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**The Inconstant "I"**  
**and the Poetics of Seventeenth-Century Libertine Lyrics**

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December 1996

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

The dissertation argues that libertine first-person lyrics of seventeenth-century England reveal a coherent literary strategy in formal, thematic, and ideological terms. My focus is the libertine poems of Donne, Suckling, Carew, Lovelace, and Rochester. I situate the lyrics in a period of historical change, an age of epistemological and ontological questioning. Libertine lyrics concern inconstancy on various levels, from the sexual to the ontological, and they explore the problems of freedom, human nature, identity, and individualism. I argue that the libertine's inconstant selfhood is a creative "solution" to a historical dilemma. This conception of inconstant selfhood is also a response to courtly prescriptions of the behavior of poets and courtiers, a way of claiming an authoritative voice and individualistic freedom. My examination of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics shows that, as part of a transitional age, the poems manifest a contradictory character and they reveal an ideological inconsistency. However, in the final analysis, the imaginative answer to the period's problem of mutability and displacement that libertine lyrics offer turns out to be unsatisfactory. In tracing the development of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics, I suggest that the poems constitute an experimental and transitional development in the lyric tradition of male confessional desire.

## Résumé

Cette thèse tend à démontrer que les poèmes lyriques libertins du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle anglais, rédigés à la première personne, révèlent une stratégie littéraire cohérente en termes formels, thématiques et idéologiques. Je m'intéresse tout particulièrement aux poèmes courtisans de Donne, Suckling, Carew, Lovelace et Rochester que je replace dans un contexte de changement historique, marqué par une remise en question ontologique et épistémologique. Les poèmes lyriques libertins s'intéressent à l'inconstance, qu'elle soit sexuelle ou ontologique, et s'interrogent sur la liberté, la nature humaine, l'identité et l'individualisme. L'identité inconstante du libertin constitue à mes yeux une "solution" créatrice à un dilemme historique. Cette conception de l'identité inconstante est également une réponse aux préceptes auliques qui dictent le comportement des poètes et des courtisans, une manière de revendiquer une certaine autorité et la liberté individuelle. L'étude que je fais des poèmes lyriques libertins du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle permet de démontrer que, dans une ère de transition, les poèmes affichent un caractère contradictoire et révèlent une certaine inconsistance idéologique. En dernière analyse, il apparaît que la réponse imaginative au problème de mutabilité et de déplacement propre à l'époque, fournie par ces poèmes, se révèle insatisfaisante. En retraçant l'évolution des poèmes lyriques libertins du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, j'émets l'hypothèse que ces poèmes constituent un développement expérimental et transitoire dans la tradition lyrique du désir confessionnel masculin.

For my parents

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## Acknowledgements


First and foremost, I want to thank my dissertation supervisor, Professor Leanore Lieblein. I am grateful for her conscientious and gentle direction, as well as her steady encouragement and support of my dissertation. I have learned much from her astute comments and focused reasoning. I also want to thank Professor Maggie Kilgour for her careful reading of the dissertation, which greatly benefited from her penetrating insight and helpful recommendations. Professor David Hensley has been invaluable in my revision of the chapter on Rochester and in my understanding of the Restoration period, first as a generous supervisor of my Ph.D. project on Restoration drama and later as a meticulous reader of the dissertation chapter. My thanks also for his warm support of my scholarly and professional development.

For their academic and copy-editing advice, my gratitude goes to Nancy Johnson, Goldie Morgentaler, and Eleana Yun. All friends were important in helping me to complete the dissertation in good spirits; their words of encouragement and sympathetic listening were much appreciated. My family provided me with the necessary prods, good cheer, and loving reassurance. I want to dedicate the dissertation to my parents, who have given me generous and unwavering support of my academic pursuits.



## Introduction

### **Libertinism as a Literary Mode**



What is libertinism? The denotation--freedom of thought and living-- covers a range of values and practices, such as the religious defiance of antinomian sects in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and Italy, the philosophic radicalism of seventeenth-century *libertins* like Pierre Gassendi and Francois la Mothe le Vayer, and the depictions of sexual pathology in the writings of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos and the Marquis de Sade. But in England, the popular meaning of libertinism as sexual freedom prevailed from the Elizabethan reign.<sup>1</sup> It gained prominence as a particular social lifestyle in Restoration England with the rake-hells at Charles II's court and the theater's fascination with libertines. Dale Underwood shows that on the conceptual level libertinism draws from different philosophical systems, including Epicureanism, skepticism, and primitive naturalism. Its liberal and inconsistent adoption of various ideas, however, never developed into a coherent school of thought.<sup>2</sup> In writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the eclectic and popular understanding of libertinism reveals itself in the variety of justifications for sexual freedom. But one aspect remains consistent in these depictions and that is the full awareness of the subversive character of libertinism. Gabriel Harvey,

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in *Pierces Supererogation* (1593), describes libertines as those "who knowe no reason but appetite, no Lawe but Luste"; Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656) defines libertinism as licentiousness and epicureanism--"nothing else but a false liberty of belief and manners";<sup>3</sup> and Thomas Shadwell dramatizes the rake as a reckless, egoistical, and amoral murderer in his play *The Libertine* (1675). Unrestrained sexuality--illicit and self-justified--signalled chaos and misrule when it violated the Christian-humanist social order founded upon the tenets of restraint, virtue, and duty.<sup>4</sup> Libertinism, either in thought or practice, was intrinsically radical because it always defined itself in opposition to the prevailing value system.

English literary studies on libertinism typically focus on Restoration England and especially on the rake figure in the comedy of manners. Analyses of libertinism in poetry before the Restoration typically confine themselves to a writer's thematic treatment. But libertinism is more than a vision of sexual freedom in seventeenth-century poems. In first-person lyrics, it constitutes a significant development in the lyric tradition of male desire and subjectivity. The lyric speaker of poetic love has changed from the feudal courtly subject and the introspective Petrarchan suitor to the rebellious anti-Petrarchan lover and the inconstant libertine. As part of the lyric confession of male desire, libertinism in these lyrics reveals a transgressive character. It is not contained by a larger narrative, such as Spenser's depiction and final negation of the

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seductive Bower of Bliss in *The Faerie Queene*. Eschewing the rhetoric of love that is adopted even in Elizabethan erotic epyllia and pornographic verses like Nashe's "Choice of Valentines," the libertine poet-lover stresses the inconstancy of human affections and relationships. Libertine lyrics do share the titillating intent and outrageousness of Elizabethan erotic poems, but the arbitrary character of libertine sexuality introduces a new radicalism to the poetic characterization of male desire and subjectivity.

Libertine lyrics first developed in late sixteenth-century England with anti-Petrarchism and alongside the new interest in Ovidian eroticism. Alastair Fowler observes that generic change basically involves alterations and/or additions to the elements that make up a genre. One common generic development stems from "antitheses to existing genres."<sup>5</sup> Libertinism, Ovidian eroticism, and anti-Petrarchism all present alternative paradigms of desire to Petrarchan and Neoplatonic formulations of love; in fact, they emerged and presented themselves in counter-reaction to the vogue of Petrarchan love convention. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth remark on "libertinism's successful insurgency against Petrarchism during the seventeenth century";<sup>6</sup> they are amongst the many critics who perceive the opposition between libertinism and Petrarchism. Libertine lyrics replace mystified love with concrete sexual descriptions, ideals of honor and virtue with those of sexual plenty and freedom, and glorification of the transcendent with that of the



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body. The Petrarchan love rhetoric is parodied or eroticized for libertine ends, and often the poetic language of courtliness gives way to a blunt directness. Later chapters will demonstrate how libertine lyrics subvert the principles and ideology of Neoplatonism, and in the process they implicitly contest the political rhetoric of absolutist ideology, idealized nationality, and the royal paradigm of spiritualized and chaste desires. But, as Donald L. Guss maintains, libertine lyrics do not constitute a systematic attack on Petrarchan codes like anti-Petrarchism. He stresses that libertinism is "*un-Petrarchan*, not *anti-Petrarchan*."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, with its ethics of sensualism, naturalistic argument, and anti-authoritarian stance, libertinism goes beyond anti-Petrarchism's reactionary response to an established convention: it shapes a self-consciously transgressive literary practice of extreme individualism.

As a literary mode, libertinism is hardly a strict and limiting code. In many ways, it manifests the same unformulated and flexible character that Malcolm Evans perceives in English Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, I contend that libertine first-person lyrics of seventeenth-century England reveal a coherent literary strategy in formal, thematic, and ideological terms. I situate the poems in a period of historical change, an age of epistemological and ontological questioning. Libertine lyrics concern inconstancy on various levels, from the sexual to the ontological, and they explore the problems of freedom, human nature, identity, and individualism. I

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argue that the libertine's inconstant selfhood is a creative "solution" to a historical dilemma.<sup>9</sup> This inconstant selfhood is also a response to courtly prescriptions of the behavior of poets and courtiers, a way of claiming an authoritative voice and individualistic freedom. My examination of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics shows that, as part of a transitional age, the poems reveal a contradictory character and an ideological inconsistency. In the end the imaginative answer to the period's problem of mutability and displacement that libertine lyrics offer turns out to be unsatisfactory.

My focus is the libertine lyrics of Donne, Suckling, Carew, Lovelace, and Rochester.<sup>10</sup> These poets wrote more than the occasional libertine lyric; Donne is the first English poet to be interested in the voice and subjectivity of the libertine poet-lover and Rochester is the last important lyricist to focus on libertinism. My study of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics adds a new dimension to current readings of these poets' works. It explains the rhetorical dimension of desire and sensuality in Donne's erotic lyrics and illustrates that libertinism is fundamentally a means of self-authorization through rhetorical performance. The contradictory character of Cavalier writings--patriotic and Platonic versus anti-courtly and libertine--can be understood in terms of the dualistic court culture of chivalric royalism and Cavalier licentiousness at the Caroline court. Suckling, Carew, and Lovelace show that the libertine's self-presentation is a clever manipulation of these two different aspects of court

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culture. For Rochester's poetry, I contend that the poet's portrayal of an exhibitionistic but degenerated self must be contextualized in the period's materialistic discourses and the diminished social status and function of the Restoration court aristocracy.

