to salve her reputation by a speedy marriage, which he certainly intended, had not the unhappy *Crisis* of his fate been so near" (357). Behn invites the assumption that Maria could overcome her defect and enter the role of wife.

Maria does not, however, become a wife in the novel. The crisis of fate occurs immediately after when Dangerfield is stabbed by Gonzago (his rival for Belvideera) and inadvertently stabs Rinaldo, who comes out to break up the fight. While both men lie dying, Dangerfield's wig comes off exposing the dagger birthmark that reveals him as Rinaldo's long-lost son and Maria's brother. Maria's entry into the female role is quickly aborted by the horror of incest. It is at this point that her body acquires the malleability that played such a large role in Behn's other tale of defect: her speech is restored "by a violent impulse [that] broke the ligament that doubled in her Tongue" (359). She thus gains the ability to be a true female, according to the gender role, at the exact point when

she is most horrified by that role. Her speech regained, she kills herself with Dangerfield's sword uttering as her last words "*O my Brother, O my love*" (359).

What should be moment of tragedy is undermined, however, by both the connotations of Dangerfield's name and the narrator's inclusion of particular, unflattering details that do not allow the reader to see Dangerfield as a heroic figure. The reader is first introduced to Dangerfield at the masquerade, where he is described as "attir'd with no disguise but a *Turkish* Turbant on" (346). However, it is soon clear that his entire persona is his disguise since the narrator informs us that his name is a "counterfeit" (348). She goes on to claim it "was a name that so pleas'd me [. . .] I us'd it in a Comedy of mine" (348). This is not the only one of Behn's narrators to refer outside the text to the author's career as a playwright; the narrator of *Oroonoko* also refers to a name that she has used in one of her plays.[19] The important difference is that the narrator in *Oroonoko* refers to an actual play whereas if Behn did use the name Dangerfield in a play, that work has never been found (Duffy 129). Through the fake name and her fake claim regarding the name, Behn sets Dangerfield up as a false or counterfeit hero (intertextually contrasted—to his detriment—with her "Noble slave," Oroonoko). Already the reader should question how seriously we should take this character.

For Behn's contemporary audience, this destabilization of her (supposed) hero would have been doubly apparent. Thomas Dangerfield was a known informer and double-agent involved in the Meal Tub plot (a fake Protestant plot meant to divert attention from the Catholics being persecuted in the wake of the Popish plot), who wrote

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[19] "We met on the River with Colonel *Martin*, a Man of great Gallantry, Wit, and Goodness, and whom I have celebrated in a Character of my New *Comedy*, by his own Name [. . .]" (111). Maureen Duffy identifies the play referred to in this passage as *The Younger Brother* (297).

a "picaresque narrative of his adventures across England and Europe" ("Dumb Virgin" 464 note 3) entitled *Don Tomazo*, in which he made "much of his sophisticated use of disguise" (Ballaster 90).[20] The use of a name so famously linked with disguise and deceit undermines Dangerfield's heroic status within the text by linking him to a self-promoting imposter, thus ultimately asking the reader to question his desirability both as a hero and as a husband for either of the sisters before the truth of his identity as their lost brother is even revealed.

Rachel Carnell argues that it is difficult to read Dangerfield as a tragic figure: "When Dangerfield cries "*horrour, horrour*," his words reflect anguish, but his mistakes—the too-swift seduction of a pretty girl and a too-quick readiness to draw his sword in an argument—are those of a hot-blooded rake, not those of a classical hero" (141). This view is furthered when one considers that his seduction of Maria is entirely brought about by opportunity, not necessarily inclination. Immediately before the description of her seduction, Dangerfield, having overheard a conversation between Maria and Belvideera in his praise, is described as "in the Closet, [. . .] impatient to see [Belvideera]" (356). This undermines any belief that it is purely out of devotion that he, moments later, chooses Maria. The inclusion of this less than flattering description of Dangerfield's thoughts coupled with the connotations of her hero's name undermines both the 'hero' himself and any tragic reading of the text's ending. Once Maria has become triply flawed, the stain of incest being added to her dumbness and her gender, it seems that death may really be the best option for her. Her entry into the role of potential wife has only added to her defect within the story, not corrected it.

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[20] For more details regarding Dangerfield's involvement in the Meal Tub plot see Todd *Secret Life* 249-252.

My interpretation that Behn is, at the end, making a point about the undesirability of occupying the female gender role is supported by Belvideera's fate, which has been largely unexplored by commentators on the novel. The text ends with the revelation that "*Belvideera* consign'd all her Fathers Estate over to her Unkle, reserving only a competency to maintain her a Recluse all the rest of her Life" (360). In most critical treatments, the significance of Belvideera's actions is weighed in relation to male society and to the expectations of a male society for a woman of her intellectual tendencies and riches.[21] However, seen in relation to Maria's fate and her choice to kill herself at the moment when she has entered the (until now) desired female social role, Belvideera's choice can be read in another manner entirely.

Craft-Fairchild reads the sisters as a unit when she writes that "Maria's brief moment of speech is itself mirrored by her sister's loss of speech [. . .] a symmetry that recalls their initial complementarity" (34). While the sisters' fates need to be read together, it is not necessary to see Belvideera's withdrawal as a "*loss* of speech" (my emphasis). Read in relation to Maria, rather than the males of the text, Belvideera's withdrawal can be understood as a repudiation of her sister's speech and a recognition of the undesirability of the role to which they both initially strove. Throughout, the sisters are depicted as adapting and overcoming their defects in order to join society in the role of woman despite the flaws which should have kept them out of that role (as Celesia's blindness did her). However, after the disastrous consequences of Maria's entry into that

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[21] For Ballaster, the conclusion leaves Belvideera as a "loose end" and she reads her withdrawal as both a "gesture of submission to patriarchal power" in that she gives her wealth to her uncle and as a resistance in that she is "refusing to participate any longer in the specularizing and objectifying male homosocial economy" (89). Nussbaum describes her fate as "the reclusive virginity typical of a learned lady" (30).

desired space, Belvideera realizes its very undesirability. Recognizing the message inherent in her sister's anguished speech, she forsakes a society that only offers rigid gender roles and chooses to live her own life outside of it. While this can certainly be read as her resistance to male society, it can also be read in a more constructive light.

Rather than struggle continually against her deformity to gain what minimal power is allowed her in society, demonstrated by the fulfillment of her sister's desires (desires which she also shared), Belvideera chooses to retreat completely to enjoy the only true power that a female can have in Restoration society, fully outside of the accepted gender role. This freedom is described by Catherine Gallagher as "[e]xclusion from political subjecthood [that] allows female subjectivity to become absolute" ("Embracing" 28). When Belvideera surrenders all of her ties to the political realm by signing her wealth over to her uncle, she does not merely protest against and defy male society. She creates a space wherein she is the absolute, unhindered by physical deformity or the defect of her gender. Read in this manner, "The Dumb Virgin" creates a much stronger message. The resistance is not merely within society and within the roles allowed to females; it is a rejection of that role completely and furthermore of that society. Behn's novel questions the sisters' desire, described throughout the text, to become part of their society's gender economy and, in the end, valorizes the complete rejection of that role.[22]

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[22] Another way of conceptualizing Belvideera's ability to step completely outside of the accepted social categories is through Wahrman's description of early eighteenth-century categories of gender and race as "a set of identity categories that had allowed [one] to imagine individuals falling between their cracks, thus exposing the limits of these categories" (143). In other words, it was not merely that movement between the dominant social categories was tolerated during this period but also that an individual could slip completely outside of them.

In light of my argument to come, it should be noted that Belvideera's ability to make this choice and withdraw from society is predicated both on her status—her father is master of "a very plentiful estate" and "his Family, [springs] from the best Houses in Italy" (341)—and on her physical deformity. Given that her deformity has been described throughout the text as masculinizing, it seems unlikely that she would be suitable for child-bearing, or, in other words, even if she were to marry, she seems unlikely to be able to continue her family bloodline. This unsuitability, in part, allows her the freedom to deny her role and leave her family behind, in the care of her uncle. The other enabling condition of this step is that she gives most of her wealth to the aforementioned uncle, enabling him to continue the family name, ensuring the proper inheritance for the family's wealth, and thus devolving from herself all responsibility in this respect. Her physical deformity, her status, and her ability to renounce her lineal responsibilities and wealth all combine to allow her a greater freedom that an average woman in Restoration society. Given the undesirability of the female gender role implied by Maria's fate, we can only read this ending as a triumph and an escape for Belvideera.

Through her two novels that deal with defective bodies, Behn exposes the artificial rigidity of her time's gender roles. Rather than protesting the limits of gender identity from within the framework of gender itself, which often results in the perpetuation of at least part of the construction one wishes to fight against, Behn exploits the malleable qualities of her heroine's bodies. The gender roles depicted in the novels are conventional; however, the bodies that are manipulated within these roles are not. The use of physical defect allows Behn to clearly illustrate the limits of particular social categories and then, through the manipulation of her heroine's bodies, to forcefully

demonstrate the arbitrary nature of these limits. Celesia's regained sight and Maria's entry into speech both reveal the porous nature of social boundaries when bodies can change and transform themselves into what the role requires. What is even more valuable in Behn's texts, however, is that once the accepted gender roles are shown to be achievable for her heroines, their desirability is subverted. If the body is truly malleable, Behn seems to ask, why even try to adapt to rigid social expectations? Perhaps, like Belvideera, it is more important to let oneself fall through the cracks of social identity and to create new places that can be sources of power instead of accepting the lack ascribed to the female social position.

Chapter 2 – Bartering Trifles for Treasures: or, Who Makes a Woman?: Descriptive Power and Embodied Status in *The Luckey Chance*

Written after a four-year hiatus from the theatre, *The Luckey Chance: or, an Alderman's Bargain* was Behn's last wholly original play to be performed in her lifetime (Todd "Introductory" 211). The play takes up the interrelated themes of gender, status, and the physical body, which were present in the previously discussed stories, and their impact on social identity. However, the exploration of these themes is further complicated by the play's treatment of money, indicative of the overlapping ways of understanding status that characterized the Restoration. The play contains the very clear traditional aristocratic mentality, which holds that status is embodied in the well-born male despite his external circumstances, in tension with the emerging idea (associated with Whig commercialism and city dwellers) that money can confer status on an individual (also male) regardless of birth. Behn complicates these competing models even further by placing a woman literally in between these two archetypal male positions. Julia, the play's heroine, is an aristocrat who has married a rich city alderman; thus, she does not completely belong within either system of status. Her liminal position allows Behn to explore the social meanings available for women in a time of competing male status systems. Like in the stories of defect, the physical body again plays an integral role in the presentation of gender and status identities.

While not many critics have written about *The Luckey Chance*, those who have agree that the romantic triangle comprised of Lady Fulbank, Gayman, and Sir Cautious Fulbank is the most complex and revealing of the three love triangles in the play—the other two being Belmour, Leticia, and Sir Feeble Fainwou'd and Diana, Mr. Bearjest, and

Mr. Bredwel. However, the critics disagree on almost every other element of this plot line: the controversy extends from divergent explanations of each character's motives and morals to completely contradictory assertions as to how to understand key scenes in the play, including the ending.[23]

The ambiguity of *The Luckey Chance* can be negotiated through a clearer understanding of the interwoven categories of self and social identity, which, I would argue, lead to the critical confusion but also provide a meaningful solution for that confusion. Following McKeon's insight that "the emergence of modern patriarchy, and its system of gender difference, cannot be understood apart from the emergence of the modern division of labor and class formation" ("Historicizing" 298), it is my argument that any interpretation of *The Luckey Chance*'s central characters needs to account for the complex ways that Behn treats the overlapping models of emerging mercantilism and traditional aristocratic status and further for the ways that gender and the sexed body

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[23] Most of the disagreement regarding character surrounds Lady Fulbank. Where one critic sees "an adept business woman" (Wilputte 451), another sees "Behn's female libertine hero" modelled on Behn "herself as playwright" (Erickson 91), and still another sees "a character of tragic status, carefully embedded into the breezy comedy" (Hobby 124). Gayman has been read as a "libertine" (Evans 24), a mercenary character who "regards relationships as business deals" (Wilputte 450), and "less daring, less libertine" than Behn's other rake heroes, lacking "the cavalier glamour of Willmour and Belvile" (Todd *Secret Life* 357).

Interpretations also differ regarding the first and second bed-tricks and the play's conclusion. While some critics, like Gallagher, believe that Julia seduces Gayman in the first bed-trick, others, like Hughes, believe that a full seduction does not take place because the rendezvous is interrupted (either intentionally by Bredwell or unintentionally by Sir Feeble Fainwou'd's arrival at the house). For a full discussion of the division between critics who regard the second bed-trick as a rape and those who do not, see Pacheco. And finally, the disagreement over the play's conclusion can be divided into three camps—those who assume Julia will take Gayman as her lover (see Gallagher *Nobody's* 47; Wilpute 452), those who believe that Julia has truly rejected Gayman as well as her husband (see Evans 25), and those who believe that it is too ambiguous to ever really know (see Todd *Secret Life* 369; Pacheco 152).

inflect both of these social categories. Janet Todd's belief that Behn feared the end of the Restoration period and the attendant freedoms that it offered "a small coterie of people sure of gender and rank and thus able playfully to destabilise both" (*Secret Life* 363) allows us to see in *The Luckey Chance*'s ambiguities a larger fear of the destabilisation of traditional, familiar ranks and roles in London society and a demonstration of the difficulties and confusion this caused social actors.[24]

Unlike most of Behn's work, *The Luckey Chance* is set in London and so more transparently reflects the central social concerns facing England during the late Restoration period and the beginning of James II's reign. On the surface, the play enacts common themes of Restoration comedy and contains stock characters by no means original to Behn: forced marriages and illicit sexual encounters, old city-men with money looking to buy young wives, young aristocratic rakes pursuing their mistresses, and passive heroines awaiting their final happy ending. Thus we have Sir Cautious Fulbank, an elderly banker, who is married to Julia, a young woman who loves and is loved by Gayman, "a Spark of the Town" (Behn 218) who is an aristocratic gentleman rake, arguably Behn's favourite type of comedic hero. However, the familiar themes are entirely superficial. For instance, Behn's treatment of her rake hero is less sympathetic than in most of her other plays. As Derek Hughes points out "Gayman's final enjoyment of Lady Fulbank has all of the nastiness of Wilding's treatment of Lady Galliard [in *The City-Heiress*], but none of the domineering virility" (161), and Gayman can easily come

[24] For an in-depth discussion of Behn's political context and its impact on her writing see Melinda Zook, who claims that "there is a deep sense of nostalgia, particularly in Behn's later work, for an older aristocratic code of values" (83); this nostalgia, according to Zook, arises from Behn's fear that in the political struggles of the 1680s "the cavalier was losing to the 'All-Powerful Whigs' and all they represented" (87).

across as "an irrepressible philanderer" (Hobby 125). And unlike another of the play's heroines, Leticia, who seems to exist only to be rescued by Belmour from her impending marriage to her December bridegroom, Sir Feeble Fainwou'd, Julia is neither a typical romantic heroine nor a passive character.