In the first chapter, I explore the provocative character of libertine lyrics, how the textual production and circulation of the poems grant special license for poetic subversion and even contribute to the character of libertine rhetoric. Libertine poems of seventeenth-century England present a new lyric "I," a unique individuality founded upon the authority of the speaker's desires and will. This selfhood, as the chapter demonstrates, is an imaginative solution to the problem of mutability. I contextualize the rhetoric of self-empowerment within a historical period of heightened displacement, particularly for the court aristocracy. The displacement of the poet--social, political, and ontological--is finally what feeds the libertine poetics of change.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four discuss the libertine lyrics of Donne, the Cavalier poets, and Rochester respectively. Where Chapter One addresses the larger issues in libertine poetics, these chapters consider the poets' poetic strategies and their specific social and political circumstances. Donne is the first English poet to be fascinated with libertinism, and he creates an aggressive lyric poet-lover that highlights the outrageous and radical character of libertinism. Suckling, Carew, and Lovelace develop Donne's libertine strategies

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of defiant individualism, but as courtiers reacting to the cult of Platonic love at the Caroline court, they accentuate the anti-Platonic thrust of libertine rhetoric. Rochester implodes the self-definition of the libertine and exposes various problems of libertinism. He brings libertine poetics to a new height, yet at the same time he alters the lyric mode almost beyond recognition with his inclusion of satirical and burlesque elements. In tracing the development of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics, I suggest that the poems constitute an experimental and transitional development in the lyric tradition of male confessional desire.

## Notes to Introduction

1. See Dale Underwood, *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners*, Yale Studies in English 135 (New Haven: Yale University, 1957), 11; and James G. Turner, "The Properties of Libertinism," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9.3 (1985): 79. Underwood and Turner discuss the complicated history of libertinism which reveals inconsistencies in defining the term.
2. On the associated philosophical systems, see Underwood, 14-30.
3. Harvey, qtd. in OED; and Blount, qtd. in Saad El-Gabalawy, "The Trend of Naturalism in Libertine Poetry of the Later English Renaissance," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Reforme* 12.1 (1988): 38.
4. See Underwood, 8-9.
5. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 170.
6. Introduction, *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. Summers and Peabworth (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 3.
7. Guss, *John Donne, Petrarchist: Italianate Conceits and Love Theory in The Songs and Sonets* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 137-38.
8. See Evans's essay, "'In Love with Curious Words': Signification and Sexuality in English Petrarchism," *Jacobean Poetry and Prose: Rhetoric, Representation and the Popular Imagination*, ed. Clive Bloom (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 119-50. He discusses the changes and various formulations of English Petrarchism (and in the process, he also touches on anti-Petrarchism).
9. In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), Fredric Jameson proposes that we "grasp the text as a socially symbolic act, as the ideological--but formal and immanent--response to a historical dilemma" (138-39). Michael McKeon also points to the "explanatory and problem-'solving' capacities" of the text, but in relation to the development of a generic form. *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 20.
10. In my study of libertine lyrics, I use the term *lyric* loosely to refer to first-person (love) elegies, sonnets, and songs. I also look at a couple of Rochester's pastoral dialogues and satires to examine how he mixes generic modes in his modification of the libertine lyric.

## Chapter 1

# **The Inconstant Self and the Historical Context of Libertine Lyrics**

Before examining the libertine lyrics of Donne, Suckling, Carew, Lovelace, and Rochester, I want to introduce their historical background, particularly the period's conception of change and their personal experience of instability as court aristocrats. This background makes sense of the poets' preoccupation with mutability and their attraction to libertinism. Beyond advocating sexual and emotional inconstancy, seventeenth-century libertine lyrics promote the practice of change on the most rudimentary level of human nature, identity, and selfhood. The chapter lays down the general groundwork of libertine poetics by delineating the characteristics and problems of the libertine's inconstant self.

To the libertine, self-identity becomes an art that he manipulates to serve his purpose. He transforms flux into an advantageous opportunity to assert his dominance, and he focuses on the present to produce a succession of enjoyable moments that keeps death at bay. In early modern England, the idea of constancy is inseparable from the hierarchical system of honor as fealty and service; it is also part of the ontological conception of Platonic-Augustinian

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selfhood. As will be shown later, Petrarchanism and Platonic love discourse are intricately related to courtly definitions of chivalric honor, nobility, service to the state. The libertine's inconstancy and his anti-Petrarchan rhetoric would then imply duplicity, atheism, and rebelliousness. This chapter explores how the pursuit of sexual variety translates itself into the rhetorical fashioning of an anti-authoritarian and aggressive libertine "I." For the libertine speaker, as well as the poets and their supportive audience, libertinism is an assertion of individual freedom and power. In the context of the poets' courtly milieu and the larger background of historical change, the libertine "I" points to a meditation on the problem of possessing an authoritative sense of self in the face of instability.

### **Changes in Seventeenth-Century Aristocracy**

The courtly and aristocratic character of libertine lyrics and the poets' concern with mutability must be contextualized in terms of changes in the economic and social composition of seventeenth-century aristocracy. According to Peter Laslett, pre-industrial England was a "one class society," where only

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the tier of gentility could exert the "collective power" of a class. Lawrence Stone also notes that the Tudor and Stuart society was divided between gentlemen and citizens.<sup>1</sup> But the social category of gentlemen was large and fluid, and it included both peerage and gentry. It is this contemporary conception of gentility that I adopt in my usage of "aristocracy" when I examine the libertine poets.<sup>2</sup> The class of gentility at that time comprises "major" and "lesser" nobility, where the first consists of the peerage and the second of baronets, knights, esquires, and lesser gentlemen.<sup>3</sup> Except for Rochester, all the other poets studied here belonged to the *nobilitas minor*. The poets, like the libertine poet-lover, adopted the aristocratic sensibility and lifestyle of gentleman leisure. They saw themselves as part of the landed elite although not all of them inherited land, or enough of it, to acquire a lifetime of financial stability and freedom. Various factors--the lack of landed estate, money, the "right" birth or personality--detracted their status and influence in the social strata that they adopted. The poets experienced instability as courtiers and aristocrats, and their experience of displacement figures predominantly in the libertine lyrics.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the market economy completely altered feudal society. A handful of London merchants gained political influence when they became an important source of financial backing for the government.<sup>4</sup> New monied individuals from the middle class and the gentry



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disrupted the class linkage of wealth and land with birth and status in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> The landed elite grew in number to include the gentry, and there was unprecedented social mobility, especially at the lower ranks of the gentry.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, particularly between 1580 and 1620, many prominent families suffered significant reductions in their landed estate and real income, partly as a result of decreased crown grants, bad fiscal and estate management, overexpenditure, and financially unfavorable marriages.<sup>7</sup> Stone's detailed assessment shows that, from 1558 to 1641, the peerage lost its old political, economic, and social force in the face of a powerful state government, a market economy, and an increasingly wealthy and well-educated gentry.<sup>8</sup> Despite the restoration of the monarchy, the aristocracy's problems with social authority and estate maintenance persisted. The cost of the Civil War devastated numerous aristocratic families like the Lovelaces. To consolidate and safeguard the dwindling lands of aristocratic families, there was the strict settlement, a new legal strategy to prevent heirs from selling or dividing up the estate. Michael McKeon details the crisis of the Restoration aristocracy. He documents how the drastic reduction in male births during the late seventeenth century created problems in the perpetuation of blood lines based on primogeniture. Several families resorted to quick fixes such as estate bequests to distant male relatives and making sons-in-law adopt the endangered family name. McKeon reports that these artificial means to preserve

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patrilineage inevitably undermined the accepted valuation of social distinction based on birth. For example, *scandalum magnatum*, the law that defends peers from the slander of lower classes, reached a new height in the Restoration. McKeon concludes that there was "an increasingly defensive awareness that social hierarchy was under assault."<sup>9</sup> Only in the eighteenth-century when the aristocracy stabilized as a group did this perception of threat subside.<sup>10</sup>

These changes in seventeenth-century England resulted in the questioning of the hierarchical foundations of social order where birth determined social status. McKeon shows that there was an erosion of what he calls the "aristocratic ideology"--the equation of social worth with lineage--and that it culminated in the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> Evidence of this ideological shift can be seen in the debates on the meaning of patrilineal honor and state enforcements of social distinctions in early modern England, such as the sumptuary legislation and the herald's regulations of titles. Religion, humanism, and the education of lay society contributed to the re-examining of traditional conceptions of virtue and honor.<sup>12</sup> The liberal sale of titles under James I and Charles I is another factor in the devaluation of aristocratic status. The success of wealthy but otherwise undeserving individuals in obtaining "honor" clearly damaged the reputation of the crown and all titled families. From the 1590s onwards, the royal "fount of honor" and the court came to be associated with veniality, peculation, and power struggles. Charles I later attempted to salvage

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the aristocratic status by reducing the sale of titles, but his efforts were limited and much too late to make a significant difference.

In addition to the diminished social and economic standing of the aristocratic class, the aristocracy's transformation from *noblesse d'épée* to *noblesse de robe* turned the relative autonomy of the armed noble into the fawning dependence of the courtier. The disintegration of chivalric values started under the reign of Queen Elizabeth.<sup>13</sup> Peace times, particularly under the Stuarts, required a different role for the warrior, but this shift from the warrior to the man of letters was partly prompted by the increasing need to justify the aristocracy.<sup>14</sup> The focus on civic service was part of the humanist movement, but it also signalled the increased power of the state and a new nationalism. Political theorists and writers of courtly handbooks and manuals for gentlemen demanded that aristocrats reform and redefine themselves as cultivated and learned courtiers, but most of all as men who demonstrate their nobility in service to the state.<sup>15</sup> Mervyn James traces the changes in the period's formulation of honor, from loyalty to one's class and kin to one that centered on the crown.<sup>16</sup> Henry VIII initiated "a 'nationalization' of the honour system," such that the king was not only the fount of honor but of gentility itself. Later modifications in the forms of honor continued to be defined by and focused on the court. Arising from the Elizabethan courtly milieu of chivalric romance, Sidney's *Arcadia*, as James points out, introduces

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a "remodelled chivalry" that combines romantic chivalry and Protestant humanism. In the court of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, where the cult of Platonic love dominated, the concept of honor incorporates state service in Neoplatonic terms.<sup>17</sup>

Seventeenth-century libertine poetics of rebelliousness and inconstancy can be seen as a creative response to the changes in the courtier's role and in the status and economic power of seventeenth-century peerage and gentry. The new need to justify one's class privileges and the courtiers' frustration with the court system generated some defiant resistance to the new role demanded of the court aristocracy. This rejection of civic duty might not be publicly declared, but it was manifested in the private discourse and leisure writings of aristocrats and courtiers. For example, Viscount Conway boldly asserted leisure as the purpose of aristocratic life, in very much the same way that the libertine poet-lover would insist on his pleasures: "We eat and drink and rise up to play and this is to live like a gentleman; for what is a gentleman but his pleasure?"<sup>18</sup> Aristocrats like Conway claimed the old autocratic pleasures of the elite. In their transformation of nature's law of change into a justification for self-serving gratification, libertine lyrics likewise claim the old privileges of aristocratic life, while dodging the entire issue of the elite's civic responsibility.

The aristocratic poets studied here reveal a similar kind of displacement, which drives the need for self-fashioning that Stephen Greenblatt attributes to

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middle-class writers of sixteenth-century England.<sup>19</sup> Despite the upper-class background of these amateur poets, the changing social order and their personal experience of social and economic mobility reduced whatever assurance and stability that could be derived from their class identity. The poets were primarily from the gentry: their fathers were professional men--soldiers, lawyers, and court officials. There was a greater need to assert and maintain a certain class identity for gentry families involved with trade, especially those that claimed dubious connections to old aristocratic families as was the case of Donne's father.<sup>20</sup> At the Inns of Court, Donne was fully aware of his social inferiority as an ironmonger's son in comparison to the sons of country gentry. The families of Rochester, Carew, and Suckling, however, managed to move up the social ladder. Rochester's grandfather rose from the gentry to become an Irish peer, and his son, Henry Wilmot, was the first Earl of Rochester as a result of his loyal service to the exiled king. Suckling and his father, as well as Carew's father, all took advantage of the generous distribution of new titles under Charles I and II to join the growing ranks of the knighted in Stuart England. But new wealth and titles did not guarantee acceptance amongst the upper and older aristocratic families, especially given the devaluation of honor at that time. Sir Henry Willoughby explained to the king that one of his reasons for rejecting Suckling as a son-in-law was because the knighted and wealthy heir of Sir Suckling was "noe gentleman by birth, otherwise than by being

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sonne to one that from a most obscure and lowe beginning who had the honour to be imployed in your Majesties service."<sup>21</sup> Rochester and Donne also faced similar rejections from the families of the women they courted and married. Donne's secret marriage to Anne More and the subsequent wrath of Sir George More point to his naiveté and social ambition, but also to the severe consequences of overstepping one's station in life.

As a group the libertine poets also demonstrated the economic ups and downs of the aristocracy. Sir Matthew, Carew's father, was a distinguished lawyer and master of Chancery. His upward social mobility, however, turned out to be short-lived, as his later financial adversity forced him to sell his lands and go into debt. His younger son Carew had to terminate his education at the Middle Temple and rely on the help of an influential kin for employment. Donne came from a prosperous family, but he soon dissipated his patrimony of about seven hundred pounds in his European travels. He was already in debt before he married Anne More, and the early years of his marriage saw him in dire financial straits. Both Donne and Carew faced the additional problem of trying to acquire patronage. The former was a celebrated wit at the Inns, but he recognized the difficulties of getting a position in the limited and corrupted court of the 1590s. He could not rely on the support and connections of kinsmen to rise up in the world since his father had died when he was around four and his Catholic family connections could only handicap him in a

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Protestant court. Carew likewise had to rely on his own ingenuity to seek preferment after offending his patron and relative, Lord Carleton.<sup>22</sup> Suckling was the only one in the group of poets considered here who inherited a vast landed estate. Before he came into his full patrimony, however, the improvident heir had already incurred enough gambling debts to prompt him to a persistent but unsuccessful courtship of the heiress Anne Willoughby. Even his huge inheritance could not secure him for life: Suckling squandered most of his estate before the Civil War. Rochester and Lovelace are the only ones in the group that appear to have had more class stability than the rest. The former was a peer and the latter came from a family that were landowners since 1368.

Nevertheless, there were other factors that diminish their social and political power at court. Rochester inherited a newly-created title that brought him no estate. His landed inheritance was meagre, and he was financially dependent on the court for a royal annuity that was always late in payment.<sup>23</sup> Pepys writes that heiress Elizabeth Malet's acceptance of Rochester's marriage proposal "is a great act of charity for he hath no estate." Without land and influential kinship ties, Rochester did not have the political influence of other peers at court.<sup>24</sup>

Like Rochester, Lovelace came from a military family: both his grandfather and father were professional soldiers. After the death of his father, Lovelace's widowed mother petitioned for royal aid in the education of her eldest son--a common recourse for aristocratic families with financial troubles.<sup>25</sup> At the

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death of his grandfather, Lovelace inherited the family's landed estate in Kent. The resulting financial security meant that he was not at the mercy of the court system of patronage as Carew was. But the turmoil of the Civil War completely overturned his life. He was twice imprisoned by Parliament, and he sold everything for the Royalist cause. Lovelace was believed to have died an impoverished man. Of all the poets discussed here, he was the one most affected by the Civil War, as the chapter on Cavalier poets will show.

The decapitation of Charles I upset the nation's social and political order. Many feared the nation would suffer divine retribution for the regicide. The chaos of war also corresponded to the period's belief in the world's decay. On the political level, the regicide demonstrated the diminished force of the monarch's 'divine' right and power. For the aristocrat and courtier, the war and the Interregnum devastated the landed reserves of the Royalist faction. Where Lovelace suffered the political and economic fate of the exiled Cavalier, Rochester experienced the displacement of the post-war aristocrat and courtier. The restoration of the monarchy did not bestow a new-found glory and authority upon the courtier, rather it saw his political and social powers lessened, as we shall see in Chapter Four. Christopher Hill observes that the Restoration courtier's flamboyant libertine lifestyle, such as Rochester's, reveals the "alienated aristocrat."<sup>26</sup> The court wits' notorious hedonistic pursuits symbolically renounced the influence of strict Puritan rule and celebrated the



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restored monarchy. But at the same time, this lifestyle suggests the courtiers' frustration with Charles II's reign, which did not bring back the Golden Age to the nation as many had hoped.

Against this background of historical change, libertine poetics can be read as an ingenious response to the various dilemmas that confronted the seventeenth-century aristocrat and courtier. One of the major problems was clearly that of displacement. Libertine lyrics imaginatively transform the new social mobility of a market society into an opportunistic sexual and emotional flexibility. Anthony Low aligns libertinism or "free love" with the free market economy of shifting allegiances dictated by self-interest, mobility, and utility.<sup>27</sup> In feudal society, relationships were stable, hierarchical, and based on service and duty--all aspects encoded in Platonic love lyrics. Raymond Southall, in his book *Literature and the Rise of Capitalism*, notices that mercantile metaphors emerge in sixteenth-century love poems at the time when society became more oriented towards trade. Low illustrates that by the seventeenth century, agricultural reforms and the market economy started affirming the individualistic pursuit of profit and self-interest, and he shows that Carew's poetry manifests this new change.<sup>28</sup> McKeon also discusses how human appetites took on a positive value in the seventeenth century as a result of the dynamics and ideology of the marketplace. In an increasingly secular society, human passions quickly obtained a new validity as they became the cardinal

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factor in the valuation and exchange of commodities.<sup>29</sup> Libertine lyrics written before the Civil War obviously play with these new ideas. The chapter on the Cavalier poets demonstrates how their lyrics legitimize personal gratification and self-interest when they present pleasure as profit. Proposals of free and temporary liaisons assume the dynamics of a market negotiation and contract; in the process, the poet-lover acquires a new seduction rhetoric and a better bargaining position.

The libertine's extreme individualism claims a new authority within the changing market society. Capitalistic values were not inimical to aristocratic ideals. Both gentry and peerage embraced the economic changes; in fact many families invested and profited from mining ventures, joint-stock companies, and privateering activities.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, the aristocracy had assimilated many of the "capitalist" values of the so-called middle class. In addition, socializing between the upper class and the rich mercantile families was common in London. Younger sons and mere gentlemen often looked for wives amongst wealthy mercantile families. In "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," Donne portrays daughters of rich merchants as "Golden Mines, and furnish'd Treasure" for students at the Inns.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, whatever bourgeois values and social relations with rich trading families the aristocracy embraced, the upper classes always maintained their social elitism. For example, the students who looked for rich merchants' daughters to marry also

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manifested an "aggressive insistence on their gentility" according to Wilfrid R. Prest's study of the Inns of Court.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar way, the libertine in seventeenth-century lyrics incorporates market principles without sacrificing the elitism and privileges associated with the feudal hierarchy. What libertine lyrics take from the market model are those principles that fit into the libertine's ethos. The opportunistic poet-lover does not practice fair exchange--even when he presents a compelling argument for mutual benefits and reciprocal pleasures. Libertinism, in these poems, demands the elitism of aristocratic license without the constraints of fealty and obedience that are part of the aristocratic code. It also embraces the market's emphasis on consumption and profit, but not the principles of fairness and honesty. Thus in his wilful pursuit of pleasure, the libertine "I" cleverly straddles the old feudalistic world that is part of the aristocratic code and the new market society to his advantage.