Though it is important to situate Julia within the context of her romantic triangle and to explore the men's characters as well as her own, her's is definitely the most complex and ambiguous of the three. Not content with playing the mistress to the Restoration version of the courtly lover, Julia attempts to define and control her own identity within the play, an identity created through the adoption of both masculine and feminine roles and a private understanding of her honour. However, the inability of Gayman and her husband to recognize Julia as a subject, and her own inability to control the social meanings of her actions, forcibly demonstrate the difficulties a woman faces if she tries to claim recognition for an identity that she alone defines, particularly at a time when aristocratic masculine social identity was itself in crisis. In a discussion of Dryden's critical writing, Marcie Frank points out the anxiety generated in the Restoration by sex and gender fluidity, when coupled with questions of status:

> The affiliation of masculinity with aristocracy, in the context of the decline of aristocratic ideology and the contest between hierarchical and oppositional understandings of sexual difference, means increasingly, to paraphrase De Beauvior, that a woman may be made but a man must be born. (89)

Behn, Dryden's contemporary, takes this one step further in *The Luckey Chance* by questioning who has the power to make a woman.

The preface to the printed edition of *The Luckey Chance* provides some important insights into the way that Behn constructs Julia's identity and sexuality in the play. After defending the play against charges of obscenity and complaining of the sex-based double standard used to judge it, Behn makes this request:

> All I ask, is the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me, (if any such you will allow me) to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in, to take those Measures that both the Ancient and Modern Writers have set me, and by which they have pleas'd the World so well. If I must not, because of my Sex, have this Freedom, but that you will usurp all to your selves; I lay down my Quill, and you shall hear no more of me [. . .] for I am not content to write for a Third day only. I value Fame as much as if I had been born a *Hero*, and if you rob me of that, I can retire from the ungrateful World, and scorn its fickle Favours. (217)

As Jane Spencer has noted, Behn does not align herself with the female tradition of authorship in this passage. While many of her contemporaries compared her to Sappho and Orinda (as she herself does in a number of her poems), Behn instead chooses to appeal here "to the precedent of all the 'Ancient and Modern Writers', mostly men" (Spencer *Rise* 43).[25]

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[25] The best example of Behn's placement of herself as a masculine poet who also belongs in a lineage of female poets is found in the lines she added to her translation of Book VI of Cowley's *Of Plants*. Indicated in the margin with the words "The Translatress in her own Person speaks," Behn's original lines read,

> Both from my Sex, and in Apollo's Name:
> Let me with Sappho and Orinda be
> Oh ever sacred Nymph, adorn'd by thee;

Behn's plea is twofold. On one level "the freedom she is demanding here is the freedom to write without any special restraints because of her sex" (Spencer *Rise* 43). On a broader level, this passage demands an acceptance of a self that can contain both the masculine and the feminine without being self-alienated or divided. Behn is writing against the idea that what is masculine is the sole property of the male sex, an idea that guarantees that "the Woman damns the Poet" (217). Importantly, she does not claim that the poet is or should be feminine; she recognizes a masculine poet yet believes that her sex is no barrier to her assumption of that part.

While the content of Behn's demand is intriguing, even more interesting is the self-possession and desire for self-creation shown in the very act of making the demand in the first place. Behn reveals in this passage a woman author intent on having control over her own identity despite the efforts of a society which would keep her in the more acceptable (though certainly still non-traditional) place of a woman writing solely for money. Keeping in mind McKeon's argument that "Behn's notion of gendered behavior comfortably crosses sexual borders even as it anticipates a much stricter correlation of gendered behavior with biologically given sexual characteristics" (*Secret History* 526), we can read in Julia an exploration of the impact of money-based status (the seed of the class definitions that would be born in the emerging capitalist economy of the eighteenth century) on a woman's ability to cross gender borders. Through this exploration, Behn exposes the growing rigidity of her society.

The desire both for self-possession and for access to the traditionally masculine is

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And give my Verses Immortality. (591-94)
As Spencer notes, "Claiming the laurels in the roles of both aggressor (in Apollo's name) and that of Daphne's female beloved (from my sex), [Behn] refuses to confine herself to either a masculine or feminine tradition" (*Afterlife* 7).

key to understanding Julia in *The Luckey Chance*. Earla A. Wilputte characterizes Julia as someone who "desires power, which she has tried to achieve through her husband's fortune, and autonomy, which, unfortunately, cannot be gained in marriage" (450). The idea that Julia expects power through her husband seems strange given the implication, revealed early on by her, that hers is a forced marriage, not one of her own choosing: "Oh how fatal are forc'd Marriages! / How many Ruines one such Match pulls on—" (227). As this comes in the context of a discussion with her servants about Gayman, it is reasonable to conclude that she is referring to her own marriage as well as to marriages in general. Indeed, much of Wilputte's evidence of Julia's marriage as mercenary comes from Gayman, whose view of Julia, I will argue, is highly suspect and unreliable. Additionally, "power" and "autonomy" are not two separate things for Lady Fulbank; rather, she seeks power to have autonomy, and not autonomy from things but autonomy to fashion and control her own self. This autonomy is not something she expects from her marriage but something she expects to be allowed within it.

Julia's desire for self-possession and self-definition are most evident in the importance she places on her honour, which Behn makes very clear throughout the play. Right from the beginning when Julia claims "I prize my Honour more than Life" (227), it is clear to the reader that she defines her identity through her honour and, further, through her own definition of what that honour should be:

> LADY FULBANK. What, because I can not simper—look demure, and
> Justify my Honour when none questions it.
> —Cry fie, and out upon the naughty Women,
> Because they please themselves—and so wou'd I.

SIR CAUTIOUS. How, wou'd, what cuckold me?

LADY FULBANK. Yes, if it pleas'd me better than Vertue Sir.

But I'll not change my Freedom and my Humour,

To purchase the dull Fame of being Honest. (275)

The honour that Julia values is not the honour of reputation or fame; it is consistency to her own principles and values. She "defines [honour] as a freely chosen and self-constructed identity. It is, essentially, a capacity for self-control" (Pacheco 147). As Julia freely admits, if she valued sexual pleasure more than virtue then she would pursue it, but her desire is to be virtuous and honourable: "That Nicety and Vertue I've profest, I am resolv'd to keep" (229). However, it is the solipsistic nature of Lady Fulbank's self-definition that leads to her difficulties at the end of the play. Because she will not perform according to a public standard of honourable behaviour, she leaves herself open both to Gayman's misreading of her desires and to her husband's jealousy. All she has to do is speak to a "young Spark" (whom Sir Cautious is unaware is Gayman), for her husband to think that she is cuckolding him: "[. . .] here in my Forehead, it more than Buds; it sprouts, it flourishes" (243). Despite her intense belief in her honour, Julia is unable to appear honourable to her husband because she will not perform the quiet, passive wife.

The different roles that Julia chooses to perform in *The Luckey Chance* openly demonstrate to the audience her attempts at a typically male self-mastery and self-signification. These themes coalesce in her disguised behaviour towards Gayman. While she openly repulses his advances, urging him to "Rail on! Till you have made me think my Vertue at so low Ebb, it should submit to you" (242), she also clearly loves him: "I prize my Honour more than Life, / Yet I had rather have given him all he wish'd of me, /

Than be guilty of his Undoing" (227). When Julia learns that Gayman is living in abject poverty because he has squandered his fortune on gifts and presents for her, she concocts a plan to return his money and to test his constancy to her. Both her access to money and her trying of her lover's virtue firmly place her in a masculine position of mastery over Gayman. Yet, she is unable to control the public meanings placed upon her identity when she adopts these positions and is ultimately erased from her self-scripted role.

Access to money at the beginning of *The Luckey Chance* is access to power for the male characters. In this respect, the opening reflects the social values of the city dwellers (or non-aristocrats). It is money that allows both Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble Fainwou'd to buy themselves young brides; it is the loss of his money that forces Gayman to hide from Julia in Alsatia and court his abhorrent landlady just to keep one suit of gentleman's clothes from the pawnshop; and it is lack of money that prevents Bredwel from marrying his contracted mistress Diana. While the money-male power relation is quite straightforward in the social environment presented at the beginning of the play, the relationship between money and the female is far more difficult.

Julia obviously has access to money—before Pert (one of her servants) suggests robbing Sir Cautious of the money to give back to Gayman, Julia plans to give him money of her own. She also has a degree of social status independent of her husband shown by the fact that, in the end, when Belmore and Leticia flee from Sir Feeble, they come to her for protection despite the close relationship between Sir Feeble and Sir Cautious. However, her access to money and her social standing may be seen as two very separate things: her social standing based on her aristocratic blood and her money derived from her non-aristocratic husband. By marrying new money, Julia has put herself in an

undefined position somewhere in between the emerging power structures and the old. This liminal position, I would argue, is integral to Julia's inability to embody or to control her highly fluid identity.

When Julia tries to manipulate her money/power and act in the role of master to Gayman's mistress, she is unable to signify the meaning she desires. Rather than interpreting his gift as money from a generous mistress, Gayman assumes the most sordid explanation:

> —Some Female Devil old, and damn'd to Ugliness,
> And past all Hopes of Courtship and Address,
> Full of another Devil call'd Desire,
> Has seen this Face—this—Shape—this Youth
> And thinks it worth her Hire. It must be so. (238)

Following upon the concrete example of Gayman's landlady, who provides him with loans of money for his amorous attentions, this interpretation has a certain amount of credence in the play's social world. Since Julia's benevolence remains hidden to protect her honour (she says to Bredwel before he brings the money to Gayman: "I wou'd not have him think it comes from me, for all the World" [229]), the meaning that does have open social currency is the one which Gayman assigns. If an unknown woman is willing to give a man a bag of gold, then she must want something back, and if that man is young and desirable and poor, she must want him, and if she needs to give him money to secure his favours, she must be old and ugly (like the landlady). That Gayman's reasoning is completely valid given his knowledge and personal experience is apparent, but what is equally apparent is that this is far from what Julia is or expects. The significant difference

between Julia's intentions and Gayman's interpretation is created entirely by her use of money (rather than beauty—the female equivalent in this type of exchange) as her medium of signification. Rather than signifying desire, she unwittingly signals desperation.[26]

The disparity between Julia's intended meaning and Gayman's reading of her actions is furthered during the first bed-trick, in which she arranges to have Gayman brought to her chambers secretly during the night in such a way that he is unaware of where he is. Her purpose in this episode is one of the play's much debated ambiguities—whether she is merely testing his constancy or she truly seduces him is unclear. In the first bed-trick, Julia is the disguised and Gayman is the innocent (so to speak), and the ostensible reason for the scene, as she herself tells us, is "that of trying of his Constancy" (282). While some commentators have chosen to believe that she seduces Gayman in this encounter, neither the play nor Julia's character, based as it is on her personal (as opposed to social) honour, seem to support that reading. However, while Gayman never claims that he slept with the unknown woman, he also does not deny it later when he confesses the experience to Julia "as it would be to his advantage to do" (Todd *Secret Life* 359). Furthermore, though Bredwel tells Gayman (and the audience) that he "feigned

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[26] Behn provides an example of the socially expected configuration of female desire, beauty, and money in Angellica Bianca from *The Rover*. Described as "a famous courtesan" in the cast of characters, Angellica proves that she is worth the exorbitant price of her favours (a thousand pounds a month) by hanging out a portrait of herself as advertisement. When she abandons the money/beauty relationship by giving herself to Willmour, she subsequently loses him to Hellena.

The Angellica figure also appears in *Love-Letters* as a Lady who charges five hundred pistoles for her company. When Alonzo, a Spanish nobleman, spurns her for her virginal maid, she falls in love with him and waives her fee. He shows so much scorn for her behaviour that he claims he only continued with her because he "had a Wager to win"; though she was "much more forward than [he] wished, who do[es] not love an over easie Conquest" (392).

a danger near—just as you got to Bed" (282) to prevent the encounter from going very far, this revelation does not occur until the very end of the play. Thus, the audience is deliberately left in suspense as to whether or not Julia commits adultery during this scene. By suspending this revelation, Behn creates a situation whereby the audience doubts Julia's honour and professed self-definition, as much as her husband and Gayman do, right up to the very end of the play.[27]

Far more interesting than the question of whether Julia intended to (or did) fully seduce Gayman is his complete inability to recognize her, despite clasping her in his arms. Through Gayman's sensory blindness, Behn makes as powerful a statement about women's failure to signify themselves bodily as she has about their failure to symbolically define themselves socially. Her body, which should be the most reliable and solid signifier of female identity, is unable to assert its own meaning against Gayman's beliefs regarding it, beliefs brought about because of her attempt to use money as a source of female power. Because he is convinced that the woman "must be old and ugly" (251), Gayman can feel only "a Carcase [. . .] a Canvas Bag of wooden Ladles" (259). While it is entirely possible that Gayman is lying when he describes his bedfellow to Julia, the point is that despite holding her in his arms, he did not recognize her. As Gallagher notes, "Julia was missing from that experience" (*Nobody's* 44).

Though Julia has succeeded in testing her lover's constancy (a test that he fails miserably), she fails on a far more fundamental level when he does not recognize her.

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[27] Anita Pacheco also comments on this alignment of the audience and the male characters' perspectives of Julia: "[. . .] by keeping us guessing about its heroine's sexual choices, the play at once makes us want to know more and obliges us to read the available signs. In fact, it places us in a position comparable to those occupied by Gayman [. . .] and by Sir Cautious [. . .]" (146).

The audience is shown how immaterial a woman actually is to her own identity, how powerless she is to signify even herself. The irony of Gayman's misrecognition is highlighted by his speech as he is approaching the unknown woman. Wondering at the ceremony and secrecy, he questions "Is it care of her Honour?—that cannot be—this Age affords none so nice" (251). Gayman's general cynicism here is all the more cutting in relation to Julia, as the audience by this point knows that she is one "so nice" despite his inability to recognize that. His ignorance fully demonstrates Julia's powerlessness to signify her identity to her lover either through her self-definition (honour) or through her physical body.[28]

The erasure of Julia from the first bed-trick is merely the first in a series of incidents that reduce her identity to "nothing." The second and most widely-discussed of these incidents is the gambling scene in which Gayman and Sir Cautious play dice for three hundred pounds or a night with Julia, while Julia herself watches unaware that her body is the stake (IV.I). Although the passage in which Gayman leads Sir Cautious to see Julia's body as the ideal gambling stake is somewhat long, it bears reproduction since the play's central themes are encapsulated in this exchange:

> SIR CAUTIOUS. —Sir I wish I had any thing but ready Money to stake—three hundred Pound—a fine Sum!
>
> GAYMAN. You have Moveables Sir, Goods—Commodities—

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[28] An interesting point of comparison here is Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*. Where Julia is shown as struggling against the significations placed on her body and incapable of asserting her own meaning through it, Fantomina learns to master and easily shape her body's significations. In both cases the women's bodies carry no inherent meaning of their own and are only able to represent what is placed on them either by the woman herself, in Fantomina's case, or by her lovers, in Julia's case. As will shortly be seen, Silvia in Behn's *Love-Letters* occupies a space somewhere between these two women.