### **The Problem of Mutability**

If the instability of social change is part of the backdrop to libertine

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lyrics, the changes in the intellectual climate of seventeenth century are equally important. The construction of libertine subjectivity must be situated in a period of ontological and epistemological questioning, where new conceptions of social order and human nature undermined the traditional understanding of self and social identity.<sup>33</sup> Christian humanism was challenged by secularism, scepticism, empiricism, and materialism in the seventeenth century. Hooker's "System of Universal Laws" might dominate early modern England, but this definition of "nature" was no longer a given. The ideal picture of primitive naturalism in libertine thought offered a playful and rebellious denial of the prevailing conception of nature, but it stood alongside other revisions of the established order, such as Montaigne's relativism, Hobbes's warring first state, and Descartes's mechanistic universe. At the same time astronomical and mathematical discoveries disrupted the Ptolemaic cosmic system. It is within this period of uncertainty and gradual decline of Christian humanism that libertine selfhood became an inviting ontological model for the seventeenth-century poet to explore, particularly since it captures displacement and uncertainty, as well as the desire for freedom and mastery. The double-edged nature of libertine selfhood in the lyrics, as I will demonstrate, is part and parcel of the transitional age of seventeenth century.

Libertine lyrics, which grapple with the dynamics of change, significantly started to appear in a period preoccupied with death and

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mutability. From 1570s onwards, there was a widespread belief in the deterioration of the world in England. Change, in the Christian framework, was equivalent to moral and physical degeneration as time was a consequence of the Fall.<sup>34</sup> To the Elizabethans, there were many momentous changes that signalled the end of the world, such as the wars in Europe, the supernova of 1572, the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 1583, and the famine and plague in the last decade of sixteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Victor Harris documents how this obsession with degeneration continued up to the 1630s, where all kinds of discourses from the religious to the scientific revealed this preoccupation with disintegration and chaos. The focus on mutability and decay peaked in the 1620s and 1630s, the period when Suckling and Carew wrote their libertine lyrics. During these two decades, Harris reports that "one writer after another ... recognizes a daily cumulative decay, a decay invariably caused by the Fall but ever increasing with man's actual sins and the inbred infection of nature."<sup>36</sup>

Given the contemporary understanding of change as decay, the mathematical and telescopic evidence for a heliocentric system appeared to prove the corruption of God's universe. Copernicus effectively took away the geocentric universe that was cardinal to the Elizabethan understanding of the "chain of being." To many, his mathematical hypothesis in *De Revolutionibus* (1543) cast earth off from its stable and privileged center of the universe so that it became "one of the other wandering stars."<sup>37</sup> Thomas Docherty points

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out that Copernicus's latin description "Errantium syderum" implies error--a "defect" in terms of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic paradigm of cosmic perfection and order.<sup>38</sup> A displaced earth would clearly dislodge the humanist subject from the focal point of God's creations and plans. What was once perceived as the immutable and hence perfect celestial realm proved to be as corruptible as the earth.<sup>39</sup> Galileo's telescopic discovery of spots on the sun and the moon was also seen as an attack on the pristine order of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system. Sir Thomas Browne commented that "When we look for corruption in the heavens, we finde they are but like the Earth... and the spots that wander about the Sun, with Phaeton's favour, would make clear conviction."<sup>40</sup> In this new cosmic order, nothing seemed to escape decay and change. Giordano Bruno sharpened Copernicus's image of a decentered earth by expanding on the Epicurean cosmology of an infinite universe with multiple worlds. Compared to the closed system of the Ptolemaic model that signalled perfection, order, and completion, this unfamiliar infinite universe suggested an eternal state of instability and displacement.

The poets that wrote libertine lyrics appear to be acquainted with all these new scientific discoveries. Donne's "The Sunne Rising," Lovelace's "To Chloe, Courting her for his Friend," and Rochester's "A Very Heroicall Epistle in Answer to Ephelia" suggest a heliocentric universe.<sup>41</sup> In "The first Anniversary," Donne specifically points out the devastating impact of the new

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sciences on seventeenth-century intellectual consciousness:

The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit  
Can well direct him where to looke for it.<sup>42</sup>

Carew's masque *Coelum Britannicum*, as Hilary Gatti shows in her article on the Stuart court masques, is a translation of parts of Bruno's *Spaccio della bestia trionfante*. It refers to the Copernican cosmology and Bruno's idea of an infinite universe.<sup>43</sup> Many seventeenth-century writers understood the significance of these new scientific discoveries. Some discussed its impact like Donne and Browne; others, like Jonson in his masque *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (1620), satirized the new cosmology.<sup>44</sup> There were also those who were ambivalent about it. Donne noted the tremendous impact of the "new philosophy" in "The First Anniversary," but the prose work which was written just a year earlier, *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), does not treat the Copernican doctrine seriously. Some of his later writings noticeably upheld the Ptolemaic system.<sup>45</sup> Whatever their opinion, the writers recognized the revolutionary impact of the new cosmology. After all, once the divine order was called into question, so was the humanist subject and the transcendental Augustinian-Platonic self.<sup>46</sup> The disintegration of the God-centered self and the resulting displacement suggest a consequent interest in the unstable self of the libertine. This radical selfhood of libertinism must have been provocative to the poets and their readers, regardless whether they personally accepted the

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new heliocentric universe like Carew, or just toyed with it like the law student Donne.

The belief in the world's corruption and the preoccupation with decay and mutability that dominated the first quarter of the seventeenth century ceased to be central to the social and intellectual consciousness of Restoration England. Achsah Guibbory notes that the shift could be related to a more positive interpretation of change, a perception which started as early as the late sixteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Bruno viewed change positively and Bacon proclaimed change as progress--an opportunity for the unlimited development of human potential. Galileo himself argued against the contemporary interpretation of the sunspots as signs of "corruption."<sup>48</sup> At first sight, libertine thought appears to be following this optimistic approach when it transforms nature's law of degeneration into the naturalistic tenet of change that liberates the pleasure principle. But in fact libertine lyrics do not draw upon the progressive and optimistic outlook of thinkers such as Bruno and Bacon. They look more toward the past than the future in their depictions of a Golden Age of sexuality. Their depictions of change are contradictory and double-edged because mutability is at once liberating and threatening, both the solution and the problem in the libertine's search for authentic and empowered selfhood.

Arguments of libertinism focus on human nature, particularly in the original state of nature. In Restoration England, Hobbes's *Leviathan* and the



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sciences projected a materialistic conception of the self, and those in the court circles were particularly influenced by this new intellectual trend. Charles II's court welcomed Hobbes, and several courtiers dabbled in scientific research. By the Restoration the full significance and impact of Copernicus's theory had been felt in England. Galileo had verified Copernicus's hypothesis with his telescope, and Kepler's three laws had refined seventeenth-century understanding of planetary movements around the sun. Louis I. Bredvold notes that the "new philosophy of motion," with its emphasis on empirical verification and mathematical deductions of reality, presented a materialistic approach to the world that implicitly undermined the established epistemological and ontological framework.<sup>49</sup> Philosophers of the day like Hobbes and Descartes typically saw the universe in terms of atomic matter in motion. Galileo's studies on motion depicted perpetual instability and contingency as the natural human condition, and Hobbes adapted these theories of motion when he emphasized that the body is in "constant mutation."

Libertinism was unmistakably linked to the new philosophy in Restoration England, as Bredvold observes. Robert Boyle must have articulated a commonly-held opinion when he associated libertinism with materialistic thought: "libertines own themselves to be so upon the account of the Epicurean, and other mechanical principles of philosophy," particularly those of Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus who "explicate things by matter and local

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motion."<sup>50</sup> This is not surprising since recent studies indicate that Epicurean materialism influenced the astronomers and mathematicians of that period.

William L. Hine believes that "the Epicurean tradition ... played a greater role in inspiring the Scientific Revolution than we have heretofore imagined."<sup>51</sup>

The "new science" certainly shared the charge of atheism with libertinism despite the protestations of several of the scientists. Materialism was condemned in the same breath with libertinism, and Hobbes was criticized for supporting the immorality of libertinism.<sup>52</sup> Restoration libertine lyrics were both influenced by the ancient Epicurean tradition and the materialistic bent of topical scientific and philosophical discourses. Beyond the materialistic conception of human nature and reality in libertine thought, the inconstant self is akin to the Epicurean atomistic self that is continually in motion and perpetually displaced. Rochester's poems certainly appear to explore the significance of his period's materialistic determinism, and they exacerbate the problems of mutability that are but suggested by the earlier poets.

As the practice of change, libertinism is both an intensification of and a defense against mutability. The emphasis on bodies and material nature in libertinism accentuates the temporality and limitation of life and human nature--particularly since seventeenth-century society believed that coitus shortens one's life span.<sup>53</sup> But in following the *carpe diem* dictum of enjoying beauty and youth, the libertine's focus on present sexual pleasures is clearly also a defense

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against time and death. In his attempt to transform instability into empowering freedom, the libertine embraces nature's mutability into his sense of self.

Libertine lyrics, as the next section shows, are primarily concerned with libertine subjectivity--the speaker's self-presentation, his rhetoric of desire, his overt and hidden motivations and drives. As we shall see, the inconstant self can be seen as an imaginative "answer" to the dilemma posed by various scientific and philosophic discourses in a liminal age of change.

### **The Libertine "I"**

Seventeenth-century libertine lyrics produce a speaker whose articulation of his desires turns into a rhetoric of self-authorization. This rhetoric is transgressive in its defiant individualism and assertion of freedom and power in opposition to prevailing social mores. It is also seductive in its promise of pleasure to the speaker's rhetorical listeners, both female and male. For all its wit and playfulness, libertine rhetoric ultimately concerns the display of a masterful self before an audience. The rhetorical foundations of the libertine's authority and pleasure, as we shall see, disclose the drives and problems of the

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theatrical inconstant "I." On the one hand, libertine rhetoric grants an unique opportunity for role-playing and securing the libertine's sexual will. It exhibits his individualistic character and need for self-determination. On the other hand, it also hides an unstable and insecure self that requires masks and rhetorical assertions for validation.

The libertine's inconstancy is his way of transforming the threat of mutability into empowering freedom. As mentioned briefly earlier, the changeable self is drawn from the period's naturalistic and materialistic discourses. The libertine poet-lover argues for an appetitive human nature that is part of mutable nature and in the process justifies his insistence on sensual pleasures. According to the libertine's reasoning, nature is all good in its instincts and pleasures. Libertine naturalism paints a picture of sexual freedom and pleasure for all, and the libertine poet-lover uses the naturalistic conception of human nature to eradicate all moral and social restrictions that constrain his lust.<sup>54</sup> The libertine disclaims yesterday's responsibilities and today's consequences for tomorrow once they no longer serve his interests. In his world of transience, no promise nor contract is binding. The fickle but insistent nature of the libertine's desires and his rejection of all kinds of commitment and allegiance show that his ethics of pleasure effectively promotes a radical individualism where the desiring subject places himself above tradition, authority, and society's values.