SIR CAUTIOUS. That's all one Sir; that's Moneys worth Sir; but if I had any thing that were worth nothing—

GAYMAN. You wou'd venture it,—I thank you Sir,—I wou'd your Lady were worth nothing—

SIR CAUTIOUS. Why so Sir?

GAYMAN. Then I wou'd set all this against that Nothing.

SIR CAUTIOUS. What set it against my Wife?

GAYMAN. Wife Sir, Ay your Wife—

SIR CAUTIOUS. Hum, my Wife against three hundred pounds?—What All my Wife Sir?

GAYMAN. All your Wife [?] Why Sir, some part of her wou'd serve my turn. (266)

Gallagher has rightly pointed out the way in which this scene fully exposes Sir Cautious' view of money as the universal "essence of everything that is not money" (and furthermore, I would add, as something which he values for itself, not for its use value). For Sir Cautious "everything is *really* the same thing—money [. . .] The only thing that is truly different, then, must be 'nothing,' a common slang term for the female genitals" (*Nobody's* 45). The only thing that Sir Cautious has which cannot be converted to money is his wife, who becomes the "nothing" that he stakes against Gayman's money. Thus, with respect to Sir Cautious' character, the gambling scene reinforces his lust after money (in that he cannot let Gayman walk away with the three hundred pounds as the others can), and his belief that money is key to power over other men (in that he is trying to prevent Gayman, whom he knows as Wastall, from clearing the mortgage that Sir

Cautious holds on his lands). Furthermore, it comically reveals the shortcomings of a mentality that views all value as monetary. His "offence is to undervalue his wife's chastity [. . .] to reduce a possession that is by implication invaluable to its financial equivalent" (Pacheco 145). Sir Cautious' value scheme has no room for things like honour, fidelity, or even one's wife as none of these things is reducible to the only standard of value for him: money.

Gayman, conversely, comes out of this scene looking somewhat better than Sir Cautious. While he also reduces Julia to a thing to be gambled and won, by staking his three hundred pounds against one night with her, he is clearly saying that she has value to him—not merely three hundred pounds worth if we remember that he plans to use his winnings to pay back his mortgage and reclaim control of his estate. Throughout the play, Gayman has placed Julia far above any monetary wealth or power, even to his own personal destitution. In contrast to her husband, he represents a more traditional aristocratic view that sees money as just one of many tools for asserting one's status, as instrumentally good and only important insofar as it can win something more important—like one's mistress. It is only because Gayman and Sir Cautious have completely opposed views towards the inherent power and usefulness of money that Behn is able to set the stakes as she does in this scene—with the banker, representative of the new money-based status, gambling away "nothing" and the rake, the aristocrat, winning an object of inestimable worth.

However, while Behn sets up her two male characters as ideological opposites, their differences are not so dramatic with respect to Julia. Both treat her as an object, or more accurately, as a void to be filled with their own motives and desires. The clear sense

of her honour that comes through to the audience is quite obviously either not seen or not credited by either of them. Gayman's "pursuit of Julia's body too explicitly parallels her husband's zeal to recover his money" (Evans 24), and while the desired objects are different, the blindingly self-centred motivations of the characters are the same.

Gayman's win leads to the play's second bed-trick in which his failure to recognize Julia in the first bed-trick is sharply contrasted by her easy recognition of him. This time it is Gayman in disguise as he takes Sir Cautious' place in bed with her. He describes it thus: "Shyly you turn'd away—faintly resign'd [. . .] Till my Excess of Love—betray'd the Cheat" (278). Unlike Julia's body, which is fully malleable to his expectations, Gayman's body asserts itself unequivocally through his potent sexuality: "no mere idea can eradicate this palpable sign of identity, the tumescent penis itself" (Gallagher *Nobody's* 47). The male body, seemingly, is such that it cannot help but signify itself, its desire, and its power: "fundamentally, the primal economic act is the spending of the male; it has been superseded by monetary power of the old and the impotent, but it remains the archetypal model which distinguishes the economic [and, I would add, significatory] power of men and women" (Hughes 168). In other words, Gayman's sexual potency is an embodied affirmation of his ascendant position over Sir Cautious and Julia as a male member of the aristocracy. Considered retrospectively, this scene is merely the culmination of Gayman's unassailable masculine identity as it is represented throughout the play.

Despite the fact that Gayman is supposedly in disguise as Wastall for much of the play, he is never actually disguised. His cover as Wastall is revealed for what it is, both to the audience and Julia, early on by Bredwel, who has discovered Gayman living in

Alsatia. It is possible to see him as disguised as his former self (as Gallagher does) after he borrows money from his landlady to get a suit of clothing out of the pawnshop in order to go and woo Julia—in which case, his identity is so utterly inalienable that he can only "disguise himself as himself" (Gallagher *Nobody's* 41). The stability of Gayman's identity is most evident in the gambling scene where both Julia, who knows that he is Gayman, and Sir Cautious, who thinks that he is Wastall, are present; paradoxically, the fact that he is playing two roles is not at all evident. Despite the fact that Gayman is technically occupying two different identities in the scene, there is no confusion. Gayman is Gayman no matter who he happens to be—young aristocratic lover or broke Alsatia-dweller.

Unlike Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble, Gayman's status does not rely on money or external trappings. And while he seems to be ashamed of his loss of money, feeling the need to hide from Julia, the revelation of his changed circumstances does nothing to change her opinion of him. He may have lost his "very Badg [sic] of Manhood" (235), as his landlady refers to his sword, but the second bed-trick with Julia clearly shows that his manhood in no way relies on anything external—it is fully embodied. In short, Gayman's status and social definition never really change because his social circumstances do not affect his identity. He is, always, the play's gentleman hero.

This sharp contrast in the significatory power of male and female bodies provides an important backdrop to the play's final scene in which Julia, paradoxically, is able to use the significatory power of Gayman's body to finally achieve some measure of control over her own person and identity. However, this assertion of autonomy on Julia's part is still fraught with ambiguity caused both by the men who continue to misread her desires

and by the open-endedness of the conclusion in which the audience must choose either to accept how Gayman reads Julia or to read her in terms of the honour that she has espoused up to this point.

The stakes for Julia and Gayman in this final exchange are articulated in the following manner:

> GAYMAN. Can you be angry *Julia*!
>
> Because I only seiz'd my Right of Love.
>
> LADY FULBANK. And must my Honour be the Price of it?
>
> Can nothing but my Fame reward your Passion? (278)

In the struggle between the "right of love" and "honour," it seems that Julia's honour has lost given that the act has already been perpetrated. Thus, initially, Gayman's representation of Julia as his love, as *his*, seems to be the description that will dominate. This is further implied by Sir Cautious' willing of Julia and his land to Gayman after his death: "[. . .] if I dye Sir—I bequeath my Lady to you—with my whole Estate" (282).

Yet, as Anita Pacheco has pointed out, Gayman, through his use of the term "innocent Adultress" (278), reveals a way for Julia to maintain her honour intact despite the bodily act of infidelity: "Julia's innocence here consists not in her non-consent but in a chaste mind that takes precedent over an unchaste body" (150). In the terms of my own argument, because Julia's identity throughout the play has been forcefully shown as completely separate from her body (which, by this point, has been reduced to the "nothing" of the dice game), adultery committed on that body does not necessarily adhere to her identity—particularly, if neither Sir Cautious nor Gayman see her as an adulteress. The power of Gayman's representations over her body paradoxically provides her with

the tools to keep her own self-representation intact.

Pacheco points out that Behn never actually names the sexual act that takes place between Julia and Gayman in that second bed-trick, thus leaving it up to the audience to decide how to define what actually happened and, furthermore, how it impacts on the characters involved:

> Behn never uses the word *rape* in this scene, but she repeatedly suggests that there is more at stake in this conceptually slippery sexual encounter than Julia's honour; that what the two men have together violated is Julia's will, her status as a person. What makes this bed-trick look even more disturbingly like a rape is the fact that the violation it involves is *shown to be systematically effaced.* (151 my italics)

In effect, through Gayman's re-description of the act, Behn allows Julia's experience to be erased, to be made nothing just as her body has been earlier. In the end it is difficult to consider the second bed-trick a rape because none of the characters involved, including Julia, call it that and so Gayman's re-description of the act as possession of Julia "without a crime" (279) stands.[29]

Gayman's assertion of his control over the scene also allows Julia to break with Sir Cautious by shifting the blame she is heaping upon him squarely onto her husband. In response to Julia's "where's my Husband? Why have you left my Honour thus unguarded?" Gayman replies, "Base as he is, 'twas he expos'd this Treasure. / Like silly

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[29] Despite its ambiguity, some critics still read the second bed-trick as a rape. In her article, "Rape Voyeurism, and the Restoration Stage," Jean I. Marsden argues for this position: "Although not described as a rape, Gayman's copulation with Lady Fulbank is forced upon her without her knowledge or consent, and her response to the act is similar to the response of ravished women throughout Restoration drama. She cries out that her honor has been ruined" (194-95).

Indians barter'd thee for Trifles" (279). Sir Cautious' violation of his duties as a husband to protect her honour and chastity is what gives Julia the leverage to declare herself autonomous from him and his bed.[30] Yet if Sir Cautious no longer has a husband's right to Julia then he also has no right to bequeath her. Gayman seems to realize this when he responds to Sir Cautious' offer to leave Gayman his estate and Julia with "do you consent my *Julia*?" (282). It seems here that Gayman recognizes Julia's autonomy from her husband yet still wishes her to submit to him as *his* Julia. Considering that Julia's ability to finally exert her own control is predicated on both Gayman's body and his re-definition of what was, essentially, a non-consensual sex act, it seems likely that his description will continue to hold power. And yet, Julia says no, and it is unclear whether this is merely pique on her part for his inability to recognize her the night before or whether she seriously denies him because of his failure to respect her honour. Despite Gallagher's assertion that Julia is feigning her displeasure with Gayman—an assertion based on her belief that Julia fully seduced Gayman during the first bed-trick—it is by no means clear that Julia will end up accepting his reading of her.[31]

If we accept Julia's outrage over the loss of her honour, it is difficult to believe that she will take Gayman as her lover. Her emotion is clearly visible in the stage direction that describes her as "weeping" while she berates Gayman for his deception,

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[30] Catherine Gallagher argues, "the property rights of the male in the female can never be absolute, for the father, who had the right to exchange her, could not have the right to possess her sexually, and the husband, who had the right to possess her, could not have the right to exchange her" (*Nobody's* 46). By exchanging Julia's body with Gayman and overstepping the rights of a husband, Sir Cautious loses those rights.

[31] "When Gayman's erection reveals his identity, Julia appears outraged at the attempted deception: 'What make me a base prostitute, a foul adult'ress? Oh, be gone, dear robber of my quiet' (p. 139). We can only see this tirade as more deceit on Julia's part, since we know she tricked the same man into bed the night before" (Gallagher *Nobody's* 47).

and her anger at her husband pales compared to the extreme disappointment she expresses towards Gayman: "If he [Sir Cautious] cou'd be so barbarous to expose me, / Cou'd you who lov'd me—be so cruel too!" (279). Gayman has not only violated her body or even her honour, he has violated her love for him and his "'right' has been seized at the cost of her identity" (Marsden 195). While it is Gayman's description that has allowed Julia to recoup her tattered honour up to this point, she is shown at the end independently regaining her own right to that term: "Come hither *Bredwel—witness for my Honour*—that I had no Design on his Person, but that of trying his Constancy" (282 my italics). With this final revelation, Julia is allowed to re-describe the first bed-trick for Gayman and, more importantly, for the audience. At the end of the play, it is her descriptions of herself and that incident that are left standing. Yet for all that, there is the sense that Julia's control is fleeting: "Julia has the misfortune to love Gayman, and her refusal of consent here feels less like the clear-cut, morally satisfying rejection we might wish for than a renewal of the power play that has throughout characterized their relationship" (Pacheco 152). The sense of a continuing power struggle is furthered in that it is Mr. Betterton, who has played Gayman, who speaks the epilogue and is given the last word by Behn.

Far from providing any sense of definite social place or identity, Behn leaves her characters in more ambiguous locations than those in which they began. Sir Cautious maintains his wealth and social standing but the superficiality of his status based on money has been revealed through the loss of his wife (and more generally in the play through the other city characters'—Sir Feeble's and Bearjest's—loss of their wives). In contrast, Julia has asserted her autonomy and insisted on her own honour-based self-

definition by denying both Sir Cautious and Gayman any claim to her person. In that brief moment of denial at the end of the play, Behn has opened up a space where a woman can claim the exact sort of self-definition that Behn attempts to claim for herself through her preface. However, this is a small moment in a play that has continually shown Julia's attempts at bodily and economic self-signification being dramatically misread or failing completely. Taken as a whole, the play firmly establishes Gayman (representative of the young aristocratic rake, the Tory cavalier) as the only character who has a fully embodied status/identity that is able to exert itself no matter what external economic or social conditions happen to prevail. This consistency of male identity underlying the shifting identities of the other characters implies that, in the end, Gayman's description of events will endure.

Behn's experiment in the intersection of gender with the overlapping frameworks of the emerging money-based status and the traditional blood-based status comes out clearly on the side of the male aristocrat, thus combating the anxiety around that identity characteristic of the Restoration. While this verdict in favour of the aristocratic male may be unexceptional in a Royalist like Behn, her treatment of the woman's place within these competing frameworks is intriguing. Julia's status is located neither in her money nor in her physical body; in fact, she seems to have no status or signification other than that which is placed upon her by the male characters in the play, with the exception of her very brief moment of control at the end. Even this moment is predicated on Gayman's redescriptive power, in other words, on the solid, embodied identity of the aristocratic male.

This outcome problematizes feminist readings of the play because of what it

seems to demonstrate about the relationship between female identity and both systems of male status. When Julia, through her husband, belongs to the money-based status system, she is clearly shown as unable to derive any power from that money and is herself reduced to a position of insignificance both through her inability to be understood in monetary terms and through her inability to embody her social identity. Given the play's portrayal of the link between aristocratic status and embodied identity, Julia could be seen as having forfeited that identity when she chose (however unwillingly) to marry her city husband over her aristocratic lover. In contrast, when Julia is linked with Gayman because of the second bed-trick, she, through his body, gains access again to her aristocratic identity. However, while the female aristocrat has the ability to reject the city-alderman, her power is subordinate to and dependent upon that of the aristocratic male. The ambiguous ending of Behn's play which leaves us in a state of suspense with regards to Julia's future decisions seems to imply that, for Behn, neither of these positions is satisfactory. Rather than clearly choosing the lesser of two evils (Gayman), Behn demonstrates the unattractiveness of both these options and refuses to choose. While, as I have argued, the events of the play point to Gayman having both Julia and the last word, Behn, through the open ending, succeeds in both endorsing the traditional system of aristocracy and gesturing towards the negative aspects of that system for women.

Chapter 3 – "Writing Beyond the Ending": or, the Adventures of an Exiled Heroine: Gender, Status, and the Body in Behn's *Love-Letters*[32]

Aphra Behn's three-part novel, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, is in part a *roman à clef*, based on a scandal that engrossed London in the winter of 1682. The action centres on the seduction of Lady Henrietta Berkeley (Silvia in Behn's text) by her brother-in-law Ford Lord Grey (Philander) and her flight from her father's house. When Lady Henrietta's father brought legal action against Grey in an attempt to retrieve his daughter, Grey married her to his servant, William Turner (Brilljard), to counteract Lord Berkeley's legal rights as a father. The romantic scandal had political value for a royalist like Behn because Lord Grey was a prominent supporter of the Duke of Monmouth's claim to the throne.[33] Adding further spice to the mixture was the claim that Monmouth (Cesario in Behn's text) cuckolded Lord Grey by seducing Lady Henrietta's sister, Mary (Mertilla), Grey's wife.[34]

Part I, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*, published in 1684, describes the seduction of Silvia by Philander through a series of love-letters against the political backdrop of the Rye House Plot. Part II, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister Mixt with the History of Their Adventures*, published in 1685, details the private

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[32] The phrase "writing beyond the ending" comes from the work of Rachel Blau DuPlessis. I encountered this concept with relation to Behn in Ruth Salvaggio's "Aphra Behn's Love: Fiction, Letters, and Desire."

[33] James, Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's first-born bastard son, was the figurehead around whom those who wished to see the Catholic James, Duke of York, excluded from the secession rallied their forces.

[34] See Todd's introduction to *Love-Letters* as well as the appendices to the text, which contain extracts from *The Trial of Ford Lord Grey of Werk* as well as other relevant historical documents, for more detailed information.

lives of Silvia and Philander after they have gone into exile in Holland, while Part III, *The Amours of Philander and Silvia*, published in 1687, continues with descriptions of Philander and Silvia's private amours intertwined with the political machinations that led to Monmouth's failed rebellion against James II and his subsequent execution. *Love-Letters*, however, is not only political allegory, as there are a number of characters who do not have a historical counterpart (such as the Dutch nobleman Octavio and his sister Calista) and there is much action that is pure invention on Behn's part. Rather than the explicit political meaning, it is Behn's narrative invention and characterization that make *Love-Letters* a challenging, highly ambiguous piece of writing.

Love-Letters begins in a very clear epistolary tradition, one that starts with Ovid and, for Behn, continues up to *The Portuguese Letters* (translated into English as *Five Love-Letters From a Nun to a Cavalier* by Sir Roger L'Estrange in 1678), which were extremely popular during the Restoration and throughout the eighteenth century. In fact, the first part of *Love-Letters* was the first original English contribution to epistolary fiction (Day 146). As the second and third instalments of the novel demonstrate, however, Behn was not interested in merely writing within the Ovidian epistolary framework. As the novel progresses, the letters themselves become subordinated to a narrator whose voice becomes stronger and more intrusive as the letters gradually disappear. This movement is not solely a change in structure; it also signals a change in the novel's content and in its heroine, Silvia. As the narrative style moves away from its traditional framework, Silvia herself drifts from a traditional heroine's (and a traditional woman's) role into behaviour far more complex and interesting. As Behn proceeds to create a space for herself outside of the literary tradition in which she begins, her heroine,

Silvia, is also freed to explore her own possibilities outside of her traditional locations—France (a thinly disguised England) and her father's home. Like Julia's status in *The Luckey Chance*, Silvia's identity is somewhere between conventional categories. In Silvia, however, Behn takes her experimentation with the interstices of identity categories further in that Silvia's liminality is not restricted to status (as Julia's was) but also extends to gender and political subjecthood.

Most critics view Silvia's movement from Part I to Part III, as a linear, albeit negative, progression. Albert J. Rivero, for example, describes Silvia's "transformation from a naive young woman [. . .] into a predatory, manipulative, cross-dressing, immoral prostitute" as a sort of "female rake's progress" (128). While Janet Todd's description of Silvia's development is not so wholly negative (and certainly does not associate cross-dressing with purely negative feminine qualities), she does still see the movement between the parts of the novel in linear terms—generically from romance to "pornography, spectacle, and bedroom farce" ("Silvia" 216) and, with regards to Silvia, from idealist aristocratic daughter, through Philander's instruction, to "female rake" ("Silvia" 208). In fact, the majority of critics do project either a developmental or degenerative trajectory to the three instalments of Behn's novel.[35]

I am wary, however, of assuming this sort of novelistic progression in a work written before this model of plot development became solidified as a characteristic of the form and, particularly, in a work written by Behn, who wrote in many genres and who is

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[35] To take another example, Warren Chernaik writes, "The progress of Sylvia in the course of the three volumes is a gradual coarsening and corruption, a hardening of the heart" (28). For other progressive analyses of the plot see Ballaster 86 and Pearson 124-25.

noted for her interest in experimentation with traditional literary forms.[36] As G. Gabrielle Starr puts it when justifying her decision not to label *Love-Letters* a novel, "we cannot say that it is a species of the form in transition without committing a teleological fallacy; we can say that it captures the changes and fluxion that are the history of prose fiction in the greater eighteenth century" (*Lyric* 51).

Just as we should not expect Behn's text to fit in a linear model of the genre, we also should not expect it to internally conform to our expectations of a novel. Rather than tracing a linear progression (whether positive or negative), *Love-Letters* stages a series of repetitions, of episodic experiments that allow Behn to push the boundaries of her genre and of her subject while suspending the need to take a firm moral stance on the outcomes of her fictional explorations. While there are clearly definable episodes (and volumes), they are not fully discrete. Often, information revealed in later episodes impacts and revises the reader's interpretation of earlier parts of the work; Todd's observation that "the authenticity of Part I of *Love-Letters* does not merely contrast with the inauthenticity of Parts II and III but is undermined by it" ("Silvia" 200) is not limited to a linear perspective.[37] Furthermore, it is uncertain, as Michael McKeon insightfully notes, whether "*Love-Letters* [is] the story of a woman's fall into ethical depravity, or [whether it] is [. . .] the story of a woman's discovery of how to narrate the ethical fullness of her

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[36] For a full discussion of Behn's experimentation with poetic forms see Starr 51-61.

[37] Todd maintains her linear view, however, while allowing that perhaps the seeds of Silvia's degeneration were already present despite the apparent innocence of the maid in Part I.

For an example of the narrator's retrospective analysis of Silvia see Part III, where the narrator claims that interest has always been Silvia's defining motive, even in her affair with Philander: "it is most certain, she refused to give herself up intirely even to *Philander*" (384).

characters" (*Secret History* 531).

Viewing the different episodes as exactly that, different moments in space and time, rather then as stages of Silvia's development, allows one to recognize the tension between the different identities she performs throughout and to realize the impact that the narrator's growing interventions have on the reader's understanding of the characters. Although some of her identities should be mutually exclusive from a modern perspective, the episodic nature of the text, understood as difference not development, allows these identities to coexist and to influence her behaviour at any given moment within the text (often with self-destructive consequences).

It is the movement from the pure epistolarity of Part I to a mixed narrative containing both a third person narrator and letters that allows Behn the freedom to explore questions of form and characterization. Likewise, it is the movement from the clearly defined identity of aristocratic daughter and French citizen to the ambiguous position of exile from both country and family that allows Silvia to explore her identity (in terms of gender and social status) in ways that would never be possible under an aristocratic father's or husband's roof. Thus exile, while it sometimes maintains its negative qualities of isolation and separation from one's society and home, is paradoxically the enabling condition for Silvia's transformation and identity experimentation within the novel. Represented as neither wholly negative nor wholly positive, exile allows a freedom from traditional societal constraint that affects both the social and the personal, both public persona and the body, in quite dramatic ways.

Yet, exile itself is not a unified concept in *Love-Letters*. Behn seems to combine elements of political (involuntary) exile with personal (voluntary) retreat from society—

often in ways which suggest that neither position is wholly voluntary nor wholly forced. Therefore I will be using the broader term "deterritorialization," borrowed from Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's text *A Thousand Plateaus* (in particular, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology:—The War Machine") to describe the umbrella state of being outside of society, including under this term both exile and Behn's rather idiosyncratic use of the literary trope of monastic retreat.[38] In *Love-Letters*, there are many levels of political exile and throughout the characters often are forced, both for political and personal reasons, to leave a place of exile for a space even further from their home and from any social knowledge of their identities. Religious retreat is another highly important form of removal in the text. The disavowal of society and all worldly goods and pleasures is a response, reserved by Behn, for private, amorous crimes, and yet, it too is shown to have political implications and motivation. While there seems to be more volition in religious retreat, the amount of choice truly allowed the characters in *Love-Letters* is modified by the categories of gender and status. Though it is necessary to consider Behn's treatment of a number of her characters of different genders and statuses in order to trace the relationship that these categories have with the deterritorialized body, following Silvia's movement through the text provides a link to all of the other significant characters.

The Deterritorialized Body And Gender

Silvia begins *Love-Letters* in a highly structured social space. Subordinate to her father, "the great *Beralti*" (25), and defined by her family's status and honour, Silvia is an

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[38] In conjunction with their discussion of "smooth space" (another concept that will be of use later in my argument), they write "deterritorialize oneself by renouncing, by going elsewhere ..." (353).

"unspotted Maid, fit to produce a race of Glorious Hero's" (25). When she flouts this society by eloping with her brother-in-law Philander (usurping her father's authority and transgressing her society's incest taboo which extended to affinal incest), she escapes the restrictions under which she was constrained but she also gives up the protection of those very restrictions.[39] When Silvia is betrayed by Philander in Part II and left to her own devices, the question arises whether "a candid system of gender inequality mitigated by the female entitlement to paternalist protection is far preferable to a careless and irresponsible utopianism that promises all but provides for nothing" (McKeon *Secret History* 509). Though Silvia may bemoan the loss of her father's protection and that afforded her by Philander immediately after his abandonment of her, she quickly recovers and seeks out the means to provide for her own protection, though whether she achieves a form of "irresponsible utopianism" through this self-liberation and control remains to be seen.

Initially it is the freedoms that exile accords the heroine, not the perils, that the text celebrates. While Silvia's "Boys cloaths" (115) serve as a necessary disguise for her escape from France with Philander at the end of Part I, by Part II of the novel the constraint of disguise is forgotten, replaced by the freedom enabled by gender passing. Silvia, "pleas'd with the Cavalier in her self," continues to dress as a man by choice rather than necessity because it "gave her a thousand little Priviledges, which otherwise wou'd have been deny'd to Women" (126). Silvia's very rationale for remaining as a man

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[39] Despite the lack of blood-relation, affinal incest was considered just as much a crime during the Restoration as blood incest. Pollak explains: "In point of legal fact, as Sybil Wolfram's work has shown, because the English concept of marriage in the seventeenth century was based on the legal and religious doctrine of the unity of husband and wife, 'intercourse between affinal relations was . . . on a footing with and as much incest as intercourse between close blood relations'" (153-54).

underscores her ability to fully pass for the opposite gender.

At the beginning of Part II, Silvia is not merely disguised in men's clothes; as Fillmond (her cavalier name), she fully occupies a male-gendered role in society. The narrator goes to great lengths to establish the ability of Silvia's physical form to be gendered male. Regardless of sex, all who see Silvia disguised as Fillmond fall in love with her: "Every day [Silvia] apear'd in the Toure, she fail'd not to make a conquest on some unguarded heart of the fair Sex" (126), and "she captivated the Men no less than the Women, who often gave her *Serinades* under her Window with Songs fitted to the Courtship of a Boy" (127). Even Octavio, who is on intimate footing with Silvia and Philander, accepts Silvia as a young cavalier and first falls in love with her as a boy: "he felt a secret joy and pleasure play about his Soul he knew not why; And was almost angry that he felt such an emotion for a youth, tho the most lovely that he ever saw" (123). The significant point is not that the men as well as the women fall in love with Fillmond; it is that the men are specifically described as falling in love with a boy. Octavio initially desires Silvia as a young man, though he does begin to suspect her true sex as he spends more time with her and Philander. Furthermore, despite his initial discomfort over his attraction to Fillmond, Octavio resolves "to persue, be the fair object of what sex soever" (124). As McKeon notes, Octavio "hopes [Silvia] is a woman; but her female sex is less important to him than her feminine gender" (*Secret History* 512).

In a state of exile, Silvia's boy's clothes are allowed to entirely construct her gender position and completely obscure the body underneath. Only when Silvia is taken ill with a fever, and thus, when the body beneath the clothes must be revealed to someone other than Philander, is her passing thwarted. However, it is important to note that it is

not the body that solely reveals her sex but rather the forced absence of clothing which finally allows that body to be seen. The implication is that Silvia could have easily maintained herself in the male gender indefinitely while she remained in a place where she was known only as the cavalier Fillmond. Her passing relies on her lack of history within her social environment, the consistency of her public identity, and her ability to fully mask her body. Her fever displays her inability to keep the mask perpetually on her body but it does not mean that her mask itself is at all defective.

To underscore this fact, Behn has Silvia again adopt the cavalier disguise in Part III of the novel. Now in a small village outside of Brussels, Silvia again turns to men's clothing for the freedom such a disguise allows her. By this point, though she is technically still being kept by Philander, they have grown tired of one another and very rarely stay together for any length of time. Bored by her isolation, Silvia readopts her male disguise and determines to find herself an adventure on the road, taking only her young page along. At her first inn she meets the nobleman Alonzo, whom she befriends in her role as Bellumere. Despite Silvia's lack of caution, it is clear that her passing is as completely successful in this incident as it was in Part II, perhaps even more so as Alonzo, unlike Octavio, clearly has no idea that Bellumere is actually a woman disguised:

> *Silvia* began so very well to be pleas'd with the fair Stranger, that she had like to have forgot the part she was to act, and have made Discoveries of her Sex, by Addressing herself with the Modesty and Blushes of a Woman: But *Alonzo* who had no such apprehension; tho' she appear'd with much more Beauty, than he fansied ever to have seen in a Man,

> nevertheless admir'd without suspecting, and took all those Signs of Effeminacy to unassur'd Youth, and first Address; and he was absolutely deceiv'd in her. (387)

Even though they share a bed, and Silvia has already "fix'd her Eyes, and all her soft desires upon him" (392), the incident concludes without any breach of Silvia's male position. While Alonzo is clearly taken with the youth, his affection is solely based on his firm belief that she is a man: "Why Sir, said Alonzo, I am too passionate an adorer of the Female Sex, to incommode any of my own with Addresses; nor am I so Nice, but I can suffer a Man to lye by me, especially so dear a Youth as your self" (394 font reversed). While Octavio was open to loving Fillmond/Silvia even if she was in fact of the male sex, Alonzo sharply allies bodily sex with sexuality/gender roles and has no sexual intentions towards Bellumere while he believes that "he" is of the male sex. Unlike Octavio, who "evinces the type of the 'traditional' aristocrat whose sexual desire is determined by gender, not sex, Alonzo seems rather to evoke the emergent modern type, for whom gender must be sexually grounded" (McKeon *Secret History* 528). Alonzo's firm heterosexual stance causes the male role, for Silvia, to become a trap in this episode rather than an enabling condition. She burns with desire for Alonzo—the narrator claims "'tis believed she wish'd he would awake and find by her Curiosity, her Sex" (395)—yet she cannot reveal or pursue this desire because she must not break the male role.