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The forceful and capricious libertine poet-lover completely subverts the power dynamics of the Petrarchan love courtship to his advantage. He deliberately presents a selfhood that is an outright negation of the faithful Platonic-Stoic-Augustinian subject. Unlike the God-centered self or, in its Neoplatonic version, the lover centered on his mistress (who ultimately leads him to God in Bembo's ladder of love), the speaker is fully autonomous and self-sufficient in the paradigm of libertine desire. At times the libertine speaker wears the guise of a Petrarchan lover, but any demonstration of courtliness or subservience is temporary and serves his own self-interest.<sup>55</sup> He is in fact the aggressive predator on women who thrives on sexual conquests.

Women in libertine lyrics do not help the poet-lover to experience transcendental beauty and selfhood, they are part of "nature" that is to be used and dominated by men. The consumption of women in libertinism clearly exploits and heightens the sexism of the period.<sup>56</sup> Male identity, in libertine lyrics, is validated by the unequivocal control and ownership of women.<sup>57</sup> The libertine poet-lover typically reduces women to things, fruits, and meat. Once possessed by the male, they are worthless. In "Community," the speaker compares women to fruits and concludes:

And when hee hath the kernell eate,  
Who doth not fling away the shell?

(23-24)

This expenditure of women suggests treating them like whores: in Elizabethan

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bawdry, "shell" alludes to female genitals, and "eating meat" implies coition, typically with a prostitute.<sup>58</sup> This callous treatment of women draws upon the gendered practice of libertinism, which of course includes whoring. There is no female equivalent to the epithet of "rake" or "libertine" in seventeenth-century England. On the surface, libertine lyrics condemn the patriarchal suppression of women when they argue for female sexual freedom. But when they portray women as passive sex objects and depict pleasure in terms of sexual conquest, they unmistakably demonstrate the aggressive edge of libertinism.

The libertine's sexually aggressive rhetoric is part of his grappling with mutability. If a woman is part of nature in libertine lyrics, she also represents its threatening mutability. Early modern literature frequently portrays women as the embodiment of chaos and corruption.<sup>59</sup> Seventeenth-century satires reveal an underlying misogyny when they present women's sexual promiscuity as disorder, dystopia, and monstrosity. A woman can frustrate the libertine's sexual will or, as described by contemporary love complaints and misogynist anti-Platonic lyrics, she can betray a man's love, or worse--threaten a man's independence and freedom. In the case of the libertine, his identity is dependent on his sexual conquest. A woman's sexual appetite, her evasiveness, and her inconstancy undermine the libertine's need for control. Donne shows that the speaker's libertinism is often a counter response to his mistress' inconstancy. Cavalier libertine lyrics focus on seducing virgins who make passive sexual

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objects. Rochester's poems may portray the increased sexual freedom of women, but they also divulge an underlying fear of their sexual power. Inconstancy is therefore part of the libertine's rhetoric of self-sufficiency and emotional invulnerability. The poet-lover betrays his mistress before she can leave him; his dread of commitment reflects an underlying fear of powerlessness. Instead of the typical love complaint that externalizes mutability onto a mistress, the libertine lover himself internalizes mutability in his sexual practice. The pursuit of pleasure and his rhetorical mastering of women constitute his "solution" to the elusive and threatening female other.

Libertinism is of course not simply a product of self-protective impulses. The poets also indicate the libertine's delight in power play. Pleasure is seen in terms of sexual conquest and mastery. The libertine's desire for unlimited sexual pleasure and variety is often portrayed as a voracious hunger for worldly power. Although unrestrained lust signalled anarchic excess in early modern England, the libertine does not seek to demolish the existing power structure. For all his naturalistic arguments against social and institutional control, he subscribes to society's form of hierarchical power. In his sexual fantasy, the libertine imagines himself at the top of the social and political ladder, and he often exalts his sexual conquest in terms of worldly power and influence. Overtly or slyly, the libertine always seeks to assert his mastery over others. He is constantly aware of the dynamics of power relations between the

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two sexes and amongst men. His need to dominate others contradicts the libertine rhetoric of freedom and equality. Ultimately he only cares about his own liberty and sensual pleasures.

To secure his personal advantage, the libertine speaker artfully creates and presents an authoritative persona before his listeners. His theatricality typically exhibits a rebellious edge. He enjoys being shocking and outrageous, deliberately provoking the audience with his ironic manipulation of society's conventions and values. The speaker's stance of defiance gives him a sense of superiority, and his calculated recklessness flaunts both control and outrageous daring. In libertine lyrics, the delight in masks is played out in the shifting rhetorical positions of the libertine "I." The mercurial poet-lover adopts various poses to advance his argument for libertinism and plans for seduction: a detached philosopher, a man of principles, a Petrarchan lover, or a champion of women's freedom. Rhetorical processes are crucial in the construction of an identity. To a large extent, the libertine is the rhetorical self that Richard A. Lanham describes in his book *The Motives of Eloquence*--a "social self whose behavior splits into two parts--persuasion and pleasure." Identity is a function of "both process and skill," and in the end it is essentially "a game."<sup>60</sup> The game can be the deception of a trickster, as Wayne A. Rebhorn shows in his excellent essay on the trickster as *homo rhetoricus*.<sup>61</sup> He includes the Don Juan figure as one of the notable tricksters who "adapt their identities to suit



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the different women they pursue" (37). Indeed Rochester, the rake *par excellence*, talks about the trickster's "restless Itch of Deceiving" in a broadside advertisement. He also confesses to the pleasures of disguises and masquerades.<sup>62</sup> This delight in deception, as Rebhorn suggests, is inseparable from the compulsive need for power over others as described above, because deception "is the source of a power which gives [tricksters] their sense of being at the very moment, and in the very act, of dominating their world" (41).

The libertine's assertion of his authority and sexual prowess, however, tends to remain on the discursive level. Platonic love poems typically subscribe to Aristotelian poetics of sincerity and seriousness, whereas libertine lyrics reject the correspondence between style and content in their playful rhetoric.<sup>63</sup> The libertine lyrics disclose a gap between the poet-lover's speech and his real intentions. They also highlight the theatrical aspect of the libertine self. Greenblatt tells us that "self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language."<sup>64</sup> Libertine rhetoric obviously constitutes the process of self-fashioning because it is in discourse that the libertine "I" finds validation and control. Since pleasure is intertwined with the libertine's vision of power, his sexuality likewise takes on a strong rhetorical component in the lyrics. This is nowhere clearer than in the speaker's portrayal of an Edenic sexuality, which is ultimately an image of his unlimited potency. According to Antony Easthope, the discursive quality of sexuality appears to emerge in conjunction with first-

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person confessions of male desire in seventeenth-century lyrics. He relates this discursive sexuality to the growth of individualism in the seventeenth century.<sup>65</sup> In the case of libertine lyrics, the rhetorical nature of sexual pleasure and control is partly the result of the poet-lover's strategies of self-display, which indicate an unmistakable individualism. Sexuality manifests a rhetorical dimension in libertine lyrics because it ultimately takes secondary place to the poet-lover's need to assert through language an authoritative self. In the forceful rhetoric of libertine desire, the poet turns the confession of the lyric "I" into an art of self-empowerment.

The libertine's reliance on rhetorical processes for a sense of mastery, however, indicates and reinforces his insecurity as we shall see. Unlike the action-oriented rake on the Restoration stage, the libertine poet-lover basically asserts his identity through the *pronouncement* of his will and authority. Rhetorical self-authorization clearly does not guarantee actual dominance; worse, the articulation of desire may be compensatory and may in fact be a poor substitute for action. Despite the libertine's apparent confidence and aggressive insistence on his will, the nature of the inconstant self means that the ego is fully aware of the unstable character of power and pleasure.

Rebhorn discerns that there can be no stable and authentic being when identity is seen as something extrinsic and artificial (38). He argues that the trickster is in search of an identity (41), but this does not really apply in the

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case of the inconstant "I" with a fundamental identity--both personal and social --as a libertine. Rochester's "To the Post Boy" and "The Disabled Debauchee," for example, illustrate the speaker's awareness of society's derogatory perception of the Restoration rake-hell. Obviously the libertine's identity does not provide him with an assured self; ultimately, it is also a mask like any adopted identity. The libertine is like the trickster that Rebhorn describes--an insecure ego threatened by the very fictionality of his mask because he is absolutely dependent on his audience for the verification of his assumed identity (40). The libertine's self-display clearly cannot provide the stable and empowered self that he craves, and no sexual conquest can completely gratify the boundless desires of the libertine.<sup>66</sup> Hence the libertine is the restless and precarious self that requires constant reinvention, and because of his striving for more freedom and pleasure, each act of self-definition has to be more extravagant than the one before.

A restless discontent is the result of the libertine's deep insecurity and his incessant struggle for control over others, made more conspicuous by the "compulsive-obsessive behavior" that Rebhorn observes in tricksters (40). The later libertine lyrics increasingly show that sexual excess often leads to frustration, weariness, and even boredom. Several libertine lyrics also dramatize the sexual compulsion of the poet-lover, such as Suckling's "[Loves Feast]," Lovelace's "A Loose Saraband," Rochester's "Against Constancy" and "Upon

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his Drinking a Bowl," and the drinking songs of Etherege and Sedley. The desiring subject is what Rebhorn calls the "ontologically starved" self (39). For the incomplete self, it is not his being that determines his acts, but rather the acts that delineate and project a sense of self--which in the case of the libertine lyric "I," it is the rhetorical act of self-display. Under the influence of Hobbes's conception of the appetitive human automata, however, a secure and completed self becomes an impossibility. The mechanical and repetitive quality of the libertine's sexual pursuits now indicates an inevitable fact of the human condition. Rochester's libertine lyrics, for example, depict an ego tormented by never-ending desires such that he can never find real satisfaction in sensual excess nor true authenticity in his self-display.