Despite her initial frustration, Silvia is able to turn Bellumere to her advantage in her later pursuit and seduction of Alonzo. After she has taken a house in Brussels under the name of Madame De—, she parades masked through the park wearing a ring that Alonzo gave to Bellumere, thus setting up his friend as a fictitious rival. The rival is then

transformed into the brother of the beautiful Madame De— , and finally collapsed into the body of Silvia when she reveals her men's clothes as a disguise, thus managing "to become both the desired man and the mediating woman" (Todd "Silvia" 213) and thus, also the wholly desired woman. By embodying all of the roles—friend, rival, brother, sister—Silvia ensures that all passion and all desire belong solely to her self: "by creating a male version of herself through which to lure her victims into a homoerotic attachment, [Silvia] paradoxically ensures her own status as primary object of desire [. . .]" (Pollak 176). By successfully embodying and seamlessly moving between the two gender positions, Silvia attains ultimate control over her body, her identity, and the object of her desire, Alonzo, who states:

> But by this new discovery, you have given me a Flame I have no power nor virtue to oppose: 'tis just, 'tis natural to adore you; and not to do it, were yet a crime greater than my Sin of Dulness: and since you have made me lose a Charming Friend; it is but just I find a Mistriss; give me but your permission to Love, and I will give you all my life in Services, and wait the rest: (422 font reversed)

Alonzo's sincerity is revealed by his unfortunate end—his fortune "ruin'd" (439) by Silvia and Brilljard. From a gender-perspective at least, the "irresponsible utopianism" that McKeon claims is promised by libertinism seems to be fully enjoyed by Silvia in her romantic pursuits.

Silvia is able to embody both gender positions and to entirely captivate Alonzo because she remains in a state of continual identity displacement, or to borrow another term from Deleuze and Guatarri, Silvia is always in a state of becoming. She moves

through smooth space where "the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination" (353). In this particular episode, she is completely unknown, having taken with her only her page (who is also in love with her and so completely under her control), and thus without limits. On a more fundamental level, her continual movement further and further away from home and identity free her from all forms of societal constraint and her own history. In order to maintain this ultimate control over her person, she must be in continual motion; she must forever flee anyone who knows enough about her constructed identities to exert this knowledge and in effect constrain her to that identity. Silvia's power is that of the nomads who "have no history; they only have a geography" (Deleuze 393). As the narrator concludes in the end, Silvia's exploits with Alonzo give her an unwelcome history. She "became the Talk of the Town, insomuch that the Governour not permitting her to stay there, she was forced to remove for new Prey" (439). In order to maintain her existence, Silvia must continue moving with no final destination point; she must enact continual displacements of her physical self and her serially constructed identities.

Silvia's gender passing is neither the only nor even the most striking instance of Silvia's ability to entirely efface her body and its expression of the female sex. Behn's representation of Silvia's pregnancy—or perhaps lack of representation since the casual reader easily forgets for most of the novel that Silvia is pregnant with Philander's child—underscores her ability to cloak her body with her own identificatory gestures and furthermore to act a role with her body that is antithetical to her current biological state. This is most evident in Silvia's relationship with Octavio. As mentioned earlier, Octavio falls in love with Silvia while she is passing for a youth. When he finally realises that she

is a woman, his admiration for her grows and the fact that she is already mistress to another man and has already been seduced from her maiden innocence serves to increase his "hope that she might one day as well be conquer'd by him" (127). It is his love for Silvia that prompts him to warn Philander away from Holland and that keeps him from defending Philander more warmly at the States. Once he is gone, Octavio believes he can easily supply Philander's place in Silvia's heart. However, Octavio is not dealing with the same Silvia that Philander seduced; she is no longer the innocent maid.

When Philander leaves, Silvia again occupies a very traditional literary role—the abandoned woman of epistolary tradition. Her fate reflects that of Ovid's Ariadne, many of whose lines to Theseus could easily be Silvia's to Philander:

> On this island I was betrayed both
> by you and by the sleep I could not resist;
> in my sleep you plotted my ruin.
> [. . . . . .]
> At the moment of waking, I,
> still drowsy, turned on my side and reached
> to touch my Theseus but I could not find him.
> (Ovid 6-8, 11-13)

Silvia's letter of complaint written to Philander when she receives his first letter from Cologne specifically alludes to the similarity between her and Ariadne's positions in this respect: "you left me like false *Theseus* on the shore, on the forsaken shore, departed from my fond clasping Arms; where I believ'd you safe, secure, and pleas'd; when sleep and night, that favour'd you and ruin'd me, had render'd 'em incapable of their dear loss"

(144). With this passage, Silvia aligns herself with her literary forbears and writes herself as the innocent maid convinced to betray her family for the love a man, then abandoned by that man. She is, like Ariadne, left on her own in a state of exile, unable to return to her home or family.

Behn, in Silvia's accusatory letter to Philander, draws on the tragic heroines given voice in the Heroides; she also alludes to Mariane, the Portuguese nun (a figure who would have been very well-known to Behn's readers) who writes to her French cavalier: "I have blasted my Reputation; I have lost my Parents; I have expos'd my self to the Lawes of my Country against Persons of my Profession; and finally, to your Ingratitude, the worst of my Misfortunes" (L' Estrange 41-42). Silvia, at this moment in the text, is aligned with these tragic literary figures. However, Behn does not seem interested in conventional tragedy. As Judith Keegan Gardiner argues, "for Behn a man's abandonment of a woman furthers rather than freezes her quest to fulfil her own desires" (207). Her heroine is not going to lament and plead, commit suicide, and monumentalize her lover's guilt on her tomb. Writing of another of Behn's stories and borrowing a term from Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Ruth Salvaggio identifies this type of strategy on Behn's part as "a form of 'writing beyond the ending'—beyond, that is the conventional closures (death and marriage) reserved for women in narrative" (265). Silvia may play a conventional role in her letters to Philander, thus continuing the plot trajectory begun in Part I, but outside the letters, in her behaviour with Octavio, Silvia begins anew. She will again play the young maid, the pure innocent virgin, and Octavio will allow her to occupy this position despite the fact that she is pregnant with Philander's child.

The most striking instance of Silvia's ability to completely define her social

identity while in exile, to create herself through her behaviour and her appearance and in spite of her body is her pregnancy. Tellingly, the reader learns that Silvia is with child from Philander, not Silvia, and the only times she refers to it herself is when she uses it. Her pregnancy becomes a reproach to Philander, "You ask me, Oh Charming *Philander* how the Pledge of our soft hours thrives? Alas, as if it meant to brave the worst of fate! it does advance, my sorrows and all your cruelties have not destroy'd that" (192), an excuse to refuse Octavio's early marriage proposals (248-49), and a weapon jealously wielded against Calista (whom Philander also seduces and impregnates) when Silvia learns of Philander's unfaithfulness (313-14). Any other information that we get regarding Silvia's pregnant body comes either from Philander or the narrator.

Although Silvia strategically uses her pregnant body in the three aforementioned instances, she most often effaces it completely. Despite her pregnancy, Silvia manages to be Octavio's unspotted maid, his lover and, almost, his wife. She is also able to completely bewitch Octavio's uncle Sebastian, who seems completely unaware that she is with child. Finally, she wins back Philander, then wins back Octavio, then again goes back to Philander, and then finally gives birth to the child who is never heard of again, even as to whether it lives or dies. The description of the delivery is as perfunctory and seemingly trivial as the pregnancy has been throughout: "she fell in Labour, and was brought to Bed, tho' she show'd very little of her Condition all the time she went. This great Affair being well over, she considers herself a new Woman [. . .]." (365). Hardly a "great Affair," Silvia's pregnant body is never allowed to impact let alone define the role that Silvia plays throughout the narrative. And despite the possible existence of a child, Silvia certainly never appears in *Love-Letters* in the role of mother.

Silvia's ability to escape perhaps the greatest signifier of the female sex is enabled by her exile status. This is most clearly seen by comparing another of Behn's representations of pregnancy. In her short prose text "The Adventure of the Black Lady," Behn tells the tale of Bellamora who, in her last month of pregnancy, flees to London from the country to avoid marrying Fondlove, the father of her child. In search of one of her kinswomen, she mistakenly stumbles into a house where Fondlove's sister resides and is tricked into staying there until Fondlove is brought to town to claim her. While the tale ends in marriage, this ending is by no means unambiguously happy. Bellamora does not want to marry Fondlove but she is trapped by the expectations of English society, personified in her landlady, Fondlove's sister, and the overseers of the poor, whose threat of imprisonment is used to coerce her into the marriage. It is society's norms and customs that dictate the importance of Bellamora's pregnancy and the necessity of her marriage. Despite her attempt to escape her future husband, Bellamora stays within Britain, within her own history (which she reinscribes through her telling of it to the landlady), and within a society that insists she must marry the father of her child, and furthermore, as Behn's story implies, that she must *want* to marry the father of her child. Any other feeling on Bellamora's part is deemed unthinkable by the other characters in the tale.

If the pregnancy of an unknown woman in London is a matter of concern to society (as evidenced through the attentions of the overseers of the poor), the pregnancy of an aristocratic daughter, a grandchild for "the great Beralti," would be a significant public occasion. As Silvia (like her non-fiction counterpart Lady Henrietta Berkeley) comes from a prominent Tory family, a child by her would mean the continuation of the royalist bloodline and all that entails in a society sharply divided along

royalist/parliament lines. Furthermore, Philander's child by her would constitute "a Whig usurpation of the royalist right of rule" (Pollak 167). In short, any child of Sylvia's born in Britain would have important political implications. However as Silvia is a woman without family by Part II, so her pregnancy is wholly without social meaning. She could put some private significance onto the child. One gets the sense that Philander expects this of her and hopes that the child will serve as a tie that keeps Silvia faithful to him, despite his own faithlessness: "I am impatient [. . .] to know how that dear pledge of our soft hours advances. I mean what I believe I left thee possest of, a young *Philander.* Cherish it *Silvia*" (182). However, Silvia has absolutely no intention of allowing the child to be any type of symbol, be it social or private, and the point is that, outside of the rules of society, outside of her family history, she has the freedom to decide whether her pregnancy should convey a particular meaning or whether it is insignificant. Clearly, as the text demonstrates again and again, Silvia chooses to disallow her body this potential signifying power.

Silvia's ability to completely efface her female sex with clothing suggests a certain malleability of the physical body different from that present in Behn's other texts. It is not that Silvia's body undergoes actual changes like that of Maria in "The Dumb Virgin," who regains her speech, and Celesia in "The Unfortunate Bride" who regains her sight; rather, *it is robbed of its signifying power.* However, unlike Gayman's power over Julia's bodily representation in *The Luckey Chance*, there is no man in *Love-Letters* who controls the effacement and signification of Silvia's body; Silvia herself controls it. But this control over the body is something very different from a feminist version of the right to bodily control that sees the body as integral to the self and to identity, in other words,

that sees a woman's body as formative of a unique female identity. Silvia's body is not portrayed by Behn as a formative ground of meaning or even as something linked to her emotional or mental awareness. It is a weapon, like her beauty, her jewels, and her wit; it is another element in her arsenal that she can use to maintain her position within society, and yet outside society's rules.

The body-identity fusion that is present in later eighteenth-century texts is not at all present in *Love-Letters*.[40] Silvia at times actually seems strangely distant, almost alienated from her physical body and its sensations. Like those around her, she too is portrayed as having to read her external body to have access to her own physical experiences. In Part II, when Silvia faints in Brilljard's arms at the possibility that Philander is unfaithful, Brilljard (Philander's servant and Silvia's husband of convenience) seizes the opportunity to enjoy the body he so entirely desires:

> so transporting was the pleasure of that dear burden, that he forgot to call for, or to use any aid to bring her back to life, but trembling with his love and eager passion he took a thousand joys, he kist a thousand times her Luke-warm lips, suckt her short sighs, and ravisht all the sweets her Bosome (which but guarded with a loose Night Gown) yielded his

[40] The best example of this fusion is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. While her bodily purity is conflated with her personal identity throughout the novel, the direct link between Clarissa's body and her self is best exemplified by the loss of that purity. After being drugged and raped by Lovelace, Clarissa loses her wits and continues in a state of madness for a week. Her core identity is so dependent on her body that her mental stability is lost at the moment that her body is taken beyond her own control; as Linda Kauffman describes it, Clarissa's discourse "posits a logic based on the integrity of the body and the supremacy of the heart [. . .]" (133). After her bodily integrity is lost, though she struggles with the relationship between her unpure body and chaste mind, Clarissa's longing for and eventual death reveals the primacy of her body over her spiritual and mental purity in defining her identity. Her moral and spiritual victory is predicated on the death of her physical body.

> impatient touches [. . .] in one Minute, ran o're all the killing joys he had been witness to, which she had given *Philander*; on which he never paws'd but urg'd by a *Cupid* altogether malicious and wicked, he resolves his cowardly Conquest, when some kinder God awaken'd *Silvia*, and brought *Octavio* to the Chamber door [. . .]. (148)

After Silvia awakens she has no physical intuition or suspicion of what has taken place; she has no idea that her gown "was still open and discover'd a World of unguarded Beauty" (149), and she is described by the narrator as "not knowing any thing of the freedom the daring Husband-Lover had taken" (155). It is only after Octavio has voiced his suspicions of Brilljard that Silvia begins to suspect something has happened. Her only recourse to discover whether her and Octavio's suspicions are true is to look at her reflection.

When Octavio expresses his concerns regarding the liberties he believes Brilljard has taken with Silvia, she turns to inspect herself in the mirror: "With that surveying of her self, as she stood, in a great Glass, which she cou'd not hinder her self from doing, she found indeed her Night Linnen, her Gown, and the bosome of her Shift in such disorder" (156). Silvia is not portrayed as having any sort of bodily knowledge; like anyone else, she reads her external appearance in order to discover what happened while she was in her fainting fit. Even after her suspicions are raised by Octavio and her mirror, she still has to resort to tricking Brilljard in order to learn the full extent of his usage of her. She cannot rely on her body to tell her if she has been ravished.

The disjunction between Silvia's body and her experience of it represented in Part II contrasts sharply with the seemingly fully embodied heroine of Part I. Many of Silvia's

early letters to Philander use intensely physical language to describe her desire and passion for his presence. When she first ponders a secret meeting with Philander, Silvia writes "I lost all my senses [. . .] the violent effects of Love and Honour, the impetuous meeting tides of the extreams of joy and fear, rushing on too suddainly, over-whelm'd my senses" (32). The connection between thought and bodily reaction is strong in this passage, and while one could argue that Silvia may be staging this reaction for Philander's benefit, the fact still remains that she chooses to describe her thoughts in highly physical, embodied language. This sort of description continues throughout the first part. Describing her reaction to the presence of the King, Sylvia writes "I never approach His Sacred Person, but my Heart beats, my Blood runs cold about me, and my Eyes o'reflow with Tears of joy, while an awful confusion seizes me all over" (40), and while she is anticipating Philander's arrival at her rooms or longing for her own escape from her father's house, Sylvia continually describes her emotions in physical terms: "what pains and Pantings my heart sustain'd at every thought" (49), "at every thought of thee, I find a strange disorder in my blood, that pants and burns in every Vein" (67).

The link forged so explicitly between Sylvia's identity and her body through her letters in Part I can be partially attributed to the epistolary form, in which, as Janet Gurkin Altman points out, the letter functions metonymically in that "the letter itself, by virtue of physical contact, stands for the lover" (19). In addition to their metonymic function, letters attain a level of embodiment in their evocation of the absent lover and in their inscription (thus materialization) of the writer's desire and passions. Linda Kauffman, in a discussion of the heroine figure in Ovid, writes, "Writing comes to signify her life's blood, illustrating her identification of her body with the text" (37). Behn's move from

the pure epistolarity of Part I allows her to escape this generic link between her heroine's body and her writing in the same way that Silvia's movement into exile allows her to escape the social meanings surrounding her female sex. Furthermore, Behn's representation of letters in Parts II and III highlight their artificiality, as opposed to the "authenticity of the emotion conveyed" (Kauffman 121), in a way that even further breaks any links between her heroine's body, her "true" expression of self, and her writing. The effects of the epistolary genre, so valuable to Richardson's portrayal of his heroine whose words "have an exact correspondence to the inner person" and to the body in that they flow "from the 'heart'" (Castle 67), are called into question by Behn's narrator who exposes the performative elements in her character's letters.[41]

Unlike later eighteenth-century heroines, then, Silvia, in Parts II and III, is not fully embodied. She has the agency to control the social meanings represented upon her body and the ability to completely efface her sex when she desires, yet she is unable to access her body internally. Like everyone else in the novel, Silvia relates to her body externally through its appearance, not internally through its sensations. It is, perhaps, this external relation that gives the body such malleability in Behn's works and allows Silvia to manipulate the physical in ways completely counter-intuitive to a modern understanding of the body as a firm ground for identity. For Silvia in exile, her body is not primarily about its sensations and inner meanings; it is about its ability to represent certain gendered identities socially and Silvia's control over those representations.

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[41] For example, after writing to Philander, Silvia is described reading over her own letter to gauge it effects: "Having read over this Letter she fear'd she had said too much of her doubts, and apprehensions of a change in him; for now she flies to all the little Stratagems and artifices of Lovers" (147). In contrast to the seemingly spontaneous letters of Part I, the letters in Part II are often read over for effect and consciously tailored to produce particular emotions and impressions in the reader.

Calista's seduction and pregnancy by Philander serve as a foil for Silvia's situation within the novel. Like Silvia, Calista is seduced and made pregnant by Philander. Her pregnancy is treated as insignificant within the text in that she also rejects the role of mother and gives the child away: "[She] commanded the Child should be removed where she might never see it, which accordingly was done" (315). Unlike Silvia, Calista is not free from the repercussions of her actions. Her fate provides the traditional story within the text of the fallen woman who must pay for her sins against society through her own death, whether it be literal or symbolic. Seduced from her husband by a man who already has one mistress, Calista has no real choice but to retire to a convent. While the narrator praises Calista's actions—"she took the Habit; and remains a rare Example of Repentance, and Holy-living" (315)—she also makes it clear that this course was Calista's only alternative, as it is "the only Action she could do that could reconcile [Octavio] to her" (315).

Calista's fate provides an excellent contrast for her brother's fate in the text. While some critics have read Calista's and Octavio's endings as structurally the same, both the narrative treatment of each character's retreat and the implied agency or lack thereof in each decision suggests otherwise.[42] Calista's retreat from society is not overtly forced but it is implicitly expected of a woman in her position; it is very private and comes with little fanfare. Though she is outside of public life, she is not really apart from society like Silvia is. She has been placed where she is because she has been defined as a fallen woman, and so her space, while outside the public, is still firmly within society's

[42] Ballaster writes, "Octavio and Calista follow the only other course open to the deserted lover. Both, like Sylvia, are victims of seduction, duped into sacrificing their honour, but their response is retreat into holy orders, here viewed as a voluntary abnegation of discursive power" (111-12).

system of rules and prohibitions. It is also a space allowed her by society because of her family's status in Holland. Like Belvideera's choice to remove from Venice at the end of "The Dumb Virgin," Calista's ability to occupy a space in a convent (rather than being left to die, an outcast of society) is predicated on her status and her family's fortune. Because Calista was raised in a nunnery, she is allowed to return after she has fled from her husband and allowed to stay after she renounces Philander. While the convent may not be the ideal choice for a woman, Behn represents that choice as a lesser evil and, furthermore, as a degree of power for her heroines based not on gender but on status. Not all of the women in Behn's texts enjoy the same potential power.

In *Agnes de Castro: or, the Force of Generous Love*, the title character yearns to be allowed to retreat from her court environment but is continually denied this power by her superiors. Unlike Calista and Belvideera, Agnes is of inferior birth. Though she is more "a Companion than a Maid of Honor" (128) to the Princess Constantia, she is still a dependant on the Princess and her husband, Don Pedro, Prince of Portugal. Despite Agnes' personal virtues, which are continually extolled throughout the story, it is her lack of status that dictates her tragic fate.

Like "The Unfortunate Bride," *Agnes de Castro* focuses on a pseudo love triangle between Constantia, Don Pedro and Agnes. The pseudo triangle is created not by any physical defect on Agnes' part but because of her lowly status compared to that of the royal pair. Her rank as a servant allows the three characters to continue living together even after it is revealed to Constantia that Don Pedro is in love with Agnes. It is this revelation that instigates Agnes' first request to be able to leave the court, which she makes to the Princess: "I find nothing more reasonable for me than to hide my Self in

some Corner of the World" (141). The Princess absolutely denies Agnes' plea: "I will not suffer you to abandon us" (141). As the text progresses, Agnes is portrayed as suffering under her knowledge of Don Pedro's love, as being plagued by the attentions of a rival of Don Pedro's, Don Alvaro, and as being suspected by the King (Don Pedro's father) of intentionally trying to entangle the Prince in a love affair that is beneath him. Again and again she responds to these troubles by begging to be allowed to leave. She requests permission of the King, then again of Constantia, but is continually denied. After Constantia's death, Agnes resolves once more to "pass the rest of her Days in solitary Retreat" (155) but her departure is prevented by Don Pedro. Because she is subject to those around her, Agnes is trapped in Coimbra and, in the end, is murdered by Don Alvaro for scorning his love and choosing the Prince over him.

In Agnes, Behn portrays a woman completely opposite to Calista. Though Calista allows herself to be seduced from her husband, she still has the power derived from status to live out her life and atone for her sins through her piety in a convent. In contrast, Agnes is depicted as being truly virtuous. She loves the Princess far more than the Prince and never even feels, let alone displays, any affection towards the Prince until after the death of Constantia. Yet Agnes' moral worth cannot outweigh her lowly status. Subject to those around her, when she does finally secretly marry the Prince, her reward is death. Because of her lack of status, Agnes can only end tragically. True power and glory is reserved for one who embodies both gender privilege and status—the aristocratic male.

When Octavio chooses to forsake the world because of Silvia's ill treatment of him, the text treats his withdrawal from society as a noble act. The ceremony that accompanies Octavio's retreat into the monastic order of St. Bernard is as elaborate and

ornate as his sister's retreat into the nunnery is quiet, and the incident's importance within the text is signalled by an unusual narrative intervention. Not content to merely comment on the ceremony, Behn's narrator declares, "I my self went among the rest to this Ceremony" (379). Unlike the rest of the story, most of which (as the reader later learns) the narrator has heard second-hand from Silvia's page (388), Octavio's initiation into the Bernardines is given as a first-hand description complete with effusions of sentiment and praise on the part of the narrator:

> I confess, I thought myself no longer on Earth. (381)

> All I could see around me, all I heard, was ravishing and heavenly; the Scene of Glory, and the dazling Altar; the noble Paintings, and the numerous Lamps; the Awfulness, the Musick, and the Order, made me conceive myself above the Stars, and I had no part of mortal Thought about me. (382)

> For my part, I swear I was never so affected in my Life, with any thing, as I was at this Ceremony, nor ever found my Heart so oppressed with Tenderness; and was myself ready to sink where I sate, when [Octavio] came near me, to be welcom'd by a Father that sate next to me. (383)

While such lengthy quoting may seem excessive, it is but a small sample of the narrative that is given over to Octavio's entry into holy orders.

The narrative privileging of this passage suggests an importance that has not been fully considered by the few critics who even mention the scene in any detail. Both Todd

and McKeon point to the erotic nature of the narrator's description of the religious ceremony, and yet Todd is content to leave it as "an absurd and complex moment which the sobbing actors completely comprehend" (*Sign* 83). McKeon takes his analysis further, noting that the scene is "an example of eroticized religious observance reminiscent of a familiar technique of anticlerical satire" and suggesting that there is a gentle irony present "regarding the industrious futility of [Octavio's] courtship of Silvia, whereby likely success with 'the world' comes only with the decision to renounce it" (*Secret History* 542). While interesting, neither of these readings seem fully to account for the importance the narrator gives to the event in the text, and while Behn's fascination with Catholic ceremony and institutions is evident in much of her fiction and has often been noted, her description in this case seems to suggest the scene is worthy of closer attention.

The theme of monastic retreat due to disappointment in love has a long literary tradition and also appears in other works by Behn, most notably in *The Fair Jilt*, which contains a traditional account of how Father Henrick came to be a cordelier interpolated with little motivation in the rest of the plot.[43] However, in a technique characteristic of Behn, Octavio's action references this tradition while infusing it with new meaning. The high honour accorded to Octavio by the narrator and the implied nobility of his decision to forsake the world and, finally, escape from Silvia, is indicative of the text's different constructions of the relationship between gender and retreat. Moreover, Octavio's choice is not shown to be purely personal; for Behn, voluntary exile is an honourable instance of his power over his own life and identity. As we have seen, his social status informs his

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[43] See "The Story of Prince Henrick" in Behn's *The Fair Jilt: or, The History of Prince Tarquin and Miranda* 13-18.

ability to make this choice. The link between status and voluntary exile is most clearly articulated by Behn in her dedication of *The Second Part of The Rover* to James II, then still the Duke of York: "You, Great Sir, denying Your self the Rights and Priviledges the meanest Subject Claims, with a Fortitude worthy Your Adorable Virtues, put Your self upon a voluntary Exile to appease the causeless murmurs of this again gathering Faction" (228).[44] Just as Behn blends the personal/sexual and the political in her treatment of Silvia and Philander (and elsewhere in her writing), her description of Octavio's "voluntary exile" combines erotic, religious, and ceremonial elements in a way that implies the political power of Octavio's act.[45]

Turning to the passage itself, it is easy to see the appropriateness of Todd's "absurd and complex" descriptors. The language Behn uses registers on so many different levels that it is difficult to imagine any coherent explanation for her description of the event. As already noted the passage contains elements of the erotic both in its

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[44] *The Second Part of The Rover* was printed in 1681 when James was in exile, first in Brussels and then in Scotland, to avoid any fall-out from the Popish Plot. It was during the height of the Exclusion Crisis, which would finally be resolved with the Oxford Parliament in March when Charles II refused an open request by Shaftesbury to legitimate Monmouth and then dissolved Parliament. For a detailed account of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis see Fraser 354-406.

[45] Behn's tendency to link the private/sexual with the public has often been noted. About Philander's political rebellion and his inconstancy in love, Todd writes "Politics and sex, as so often in Aphra Behn's work, come together, suggesting that inconstancy in one sphere mirrors it in another" (*Sign* 80). Writing about a number of Behn's shorter novels, Ballaster claims that " these novels provide rather a means of articulating party politics through the mirror of sexual politics [. . .] Embattled virginity, virtue rewarded or ravished, what we might call the female plot, serve to reflect and refract male plotting, in other words, the party, dynastic, and ideological conflicts of late Stuart government" (84).

For an in-depth treatment of how the first part of *Love-Letters* can be read simultaneously as a romance and as political propaganda see Steen 91-122, and for a full discussion of the complex interweaving of private and public in all three parts of Behn's novel see Chapter 11 – "Behn's *Love-Letters*" in McKeon's *Secret History* 506-546.

language—"He look'd, methought, as if the Gods of Love had met in Council to dress him up that day for everlasting Conquest [. . .] he bore new Lustre in his Face and Eyes, Smiles on his Cheeks, and Dimples on his Lips" (382)—and in the description of Octavio's public disrobing before the donning of his new robes. It also, understandably, is filled with religious references: "an hundred little Angels so rarely dress'd" (380), "High-Mass" (382). However, the religious scene is overlaid with the riches and ceremony of noble status. The altar is "Embroidered with Diamonds, Pearls, and Stones of great Value" (381), while Octavio is dressed in "white Cloth of Silver embroidered with Gold, and Buttons of Diamonds; lin'd with rich Cloth of Gold and Silver Flowers" (381-2). Even the order that Octavio has chosen to join is "one of the neatest of any of 'em, and there is a Monastery of that order, which are oblig'd to be all Noble Mens Sons" (380). Like the order of the Beguines, to which Miranda belongs in *The Fair Jilt*, the Bernadines are an order for people of "quality."

While all of the aforementioned elements may be expected in a description of a Catholic ceremony, there are other more problematic aspects of the passage. Despite the glory being presented, there is also a sense of mourning. When the Bernadines enter the church "all were silent, and as still as Death; as awful as Mourners, that attend the Hearse of some lov'd Monarch" (381). Furthermore, this reference to a monarch is not the only political reference in the passage. The narrator also compares the brothers of the order to "our Knights of the Garter at *Windsor*" (381). Finally, this descriptive mixture is summed up in the narrator's final word on the ceremony, which adds to all the other elements the language of war:

> Had he dy'd, there had not been half the Lamentation; so foolish is the

> mistaken World, to grieve at our happiest Fortune, either when we go to Heaven, or retreat from this World, which has nothing in it that can really charm, without a thousand Fatigues to attend it: And in this Retreat, I am sure, he himself was the only Person that was not infinitely concerned; who quitted the World with so modest a Bravery, so intire a Joy, as no young Conqueror ever perform'd his Triumphs with more. (383)

Containing religious, ceremonial, mournful, political, and military language, this final passage clearly states the narrator's admiration of Octavio's decision and of the status and power encompassed within his choice.