Displaced by nature's mutability and alienated from others, libertine subjectivity is born of instability. The fashioning of an inconstant self justifies total freedom from social and emotional bonds, but this self-definition, as we have seen, does not deliver stability nor security. In fact, the libertine's transgressive role and marginal position in society, compounded with the precariousness of his rhetorically constructed mastery and freedom, result in a permanently displaced position, which in turn deepens his insecurity. At times the lyrics expose the failure of the libertine solution to the problem of mutability. Rochester's libertine lyrics, in particular, portray a deterministic picture of nature, and they expose a gap between the libertine's sexual will and

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his ability to fulfil it. In these lyrics, the "solution" only aggravates the problem.

Greenblatt points out that "self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self."<sup>67</sup> This is true for the libertine whose self-fashioning is driven by fears of powerlessness. But for all his limitations and perverse contradictions, the libertine poet-lover is a "fluid" self that promises and embodies "infinite possibilities and contingencies."<sup>68</sup> Most of all the inconstant self manifests the desire and need to construct a triumphant and authoritative selfhood in an age of epistemological and ontological confusion.

### **The Poet's Libertine Self-Fashioning and the Court Milieu**

As we shall see, the aggressive libertine rhetoric is part of the poets' own self-authorization as writers and courtiers. Their formulation of an inconstant self in terms of theatrical and playful self-display reveals a courtly sensibility and poetics. Tudor and Stuart court culture exhibited a theatrical quality, from the artful self-presentation of courtiers, the pomp of pageants and

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masques, to the cultivated public persona of the monarch.<sup>69</sup> The libertine speaker's playful wit, apparent effortless control, and even deceptive stance demonstrate the polished self-presentation of Castiglione's *sprezzatura*--albeit without its attendant morality and edifying function. This section examines the conditions and nature of the literary system, courtly milieu, and the readership involved in the production of libertine lyrics.

In the Petrarchan love tradition, the lyric "I" is assumed to be close to the poet's own voice. Libertine poetics, however, does not project a transparent correspondence between voice and subjectivity, as we have seen in the libertine poet-lover's rhetorical self-fashioning and his delight in role-playing. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt perceives that the creation of a literary persona is part and parcel of the process of shaping the writer's own identity and voice.<sup>70</sup> The libertine poet-lover is a recognizable pose, nevertheless the poet's adoption of a libertine "I" does indicate a calculated self-presentation before a coterie of friends. At the very least, the poet's literary mode points to a particular literary identity. Richard Helgerson's analysis of the literary system of early modern England shows that the poet's self-presentation is intrinsically bound up with the genre, mode, and subject of his writings.<sup>71</sup> The libertine lyrics demonstrate the poet's reaction against the court's Neoplatonism and love rhetoric, as well as his refusal to play by the rules of the courtly poetic system. In adopting the defiant libertine persona, the courtier is declaring his freedom

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to shape an individualistic voice that cannot be prescribed by the court.

In their preoccupation with mutability, power dynamics, and search for an authoritative identity, libertine lyrics manifest the poet's own frustration with court society, its system of patronage, and its rampant power struggle. The poets wrote most of their libertine lyrics when they were part of the courtly milieu, but before they had an active role in the political structure of the court. Like the worldly and ambitious libertine speaker, the poets studied here were primarily an ambitious lot who wanted to move up socially. None of these poets came from a politically influential family; their social mobility and ambition only increased the awareness of their unstable social positions. J. A. Sharpe reports that the Elizabethan and Stuart courts were a "magnet for the social and politically ambitious."<sup>72</sup> Office-holding was a key route to status and riches.<sup>73</sup> That was particularly the case for parvenu gentlemen, younger sons, and the lower gentry. When Donne and Carew were writing their libertine lyrics, they were mere gentlemen, the lowest rank in the gentry, and they experienced frustration and anxiety regarding their preferment at court. Donne's pursuit of a gentleman's education at the Inns and his search for a position at court indicate a desire to move away from his father's trading background. Without the aid of kinship patronage, he made the best of his own connections. It was his own fellow students at Oxford and the Inns of Court who helped him get enlisted in Essex's expedition and later in the service of Sir Thomas

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Eagleton. Carew was a younger son without the benefit of a gentleman's education at the Inns, and he had to do without the patronage of relatives. He was nevertheless ambitious and resourceful enough to seek the patronage of influential noblemen at court. Both Donne and Carew did not have the right family background and connections for political advancement, but they knew that the court held the key to their upward social mobility, hence their determined search for court preferment on their own despite many obstacles.

The fortunes of a courtier or someone aspiring to be one were known to be notoriously precarious. John Chamberlain understood full well "the court fever of hope and fear that continuously torments those that depend upon great men and their promises."<sup>74</sup> The fates of courtiers were also unpredictable because they were tied to the rise and fall of the king's favorites and the shifts in power dynamics at court. From political strife to highly restrictive social codes, the court was a place of intense pressure. Henrietta Maria's cult of Platonic love and Charles's court reforms could prove to be stifling to the fun-loving and defiant courtier. Rochester had unusual freedom at the licentious court of Charles II, but nevertheless the court exerted a huge control over his life. According to Rochester, life at court was like being "Shutt up in a Drumme, you can thinke of nothing but the noise is made about you."<sup>75</sup>

The poets' ambitions made them part of the courtly milieu, yet they were not too entrenched in it to adopt a rebellious literary identity before their



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coterie of friends and peers. They obviously enjoyed playing the anti-authoritarian and playful libertine poet-lover. The need for control and superiority that characterizes the libertine "I" appears also to prompt the poets' self-presentation. As creator of the libertine persona, the poet would obtain a mastery that is beyond the speaker's grasp. The defiant and self-sufficient libertine "I" provided the seventeenth-century courtiers compensatory authority and freedom that were not part of the court life of instability, restriction, and dependence. Extravagant role-play and theatrical masks also granted the young frustrated courtiers vicarious participation in an imaginary world of unlimited play and sensual excess.<sup>76</sup> Obviously some of the lyrics express more their experience of displacement and frustration than their ability to transcend or escape problems through wit--especially those that disclose the libertine's insecurities and limitations. Nevertheless, even if the poet suggestively reduces his persona's authority, his own position of mastery remains.

The admiration and support that the poet derived from his libertine persona came from a coterie of like-minded friends. Arthur F. Marotti demonstrates that "poems were an extension of artful, polite behavior" for the courtier of early modern England, "and, at the same time, ways of formulating actual or wished-for social transactions."<sup>77</sup> This was clearly not the case for libertine lyrics that challenged the boundaries of poetic decorum and were meant only for those of the same social station and courtly circle as the poets.

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Harold Love observes that this same-class manuscript transmission formulates existing social bonds as elitist since it excludes lower classes.<sup>78</sup> The courtly coteries, of which the circulation and production of libertine lyrics formed one of the several bonds of sociability, endorsed the libertine self-presentation so that it was an empowering position for the poet, where he could show off his "profane wit," poetic mastery, and nonconforming superiority. As part of the courtly milieu, coterie readers could also appreciate the libertine's frustration and need for freedom and authority.

Libertine lyrics have a definite appeal to young male readers. Marotti observes that erotic poems were popular among young male courtiers, as well as students at the universities and the Inns of Court.<sup>79</sup> Donne, Suckling, Lovelace, Carew, and Rochester wrote libertine lyrics during the early part of their pursuit of a court career. The interest in libertine ideas is a natural extension of these young men's licentious lifestyle and milieu. Conventional love lyrics, with Petrarchan blazon conceits, objectify the female body and point to the male bonding of readers. Libertine poems accentuate this bonding based on masculine desire when they eroticize the female body in almost pornographic terms. Indeed, some of the lyrics present a rhetorical setting that corresponds to the reality of the poet posing before a receptive male audience. Lyrics such as Donne's "Loves Progress" and Rochester's "Against Constancy" posit fellow libertines as listeners, or at the very least, male listeners

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sympathetic to the libertine sentiments articulated. Even poems addressed to women, such as Carew's "A Rapture" and Rochester's "Upon his leaving his Mistress," or those addressed to "Love" as Lovelace's "La Bella Bona Roba," suggest the poet's audience of male peers who would enjoy erotic and even misogynistic descriptions of women.

The manuscript form and circulation of libertine lyrics amongst peers and friends means that the poets had full control and freedom in their writing. Love observes that manuscript writings differ from print in their style and tone because they manifest "a frankness and familiarity that would not have been appropriate in print."<sup>80</sup> Libertine lyrics, with their demystification of desire and subversion of poetic conventions, certainly exhibit the kind of freedom in language that Love talks about. But the manuscript form is not merely a response to state censorship. Love rightfully points out that the choice of manuscript "publication" indicates "a self-censorship accepted by writers who did not wish to compromise the facade of governing-class solidarity." The choice of the manuscript medium indicates "a concession" to the court's promulgation of itself as a center of high civility and nobility, a rhetoric which served to conceal the fierce and often unscrupulous power struggles at court.<sup>81</sup> In comparison to the public nature of print, the manuscript form of transgressive lyrics circulated amongst select readers protected the ideology and elitism of the governing class. Despite the poets' frustration and disillusionment

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with court politics, their anti-courtly writings were quite unlike Puritans' condemnation of court life, or even the typical criticism of the court from those outside of it. These lyrics were not meant for outsiders because the criticism came from those who, despite their cynicism, wanted to maintain the court system. The elitist nature of the manuscript transmission allowed the poets and their peers to vent steam without threatening their position at court. Libertine poems may be provocative and anti-courtly, but ultimately they do not manifest any seditious goals nor do they suggest a subversive overthrow of the status quo. In addition they were similar to other lyrics in their function as light entertainment and hence of no lasting value.<sup>82</sup> In courtly circles, libertine lyrics remained merely as personal recreation and group entertainment.