This scene is not merely an instance of the narrator choosing to align herself with Octavio, as some critics have read it.[46] Like many of her other narrative interventions of this type, Behn draws the reader's attention to her self, both narrator and author, for a purpose, which perhaps is to illuminate a complex and subtle allusion being made through her descriptive language to another of her works—also a piece of writing composed for James II—"A Pindarick Poem on the Happy Coronation of His Most Sacred Majesty James II." This poem, written two years before the third part of *Love-Letters* was published, also contains the exact combination of descriptive language contained in the narrator's treatment of Octavio's retreat. It begins with the poet still mourning the death of Charles II then moves to descriptions of James and his Queen in language that mirrors the description of Octavio in *Love-Letters*. Combining elements of war, royalty, and religion, James is both a "*Royal HERO*" (25) and "*Godlike King*" (26)

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[46] Todd writes, "In the end of course the narrator lines up behind sincerity, which, with all the suffering it causes its victim, is still life's best gift. The unwise Octavio is sincere and his desparate futile throwing away of all he has for love wins her admiration [. . .]" (*Sign* 83).

who is greeted by "Ten Thousand *Angels* [who] fill'd the glitt'ring *Air*" (72). The combination of erotic and religious imagery is used for Queen Mary:

> That *future Lovers* when they hear,
> Your *all-ador'd* and *wond'rous* character;
> [. . . . . .]
> May find the *Holy Passions* you inspire,
> Such *awful* flame, such *hopeless* pain,
> Wander and thrill through every trembling Vein;
> And *Bless* the *Charmer* that *Creates* the Fire! (50-51, 54-57)

In short, the poem describing James II's coronation contains all of the descriptive language used to describe Octavio's retreat from the world.

That is not say, however, that Octavio himself is meant to represent James II in the way that Philander is a fictionalized Lord Grey. Rather, Octavio's final scene is a tribute by Behn to monarchy in general, signalled by these linguistic similarities, but not restricted by a comparison to a specific king.[47] In a time when, as John Brewer describes it, "courtiers might participate in the ritual and show of kingship, but their view of the symbols of authority was ironic, satiric, and sometimes openly parodic" (14), Behn was somewhat of an anomaly. "[A] passionate supporter of both Charles II and James II as not simply rulers but as sacred majesties, god-kings on earth" (Todd *Sign* 73), she creates a lavish description for the novel's perhaps only truly moral character that is both a tribute to power and status but also alludes to the glory of the monarchy; it contains a

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[47] Behn's adulation of monarchy as an institution is also evident in her poem, "A Paraphrase on The Lord's Prayer," which ends with the lines: "All Honour, Glory, and all Praise be given / To Kings on Earth, and to our God in Heaven" (108-09).

wish for a retreat from the cynicism of Silvia's love specifically but also more generally for a retreat from a cynical society that no longer attaches importance to the symbolism and rituals of the monarchy.[48]

As the discussion of the two forms of deterritorialization has shown, the primary differences between the genders and their relationship to exile within the text are control and symbolic power. Calista is shown as largely without choice in her decision to enter a nunnery, and thus her retreat from the world is largely without any symbolic value. She is praised for her personal piety but that is all. In sharp contrast, Octavio has status, political power and wealth and, despite all of that, chooses to forsake a cynical world for the quiet retreat of a monastic order. His decision is entirely his own and attains a symbolic power akin to the coronation of a monarch. In Behn's description of him, Octavio gains a god-like status in the text immediately before he leaves it, and his highly memorable exit is not quickly forgotten.

The difference of control between the genders, by the conclusion of the text, is even extended to the ability to renounce exile and to return home. Gardiner reads the characters of Silvia and Philander as parallel in the end, as "fellow scoundrels" "still committing adultery and unpunished" (215), and while their characters certainly grow in similarity as the novel progresses, it is their dissimilarity that is most definitive. The most important distinction between Silvia and Philander at the end of *Love-Letters* is that

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[48] According to Susan Staves, the desire for retreat from society was a common theme for tragic heroes in the drama of the 1670s and 1680s (82), a theme perhaps left over from the political turmoil of the interregnum during and after which the authors themselves were liable to express this desire: "when [Cowley] himself was imprisoned, he announced in the preface to his works an intention to emigrate to America, 'to forsake this world for ever, with all the vanities and vexations of it, and to bury myself in some retreat there [. . .]'" (Staves 39).

Philander is allowed to return home. The final implication is that even treason in a man can be forgiven: "The man can suffer or commit few irrevocable deeds, such as entering a monastery or mounting a scaffold. He finds many routes back to his starting place in family and society" (Todd "Silvia" 202). However, for Silvia, there is no returning. Though she gains power over herself, her body and those she comes into contact with, her movement must be perpetual and must always be forward. The crimes she has committed towards her gender and her family's status are unforgivable—so much so that the idea of her return to France is never even raised as a possibility: "for the woman there is no [. . .] return, despite the fact that the body does not appear to own its disgrace and undoing, as the feminine myths have supposed. After his sexual escapades Philander will always be a lord, Silvia is no longer a lady" (Todd "Silvia" 202). Yet, while Silvia may not be a lady, she is also not a servant or a fallen woman despite what critics like Rivero have asserted. Silvia's movement in exile is not linear; as I have argued, she is neither bound by the rules of society nor by the rules of genre. To see her movement as a progression from aristocrat to whore is to keep her within the striated space of society and to ignore the deterritorialization that her body has undergone. Like gender, status is another path upon which to follow Silvia's movements through the three parts of the novel.

Status and the Commodified Body

Silvia's gender passing is limited by its strategic nature and eventual discardment, but it is not the only type of identity control that she has. Even when Silvia is forced back into the female gender position in Part II because of her fever, the resulting position is by

no means identical to that which she occupies in Part I of the novel. William Warner points out that once Silvia discards her male clothing, Behn repeats the plot of Part I (and she does this again in Part III); for Warner, this repetition between the three serially-published volumes "obey[s] the logic of serial fiction on the market: each sequel meets the reader's demand for comforting continuity and enticing variation" (65). However, on a formal level, the repetition serves to focus the interest on the characters and the different effects that their subsequent changes in location and status have on the unfolding of events. One of the most significant results of this structural repetition is that it allows Behn, by Part III, to place Silvia and Philander in structurally similar roles as manipulative, self-interested seducers. The numerous amorous possibilities enabled by the structural repetition and the introduction of new individuals in the seduced/seducing roles emphasize the role fluidity available in amorous relations as "in each novel, characters take different positions within the scenario" (Warner 65).[49]

Like the exploration of the substitutability of bodies in erotic relationships in "The Unfortunate Bride" or *The Luckey Chance*, this repetition of the parts of *Love-Letters* allows Behn to explore the theme of erotic substitution in a more developed narrative. The overlapping triangles of Sylvia-Philander-Mertilla, Philander-Mertilla-Cesario in Part I are replaced with a more complicated yet structurally similar set of overlapping arrangements in Parts II and III: Philander-Silvia-Brilljard, Octavio-Silvia-Philander/Brilljard, Philander-Calista-Count Clarinau, Octavio-Silvia-Sebastian, Silvia-Calista-Philander, Silvia-Brilljard-Antonett, Brilljard/Philander-Sylvia-Alonzo. The significant change in the makeup of the erotic triangles in Parts II and III, more so than

[49] For a full discussion of the plot elements that are repeated see Warner 64-66.

their proliferation, is the inclusion of lower-status servant characters. Both Brilljard and Antonett are servants and both appear in relation to Silvia, whose status position once she enters exile needs to be examined more fully. Like her gender fluidity, her status also seems to become more fluid. However, these categories cannot be collapsed in that the elements of control and the relationship to the body demonstrated through the lens of gender are not contiguous with those that are revealed through the lens of status.

The significant difference between Parts I and II is Silvia's position and the level of autonomy brought about by the shift in her location and her circumstances. Silvia's situation in exile, once she is left by Philander, is both highly ambiguous and seemingly autonomous. Warner argues, "the Adventures [Part II], by following the diplomatic manoeuvres of equal subjects, apparently free of fathers or the Law, takes characters through perverse deflections of desire" (67-68). On the one hand, it is true that Silvia is free from the restriction of an immediate master, be it father or husband or king even, and thus is allowed to act as her own master in terms of her immediate behaviour and choices. Furthermore, she is still treated as a woman of quality by Octavio and so, at least in the beginning of Part II, maintains her high social status. However, in a larger sense, she needs to find someone to support her or some way to support herself economically as Philander's money is running out. Thus, what initially may appear as her complete freedom (that is from male restraint) is actually a different type of constraint. In Part II, her social behaviour is determined by her need for the very economic resources that she gave up when she abandoned her family and put herself in the power of her lover. The tension between her potential power and her economic need creates many of the ambiguities in Silvia's character. Where the heroine of Part I is motivated by love (and

possibly by a desire to escape her father's control), the heroine of Part II is largely motivated by a desire for economic freedom and an increasing sense of self-interest which she disguises beneath her discourse of love to Octavio.

The need for money is what initially brings Silvia closer to her servant, Antonett, while Silvia's lack of masculine protection when Philander leaves Holland is what allows Brilljard to aspire to the role of protector (and his legal rights as a husband), albeit unsuccessfully. Thus, in one sense, Silvia's gender position seems to be implicated in her loss of status. However, Brilljard does not achieve mastery over his legal wife in any significant way because Silvia's pursuit of her economic interest negates the needs suggested by her gender. In other words, by learning to act in her own interest, Silvia frees herself from the feminine requirement of masculine protection. Her ability to obtain money from multiple sources becomes her source of protection. In order to achieve this form of power, however, Silvia abandons her strictly aristocratic status for a position as fluid and uncategorizable as that of her gender identity, perhaps even more so as her movement is not merely between two roles—male/female or lady/whore. Rather, Silvia seems to create and occupy a smooth middle space that is neither and all of these. This new position relies on her ability to efface and manipulate her physical body but, further, it relies on her ability to learn to use that body strategically—in effect, to turn it into a commodity that is never spoiled. This preservation of a pure (thus marketable) body does not rely on the sort of self-alienation discussed by Gallagher in her reading of Behn's articulation of the position of the female writer as new-fangled whore.[50] There is no evidence of an inner, inalienable self that Silvia reserves in her repeated self-sales.

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[50] See Gallagher's *Nobody's Story* 1-48.

Instead, it is Silvia's identity/body mutability (i.e. her ability to recreate the maiden despite the pregnancy) that allows her to always have a beautiful body to sell, untainted despite her past sexual experiences: "she was indeed too Charming without, for the deformity of her indiscretion within" (Behn *LL* 375).

To grasp how Silvia's status comes to change in *Love-Letters*, it is useful to compare two scenes involving Silvia and her female servants. In Part I, while Silvia is still safely within her father's house, the Duchess —, who has come to visit Silvia and her mother, discovers Silvia in the process of writing. Snatching the letter that Silvia has tried to hide in her comb-box, the Duchess proceeds to read it aloud to the Countess Beralti. Silvia has to act quickly to distance herself from the letter being read, and her successful deflection of guilt in this incident relies on the unbridgeable gap between maid (Melinda) and mistress in Restoration society. Silvia "whose wit never fail'd her, Cry'd, I beseech you Madam, let us have so much complisance for *Melinda* to ask her consent in this affair" thus claiming that the letter is Melinda's written to her lover, Alexis, "profess[ed] under the name of *Silvia* to *Philander*" (52). To undermine the effect of the Duchess's earlier performance, Silvia reads the letter aloud as if it is from Melinda, not herself, "and turn'd it so prettily into Burlesque Love by her manner of reading it, that made Madam the Dutchess laugh extreamly" (53).

Her burlesque performance of the letter, written in her name, is successful because it is predicated on the absurdity of thinking that the mistress could be the maid, and vice-versa. By turning the love-letter into a comic performance, Silvia ensures that it cannot be seen as anything but low and through her very act of saying the words distances herself from them. Her strategy works precisely because her aristocratic status

in Part I is secure; once the letter is made low, it cannot belong to Silvia. While Philander, in a scene of comic misrecognition, is capable of being mistaken for Melinda, Silvia is not.[51] "The significant differential between the private and the public, the high and the low, is not in this case that between man and woman but that between mistress and maid" (McKeon *Secret History* 525-26).

The scene of performance, of Silvia performing lines supposedly written by Melinda but actually written by her, is further complicated in that it occurs in a letter to Philander written by Melinda, not Silvia—one of only four letters that occur in Part I that are written neither by Philander nor Silvia (the other three being from Cesario to Philander, Mertilla to Silvia, and Foscario to Silvia [63, 74-76, 85-86]). By placing the incident in a letter written by Melinda, Behn expands the levels of language such that the maid describes the mistress performing the maid using words originally written by the latter. This ambiguity demonstrates how language can be co-opted and given a particular meaning through embodiment that it does not necessarily carry on its own. "The thinnest of lines (a mere 'matter of reading') divides love from burlesque love—which is to say, at least in part, love among the aristocracy from love below stairs" (McKeon *Secret History* 527). While the line is indeed thin, in Part I, it is also uncrossable—as long as it is grounded in the body, that is to say, in performance. The stability of the body in its aristocratic role gives meaning and fixity to language, which does not itself carry an intrinsic signifier of status.

In contrast, the bed-trick in Part II relies on the idea that perhaps bodies

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[51] Fleeing from Silvia's bedchamber disguised in Melinda's clothes, Philander is accosted by Count Beralti in the garden, who mistakes him for the maid and "clapt fifty Guinnies in a Purse into one hand, and something that shall be nameless into the other, presents that had both been worth *Melinda's* acceptance" (61).

themselves do not actually have the status stability implied in Part I. The bed-trick, instigated by a series of counterfeit letters written by Brilljard masquerading as Octavio to Silvia, is a complex web of deceit involving letters (real and fake), counterfeit bodies, and mistaken identity. It is enabled by a letter of Philander's that Octavio has and Silvia wants. Brilljard, posing as Octavio, convinces Silvia to agree to an exchange—her body for Philander's letter. However, unbeknownst to Brilljard, Antonett has convinced Silvia to agree, on the condition that Antonett, the maid, will be the one going to bed disguised as Silvia. To further complicate matters, Octavio witnesses Brilljard being let in by the garden door (though he does not recognize him) and so comes to believe that Silvia is "the most Jilting of her Sex" (213), playing the whore with others while keeping him at arm's length with her coquetry, until finally the entire deceit is discovered days later.

Whether the stand-in of the maid for the mistress would have actually worked, we can never be sure. Brilljard, disguised as Octavio, falls ill due to a philter he has taken to ensure his potency and is unable to remain with Antonett for he is "taken with intollerable gripes and pains [. . .] insomuch as he was not able to lie in the bed" (216). Brilljard's premature exit causes Silvia to question the ability of Antonett's body to pass for her own and fear that Octavio has "made some discovery of the cheat" (217). This leads her to make her own test of her maid's body in a scene filled with "autoeroticism, twinship, and homoeroticism" in which "Sylvia also identifies with the male as she has her way with her maid" (Goldberg 71-72). Silvia "imbrac'd her, she kiss'd her bosom, and found her touches soft, her breath and Bosom sweet as anything in Nature cou'd be" (224). Thus she concludes that the maid's body easily becomes the mistress's when dressed in her fine bed-clothes. The implication is that status, while comically evident in

Brilljard's body's being punished for his presumption towards his mistress, is not embodied in the female. Silvia concludes that there is nothing in Antonett's body, when she is dressed and perfumed in Silvia's manner, that reveals her lowly status, the implication being that there is nothing in Silvia's body that ensures her aristocratic position. A female body, by Part II of Behn's novel, is like the language of the letter in Part I—without intrinsic status.

It is Silvia's ability to manipulate the significatory power of her body with regards to status and gender that keeps her from becoming merely Philander's counterpart; she is more that just a female rake because she can be male or female, whore, lady, or self-interested (in some senses masculine) woman at any given moment. Where Philander is and always will be a lord and is unapologetically always a rake, Silvia will never be what she was pages before. Her ability to stay outside defined roles is illuminated in her decision, in Part III, to give Brilljard access to her body. Though he is described as gaining "the kind of Authority of a Husband" (373), the description is somewhat disingenuous. Silvia, in effect, trades her body for his silence and his continued support and assistance in her amours. Her submission does not actually give him control; rather, it strategically allows her to maintain her ascendancy over him and, as the narrator reveals, Silvia deems it necessary because he knows too much: "she found too late she had discovered too much to him, to keep him at the Distance of a Servant, and that she had no other way to attach him eternally to her Interest, but by this means" (373). As we have seen, knowledge of Silvia is the one element that can be used to control her movement—she must not be weighed down by history.

By sleeping with Brilljard, Silvia binds him to her service through her body, but

she does not grant him any rights over her. She is still able to bar him from her presence whenever she desires, as demonstrated during the beginning of her affair with Alonzo when she is described as "not suffering even her Domesticks to approach her" (422). In effect by playing Brilljard's whore, Silvia remains his mistress (in the status sense of the term) and never becomes his wife, in part because she still believes him "so infinitely below her" (373). Like the role of mother, wife is a position that Silvia never occupies in the novel. Even her marriage of convenience to Brilljard is undermined near the beginning of Part III when it is revealed that he "was already privately married to a Gentlewoman, by whom he had two Children" (277 font reversed). Silvia escapes the roles society defines for women through her ability to move smoothly between and through them, never being pinned in one place for long. This ability is predicated on her economic freedom which, in turn, is based on her capacity to turn her body into a saleable commodity—a skill she learns, at least in part, from her servant, Antonett.

McKeon argues that the amours of the servants, Brilljard and Antonett, constitute a "'low' reenactment" of "the central 'private' triangle of Philander, Silvia, and Octavio" which "itself assumes the 'public' stature of a 'high' plot" in comparison (*Secret History* 524). The influence of the low on the high, however, is not limited to this effect. The servants in *Love-Letters*, in particular Antonett but also to a lesser degree Brilljard and Silvia's page, provide Silvia with knowledge of and access to "a larger social and financial program, one that is not governed by male aristocratic privilege" (Conway 12). It is Antonett who first "transforms Philander's betrayal of his lover into an opportunity for her mistress' economic advancement" (Conway 12). Comparing a lover to a gamester, Antonett links the exchange of love or desire to that of money, claiming "the young and

fair find Credit every where." She further argues "that love and int'rest always do best together, as two most excellent ingredients in that rare Art of preserving of Beauty" (186 font reversed). While Silvia is not quite ready to give up her despair over Philander's coldness at this point, Antonett's influence on her mistress' character grows as Part II progresses. It is she who convinces Silvia to engage in the bed-trick and who, with her continual praise and affection for him, enables the growth of Silvia's regard for Octavio. Thus, the servants provide the key link for Silvia's ability to escape the fate of the fallen aristocratic woman by teaching her the benefits of self-interest and the potential value of her body.

Some critics have read Silvia's adoption of a self-interested, economic view of her body as wholly negative, but that reading is too heavily influenced by the contemporary biases of a post-Marx society concerned with the alienating and potentially destructive powers of the marketplace.[52] We must keep in mind that Behn is writing before the full emergence of the market, before the articulation and rise of capitalism and a money-based economy. And while she is suspicious of the "commercial classes and the parliamentary Whigs who, she felt, put a price on everything" (Todd *Sign* 72), the presentation of Silvia's adoption of the principles of self-interest is far too ambiguous to be dismissed as wholly negative.

Throughout Part III the narrator displays a range of attitudes towards her heroine. At times she is clearly negative in her descriptions, calling Silvia

> Imperious and Proud, even to Insolence; Vain and Conceited even to Folly

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[52] For example, Donald R. Wehrs writes, "Behn represents Sylvia's transformation from a soul into a commodity as a diminishment that includes the dissolution of gender identity. To succeed as a sexual commodity, Sylvia must, paradoxically, lose her identity as a woman" (472).

> [. . .] Amorously inclin'd and indiscreet in the Management of her Amours, and constant rather from Pride and Shame than Inclination; fond of catching at every trifling Conquest, and lov'd the Triumph tho' she hated the Slave. (257-58)

Yet, she also displays an archness at times that seems to reveal admiration for Silvia despite also pointing out her weaknesses: "[Octavio] presented her with Jewels and other Rareties of great Value, and omitted nothing that might oblige an Avaritious designing Woman, if *Silvia* had been such" (278). There are also times when the narrator explicitly excuses her heroine's weaknesses as understandable—necessary even—given the double-standard of her society. For example, when Silvia rails at Philander's dissembling in a letter to her, the narrator comments:

> This she spoke without reminding that this most contemptible Quality she herself was equally guilty of, tho' infinitely more excusable in her Sex, there being a thousand little Actions of their Lives liable to Censure and Reproach, which they would willingly excuse and colour over with little Falsities; but in a Man, whose most inconstant Actions pass oftentimes for innocent Gallantries, and to whom 'tis no Infamy to own a thousand Amours, but rather a Glory to his Fame and Merit: I say, in him (whom Custom has favoured with an Allowance to commit any Vice and boast it) 'tis not so brave. (312)

Thus, to read Silvia in the end as purely negative, as a common whore, ignores significant aspects of the narrative. In this respect, McKeon's description of self-interest which suggests "a historical context of ambivalence regarding the category" (*Secret History*

537) provides a way to understand the narrator's seemingly contradictory treatment of her heroine. He claims, "The pursuit of one's own self-interest, traditionally proscribed for men as well as women, is gradually being reconceived at this time as, properly understood, not negative at all but a natural norm of human behavior" (*Secret History* 537).

McKeon's discussion also provides a way of linking the two sections of my own argument by gendering self-interest masculine: "This is, of course, first of all a male norm" (*Secret History* 537). In other words, the mercenary use of her own body that should imply a loss of status for Silvia is actually enabled by her ability to access the masculine role, and in the process escape the loss of status that her actions would precipitate for an average woman. Thus, gender-role fluidity enables and partially creates Silvia's ambivalent status; it is this which allows her to maintain a social position somewhere between the accepted status categories of high/low, lady/whore. The inter-dependence of these categories is encapsulated in the roles Silvia adopts throughout her seduction of Alonzo. Beginning as a youth, Silvia moves through the role of unknown beauty (and assumed whore)[53] to the mysterious and aristocratic Madame De— who is the talk of Brussells and who, somewhat comically, manages to ensnare Philander's affection through word of mouth alone: "*Philander*, now grown the most Amorous and Gallant in the World, grew passionately in love with the very description of her, not imagining it had been *Silvia*, because of her Equipage" (415). She follows this with the masked Lady who intrigues Alonzo with her figure and carriage, "her Equipage [. . .] not

[53] While Silvia is disguised as Bellumere, Alonzo tells her of a mysterious woman who, he learns, "belonged to a young Noble Man, who has since taken Orders" (393 font reversed). Her realization that he is referring to herself affirms her belief that she can successfully seduce him, and furthermore, keep him, a feat no woman had yet to achieve.

being by her, he did not imagine this fine Lady to be her he saw on the *Toure* last Night" (417). Finally, Silvia returns to her youth disguise coming full-circle to fully ensnare Alonzo with a look "which so resembled what he had seen the day before in another Garb on the *Toure*" and a voice " being absolutely the same that had charmed him that Day in the Park" (420). Combining the youth, the whore, the unknown beauty, and the masked Lady, Silvia, in one penultimate seduction, displays for the reader the secrets of her power and success.

The potential embodiment of both genders and all status roles allows Behn's heroine freedom from being wholly defined by any of them. And this freedom, this potential for embodiment rests solely on the mutable conception of the deterritorialized body as it has been presented throughout the text. It is only outside her society, away from her family and divorced from her own history that Silvia can enjoy the control she finally attains through her mastery of gender roles and economic transactions. Furthermore, as Behn's portrayal of Silvia in contrast to the other characters has shown again and again, the truly deterritorialized body is female.[54]

Behn is writing in an interstitial space of identity. Her focus on female identity is not solely due to her own female authorship but also to the unique place that the female occupied in this transitional period. While, as McKeon has argued in his essay

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[54] It is no accident that Octavio's renunciation of the world is coincident with his disappearance from the plot. The deterritorialized male body does not embody all identities, like the female, but rather embodies nothing and is thus unrepresentable. As Roland Barthes represents the lover who has chosen the "*non-will-to-possess* [. . . the] reversed substitute for suicide" (232), we can also represent Octavio, after his choice to give up Silvia and with her, society: "For the notion of the N.W.P. to be able to break with the system of the Image-repertoire, [he] must manage (by the determination of what obscure exhaustion?) to let [him]self drop somewhere outside of language, into the inert [. . .]" (233). The male body does not add to its identities through exile; it retreats into silence.

"Historicizing Patriarchy," the categories of status, class, sex, and gender were in a process of transition in the late seventeenth century, the changes were uneven and inflected by the intersections of the different categories. In her writing, Behn negotiates a time when male identity is still firmly attached to status, which is a biological and thus embodied category, whereas female identity has begun to be separated out from the male (and thus from status) but has not yet been collapsed into sexual difference as a biological category. This view of the late seventeenth century as a liminal period of female identity is consistent with the argument that it was from a redefined female gender and sexual identity that the modern conception of the masculine was born, in that the fluidity of the female gender allowed for its solidification into a biological grounding in sex, which then provided the ground for a new conception of the male in opposition to the newly stable female identity.[55] Writing during the very beginnings of the movement towards the modern view of a biologically-grounded identity based on the opposition between the sexes, Behn is in a unique place to experiment with female gender fluidity, as exemplified throughout her writing but most explicitly and fully in Silvia, through whom Behn experiments with the absolute limits of mutable female identity and its complex interactions with other categories such as masculinity, status, class (signalled by the pursuit of self-interest and a dependence on money), and the physical body.

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[55] For the relationship between the emergent gender/sex identities, see McKeon's "Historicizing Patriarchy" where he writes, "from the interstices of these two gender types, the feminine and the effeminate, would emerge the modern category of the masculine" (310) and Nancy Armstrong who, documenting the rise of domestic fiction throughout the eighteenth century, claims that "the female was the figure, above all else, on whom depended the outcome of the struggle among competing ideologies" and furthermore "that the modern individual was first and foremost a woman" (5, 8).

Coda: The Body Without Sensation: or, What About Pleasure?

The most troubling implication of the separation between body and identity that I have been arguing for is that it may leave no room for pleasure. While the function of pleasure in Behn's works certainly deserves a study of its own, I would like to use these final pages to consider what such a study might look like and what it may take into account if it were to follow on my own work.

Considering Behn's reputation, in her own time and well into the eighteenth century, as primarily a poetess of love, one might expect a more prominent role for pleasure in a study which focuses on Behn's representation of the physical body.[56] The reading of the first bed-trick in *The Luckey Chance* is merely one instance of a noticeable silence on the question of pleasure. *Love-Letters* is full of these silences in that Silvia is portrayed as acting out of many different motives but never explicitly for her own physical gratification. In both works there is an elision of physical enjoyment; we get no sense of the pleasure that Julia may have derived from the first (and even the second) bed-trick or the sensual enjoyment that Silvia, one would expect, must have experienced

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[56] Todd cites a commendatory poem written by Charles Cotton for Behn's 1686 collection, *Le Montre*, as representative of the angle taken by Behn's "beleaguered defenders":

> But when you write of Love, *Astraea* then
> Love dips his Arrows, where you wet your Pen:
> Such charming Lines did never Paper grace,
> Soft as your Sex, and smooth as Beauty's Face (qtd. in Todd *Critical* 14)

Thomas Creech is even more explicit in his poem about Behn's *The Voyage to the Island of Love*:

> Each languishes for thy *Aminta's* Charms,
> Sighs for thy fancied raptures in her Armes. . . .
> In the same Trance with the young pair we lie,
> And in their amorous Ecstasies we die. (qtd. in Todd *Critical* 13)

from her numerous conquests. Thus, my primary reason for not taking pleasure into account is its absence from these works, an absence that itself bears investigation

One possible way into these questions is my sense that in much of Behn's writing, including the works in question, it is not so much pleasure that is at stake but rather a freedom from frustration (both romantic and physical). In truth, more often than not, Behn is a poet of frustrated desire, not pleasure. This frustration is apparent in Julia when Gayman fails to recognise her; it also plays a key role in Part I of *Love-Letters* when Philander (like the hero of "The Disappointment") proves impotent in his first attempted seduction of Silvia. One cannot help but speculate on a potential link between Behn's interest in frustration and her almost antagonistic relationship with desire as it is portrayed in poems like "On Desire," where she describes desire as "the weekness [sic] of my sex" (114), and "Song. Love Arm'd," in which she writes: "But 'twas from mine, he took desire, / Enough to undo the Amorous World" (7-8). Approached as something uncontrollable and usually external to her self and body, desire, in Behn's writing, is often dangerous for both the female speakers in her poems and the heroines of her fiction.[57]

Though pleasure and desire are certainly distinct, in Behn's writing they are linked together through frustration, a concept that links the corporeal with the

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[57] As the verses quoted in the previous note attest, Behn's reputation as a love poet had much to do with her ability to describe states of arousal, a talent that is very prominently on display in the first part of *Love-Letters*. However, Behn's poetry often leaves her aroused lovers unfulfilled or focuses on the unrequited desire of her speaker. While there is certainly as aspect of pleasure to desire itself, it is a disembodied, solitary pleasure, which needs to be separated from the embodied pleasure of sexual fulfilment. For examples see "The Disappointment," "Verses design'd by Mrs. A Behn, to be sent to a fair lady, that desir'd she would absent herself, to cure her Love. Left unfinish'd," and "Love-Letters."

psychological. In fact, the seeming unimportance of her heroines' pleasure in a number of Behn's works could be fruitfully investigated by questioning the ways that female desire and frustration of that desire may fix or hold a woman in a particular gender position with relation to a man. Such an inquiry would also need to take into account Behn's poems that express female-oriented desire in order to understand the ways that the presentation of desire may be modified by sex. Assessing the interactions between pleasure, frustration, desire, gender, and sex, is one of many possible paths leading out of this thesis, and I believe it would be a particularly fruitful one.

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