Malcolm Smuts, in his study of the early Stuart court, notes that the courtiers' criticism of the court reveals "the ambivalence felt by men caught up in the scramble for place and power at Whitehall."<sup>83</sup> This ambivalence is definitely shown in the divide between the public and private self-presentations of the poets. Within the courtly context of the production and circulation of libertine lyrics, it is not so surprising then that the poets also produced Platonic and complimentary works that were more in line with the political rhetoric and courtly poetic norms of their period. This is particularly the case in the official presentation of the courtly class before royalty or the public, be it in print, theatrical production, or other forms of public entertainment such as court

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masques.<sup>84</sup> The gap between licentious manuscripts and official courtly presentations to the public is ultimately the distinction between individual practice and class ideals and codes, where the ambiguity of the latter and the lax enforcement in the realm of private entertainment and leisure made the writing and circulation of libertine lyrics the unofficial but accepted practice amongst courtiers and students at universities and the Inns of Court in the seventeenth century.

The posture of the rebellious amateur was entirely compatible with gentleman status in seventeenth-century England. Helgerson explains that the amateur's "oppositional" self-definition is a recognized part of the literary system. Although libertine lyrics were not written to elicit patronage, they were nevertheless like courtly love lyrics in their function as part of the socialization and entertainment of gentlemen. Helgerson observes that amateur poets customarily took on a non-conforming stance in their youth and that their writings are characterized by play, lightheartedness, and passion--a deliberate rejection of "the expectation that the end to which a man so born and so educated should direct himself was service to the commonwealth." He tells us that the amateur's defiance is in fact "conventional" and is rejected once he finds preferment.<sup>85</sup> Helgerson contends that authorial roles alter in the seventeenth century, when poetry becomes increasingly part of a gentleman's socialization and recreation. In addition, the prestige of Donne's and Herbert's

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collected works in the 1630s served to diminish the age-old stigma of print for gentlemen.<sup>86</sup> By the Restoration, there was indeed little differentiation between professional and amateur writers. For example, several of the court wits were patrons of playwrights, but they also wrote and produced plays themselves. For the Cavaliers, there was no marked graduation from provocative and licentious poems to "dutiful" writings; they adopted both rebellious and dutiful poetic roles when they simultaneously produced Platonic love poetry and libertine lyrics.

Nevertheless, the amateur self-presentation delineated by Helgerson is useful in understanding the seventeenth-century poets. The courtiers certainly did not adopt a professional nor a laureate literary identity in their writings, not even when they stepped into the professional arena: Donne, Carew, Lovelace, Suckling, and Rochester clearly presented themselves as amateurs. They wrote libertine lyrics primarily in their youth; with the exception of Lovelace, they all shunned print. Their libertine lyrics plainly spurn public duty for personal pleasure, much more than pastorals and love sonnets, genres that Helgerson cites as typical of amateur writings.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, the poems also display the characteristic trait of frustration. Like other types of amateur writings, the libertine pose is not a risky self-definition because it is part of the expected unruliness of youthful recreation. After all, behind the stance of defiance is the yearning to be part of the courtly elite. The poets' libertine

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writing also confirms the limited duration of amateur writing. They noticeably abandoned anti-courtly poetic modes once they became heavily involved in a court career, or in Donne's case, the serious pursuit of one.

Libertinism in the poetry and lives of the courtiers and poets discussed here was also not politically dangerous because it was restricted to the private and unregulated domain of court life. Although it was not officially sanctioned by the monarchy, libertinism was discreetly accommodated by aristocratic and courtly behavioral codes. On the one hand, the libertine poet-lover opposes the courtiership prescribed by Castiglione and other manuals on gentlemanly behavior. The licentious poet-lover fits the very image of the courtier as a figure of vice that anti-court literature had been promulgating.<sup>88</sup> But on the other hand, violation of the ideal of aristocratic nobility was ordinary, indeed indulged and sustained by the aristocratic code and lifestyle. As mentioned before, there was a discrepancy between practice and what was upheld as the ideal and the official at court. The contradiction is due to the fact that sexuality, as James Grantham Turner discerns, fell within the realm of "ambiguous moral and aesthetic values suitable for libertine defiance."<sup>89</sup> This ambiguity is seen in the social dimension of honor, where it could permutate from Elizabethan chivalry to Restoration sexual "gallantry."<sup>90</sup> A promiscuous lifestyle ironically came to mark the political allegiance of the aristocrat during the Civil War and in the Restoration. Erotic verses were also associated with

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the court and the upper classes under Charles I and II.<sup>91</sup> These apparent violations of aristocratic ideals and behavioral codes can also be understood in terms of the distinction between public and private lives in the aristocratic value system. James's study of early modern honor clarifies that honor was a public code kept separate from private morality and behavior: "men of honour could (and did) lie, cheat, deceive, plot, treason, seduce, and commit adultery, without incurring dishonour." He informs us that "as long as [such activities] were not attributed to [a man] in a public way, honour was not brought into question."<sup>92</sup> The same criteria of public opinion affects how much the licentious writings and sexual conduct of poets were silently permitted at court. As long as the courtiers and poets did not openly challenge royal authority, their honor and court career were not at risk.

Ultimately the courtly nature and entertainment value of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics emphasize that both the poet's libertine self-fashioning and the inconstant selfhood belong to the world of pleasure, theatrical role-play, and creative fantasy. The poets' inflammatory libertine poetics is part of this playful extravagance. Although their sportive treatment diminishes the transgressive thrust of libertinism, libertine poetics nevertheless challenges and interrogates prevailing discourses when it proposes new possibilities and alternative values. As we have seen, the lyrics present an innovative reconsideration of the period's conception of change and selfhood. In toying



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with the ideological significance of sexual license and an inconstant self, they also question Platonic-Augustinian selfhood and value system, aristocratic honor, early modern prescriptions of courtiership, court ideology and discourses, as well as Petrarchan courtship and poetics. Most of all, the poets' libertine self-fashioning indicates a skilful manipulation of the various discourses of the period to introduce a new psychological and ontological complexity to seventeenth-century understanding of selfhood.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, 1965, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1971), 23-24, also see pp. 23-27; and Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 51.
2. J. A. Sharpe discusses the difference between the early modern conception of "aristocracy" and scholars' various usage of this term in *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550-1760* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), 152-53. McKeon talks about scholars' different usage of the term "aristocracy" (167).
3. See Laslett's "Chart of Rank and Status," 38. On the upper, middling, and lesser ranks of gentlemen, see Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 15.
4. Theodore K. Rabb, "Population, Economy and Society in Milton's England," *The Age of Milton: Backgrounds to Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1980), 89.
5. The beginnings of English capitalism are now understood to occur in the sixteenth-century countryside. See McKeon, 168. Also Stone, *Crisis*, 258-59. Stone discusses the significance of new wealth and changes in land ownership, in *Crisis*, 36-38, 129-98.
6. Stone tells us that "exceptionally large numbers of new families were forcing their way to the top, [and] exceptionally large numbers of old families were falling on evil days and sinking" during the period between 1560 and 1620 (*Crisis*, 38). J. A. Sharpe also refers to the period's social mobility on pp. 159-60, 174. The gentry controversy--the debate on R. H. Tawney's idea of the "rise" of the gentry versus H. R. Trevor-Roper's emphasis on declining gentry families--has initiated more regional studies that point to the complexity of the period's social and economic mobility--upward, downward, as well as mere survival within the gentry strata. R. C. Richardson discusses this controversy in *The Debate on the English Revolution Revisited*, 1977, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 103-6. So does McKeon on pp. 159-62. J. A. Sharpe summarizes these latest findings, noting that there was a general "rise" of the gentry in the second half of sixteenth century, but after 1660 more gentry families experienced economic difficulties when the peerage regained their old economic dominance (156-57, 159-60).
7. Stone, *Crisis*, 129-98.

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8. N.B. Some historians would limit the time span given by Stone in *Crisis*. Stone, however, emphasizes that the late Elizabethan and early Stuart peers were the ones who faced the most drastic economic reduction between 1580 and 1620. Sharpe gives a brief update on the latest historic studies on what Stone called "crisis of the aristocracy" in his chapter on the landed orders (152-75). Unlike Stone, he emphasizes the adaptability of the peerage during the period that Stone cites. Nevertheless, the peerage clearly underwent several changes, including a period of economic difficulty; it is only in the eighteenth-century when it attained an oligarchic stability.

9. McKeon, 151. On his assessment of the aristocratic crisis, refer to pp. 153-54.

10. J. A. Sharpe points out the "striking [financial] recovery [of the peerage] in the century after 1660" (157). On the persistence of the hegemonic power of the aristocracy, see McKeon, 167-69. Stone reminds us that despite the crisis of the aristocracy that he documents, "relatively little structural change took place in English society between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries: what altered was the role of the various social classes within a fairly static framework" (*Crisis*, 5).

11. See McKeon's section "Progressive Ideology and the Transvaluation of Honor," pp. 150-59.

12. Mervyn James, *English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485-1642*, Past and Present Supplement 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 58. Stone talks about how the government of sixteenth-century England protected social distinctions in *Crisis*, 27-29.

13. Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 83.

14. James, 58.

15. On the promulgation of state service as the cardinal role of the aristocracy, see Stone, *Crisis*, 27; and McKeon, 182.

16. James tells us that before the Tudor period, the "lineage bond" was greater than the bond to the king (16).

17. James, 72, 75-76.

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18. *England in the Seventeenth Century* (1952), p. 18; qtd. in Stone, *Crisis*, 27.
19. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Greenblatt, of course, uses the term "middle-class" very loosely. His examples include writers from the gentry and the "exception" of Wyatt.
20. Donne's father claimed blood ties that go all the way back to the Yorkist family of the War of Roses. See R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 20-22.
21. Qtd. in Charles L. Squier, *Sir John Suckling*, TEAS 218 (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 23.
22. See Anthony Low's "Thomas Carew: 'Fresh Invention,'" *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics and Culture from Sidney to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-57.
23. David M. Vieth, Introduction, *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), xxi.
24. Vieth comments that Rochester inherited "scanty paternal acres at Adderbury" (xxi), but clearly Pepys' remarks show that most of his contemporaries saw him without estate. Pepys' quote is taken from John Hayward's introduction to *Collected Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Hayward (London: Nonesuch Press, 1926), xxv. On Rochester's lack of political power as compared to other courtiers from aristocratic families, refer to Basil Greenslade's "Affairs of State," *Spirit of Wit: Reconsiderations of Rochester*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 101-2.
25. Manfred Weidhorn, *Richard Lovelace*, TEAS 96 (New York: Twayne, 1970), 15.
26. Hill, *Writing and Revolution in Seventeenth Century England*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 301.
27. Low, *Reinvention of Love*, 106. Helen Carr also links a certain love rhetoric and type of relationship with a specific social order. She points out that Petrarchism "grew originally out of a feudal society." "Donne's Masculine Persuasive Force," *Jacobean Poetry and Prose*, 101.

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28. See Chapter 6 of *Reinvention of Love*. Southall discusses the prevalence of economic metaphors in Elizabethan love lyrics in *Literature and the Rise of Capitalism: Critical Essays Mainly on the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973).
29. McKeon discusses this new perception of appetites in the section "Evaluating Human Appetites" (200-5).
30. See J. A. Sharpe, 156-57.
31. Lines 13-14; qtd. in Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 52. On the same page, he mentions the relationship between the Inns students and the rich middle-class women.
32. *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts, 1590-1640* (London: Longman, 1972), 41.
33. For example, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson's discussion of the confusing "theories of the nature of man" in *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth Century Poetry* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwest University Press, 1950), 109-13. Also see Hiram Collins Haydn's *The Counter-Renaissance*, 1950 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1966); Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). McKeon also deals with the epistemological crisis of the seventeenth century, especially in Chapter Two, "The Evidence of the Senses: Secularization and Epistemological Crisis" (65-89). Some examples of works that link literature with seventeenth-century epistemological questioning include McKeon's *Origins*; Thomas Docherty's *John Donne, Undone* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986); Low's "John Donne: 'Defects of Loneliness,'" *Reinvention of Love* (31-64); and Anna K. Nardo, *The Ludic Self in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).
34. On this link between time and sin in the religious framework, see Achsah Guibbory's *The Map of Time: Seventeenth-Century English Literature and Ideas of Pattern in History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 5-7; Herschel Baker's *The Wars of Truth: Studies in the Decay of Christian Humanism in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 65-77; and Chapter 4 of Victor Harris's book *All Coherence Gone: A Study of the Seventeenth-Century Controversy over*

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*Disorder and Decay in the Universe* (London: Frank Cass, 1949).

35. See Bernard Capp, "The Political Dimension of Apocalyptic Thought," *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions*, ed. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 97. On the perception of the world's decay at the time, see Nicolson, 30-32.

36. Harris, 150. He also mentions the various discourses on decay (4).

37. Nicholas Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, trans. A. M. Duncan (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1976), 40; qtd. in Docherty, 18.

38. Docherty, 18.

39. Guibbory notes that early modern England juxtaposes stasis with change and corruption; therefore stasis represents the state of perfection (*Map of Time*, 18).

40. Qtd. in Nicolson, 102.

41. On Donne's "The Sunne Rising," see Docherty's comments (34).

42. Lines 206-8. All quotations of Donne's poetry, with the exception of the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonnets*, are taken from *Donne: Poetical Works*, 1933, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

43. Hilary Gatti's "Giodano Bruno and the Stuart Court Masques," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48.4 (1995): 826, 828, and 836.

44. Nicolson, 102; and Gatti, 822.

45. See Nicolson, 99; and Helen Peters, Introduction to Donne's *Paradoxes and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 130.

46. See Docherty's reading of the indeterminate post-Copernican "I" (26).

47. Guibbory, *Map of Time*, 18-19.

48. On Bruno's and Galileo's positive assertions on change, see Guibbory, *Map of Time*, 19.

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49. Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden: Studies in Some Aspects of Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1934), 53.

50. Boyle, Preface, *Some Considerations about the Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion* (1675); qtd. in Bredvold, 60.

51. "Inertia and Scientific Law in Sixteenth-Century Commentaries on Lucretius," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48.4 (1995): 740.

52. See Chapter 7, "Hobbes and Libertinism," in Samuel I. Mintz's book, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 134-46.

53. Donne's poem "Farewell to Love" refers to this belief: "each such [sex] Act, they say, / Diminisheth the length of life a day" (24-25). All quotations of Donne's elegies, songs, and sonnets are from Helen Gardner's edition, *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965). A couple of critics observe that intensified sensual pleasures heighten the awareness of mutability. Examples include Mariann Sanders Regan, *Love Words: The Self and the Text in Medieval and Renaissance Poetry* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 57; and Earl Miner, *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 216-17.

54. On the naturalistic arguments for libertinism, see Bredvold's essay "The Naturalism of Donne in Relation to Some Renaissance Traditions," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 22 (1923): 471-502; Underwood, 17-20; and Bald, "'Thou, Nature, Art My Goddess': Edmund and Renaissance Free-Thought," *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson, and Edwin E. Willoughby (Washington, D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), 337-49.

55. Underwood discusses the link between the libertine character and the practice of courtly love on p. 36. John Smith Harrison shows that some of the Cavalier lyrics use Platonic love as "a form of gallantry ... to cloak immorality." *Platonism in English Poetry of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 1903 (New York: Columbia College, 1930), 161.

56. N.B. even lyrics that exalt and praise women in Platonic terms describe women in terms of consumption. Take for example, Carew's complimentary comparisons of women to fruit or food in "Song. To a Lady not yet enjoy'd by

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her Husband" (lines 12-13) and "Upon the sickness of (E.S.)" (lines 15-17). *The Poems of Thomas Carew with His Masque Coelum Britannicum*, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1949), pp. 31 and 36 respectively. All quotations of Carew's poetry are from this edition.

57. John Carey remarks that the eating metaphor indicates the total possession of a woman. *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 269.

58. Docherty, 225; and Patricia Garland Pinka, *This Dialogue of One: The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 53.

59. See, for example, Baker, 16; Docherty, 52; and Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 151.

60. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 111, 153.

61. Rebhorn, "'The Emperour of Mens Minds': The Renaissance Trickster as *Homo Rhetoricus*," *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G. W. Pigman III, and Rebhorn, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. 95 (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 31-65. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the main text.

62. Rochester, "Alexander Bendo's Advertisement," *Collected Works*, 155. Rochester's confession is to Gilbert Burnet, later reported in the theologian's biography of the rake, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of Rochester* (1680), reprinted in *Rochester: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Farley-Hills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 54.

63. Lanham discusses the difference between Aristotelian poetics and rhetorical ("Ciceronian") style on pp. 111-15.

64. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9.



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65. See *Poetry and Phantasy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 48-50.
66. Rebhorn argues that the trickster requires the audience's full subjection to his will. But this subjection is "unsatisfying," partly because "no object can ever fully satisfy the infinite desire animating human beings" (40).
67. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9.
68. David Aers and Gunther Kress, "Vexations Contraries: A Reading of Donne's Poetry," *Literature, Language and Society in England 1580-1680* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan; Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1981), 55.
69. Greenblatt mentions this theatricality in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 162.
70. In his analysis of Suckling, M. L. Donnelly also expresses the same point regarding "the representation of the author, part of whose self-representation or role [the] ... production [of poetic subject, character, situation] inevitably must be. "The Rack of Fancy and the Trade of Love: Conventions of *Précieux* and *Libertin* in Amatory Lyrics by Suckling and Carew," *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, 110.
71. See *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983), especially the first chapter, pp. 21-54.
72. J. A. Sharpe, 169.
73. Heal and Holmes, 815. J. A. Sharpe lists the various opportunities for financial gain that the courtiers could take advantage of, such as "investing in joint-stock companies, enjoying the fruits of monopolies, holding lucrative offices, making fortunate marriages, deriving profit from customs farms, revenue farms, and the collection of old debts to the crown, from various trading privileges, and from the management of the lands of recusants and wards" (155).
74. Sir Henry Wotton describes the court as a "place of ... servility in the getting, and ... uncertainty in the holding of fortunes"; qtd. in Smuts, *Court Culture*, 77.
75. Qtd. in Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 208.

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76. The world of play is associated with the rake figure. Noted by critics such as Harold Weber, *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 5; and Robert Jordan, "The Extravagant Rake in Restoration Comedy," *Restoration Literature: Critical Approaches*, ed. Harold Love (London: Methuen, 1972), 87-88. (Jordan links the "extravagant" rake character with carnival release.)

77. Marotti, "The Transmission of Lyric Poetry and the Institutionalizing of Literature in the English Renaissance," in *Contending Kingdoms: Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France*, ed. Marie-Rose Logan and Peter L. Rudnytsky (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 24.

78. Love, 179. Marotti also mentions the elitist character of such social bonding in *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 76.

79. *Manuscript*, 76.

80. Love, 189.

81. Love, 184. Also see pp. 209-10. All the poets would fit Love's definition of the "governing class" because he includes those who seek court preferment, such as students at the universities and Inns of Court (177-78).

82. Marotti emphasizes the entertainment function of lyrics in early modern England (*Manuscript*, 25).

83. Smuts, *Court Culture*, 74.

84. Even if the public works convey some kind of political criticism, it tends to be very subtle and buried beneath the conventional celebration of the royal couple and their reign. An example is Carew's court masque *Coelum Britannicum*.

85. Helgerson refers to these characteristics of the amateur poet on pp. 28, 33, and 26. He mentions the typical short duration of this adopted role on pp. 51 and 28.

86. On the changes in the literary system, see Helgerson, 187, 196-8, 201-3; and Marotti's *Manuscript*, 253.

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87. Helgerson notes that the favored generic forms of the amateur poets are the love sonnet and the pastoral because they "express the opposition between poetry and duty" (28).

88. Sydney Anglo looks at anti-court literature in "The Courtier: The Renaissance and Changing Ideals," *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty, 1400-1800*, ed. A. G. Dickens (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 34.

89. "Properties of Libertinism," 81.

90. C. L. Barber documents sexual virility as one of the traits of honor depicted on Restoration stage. *The Idea of Honour in the English Drama, 1591-1700*, Gothenburg Studies in English VI (Göteborg: Elanders, 1957), 142. James observes that "honour as depicted in the Stuart theatre is characterized by an extreme attenuation of its social dimension," where honor is manifested in terms of "success in the duel and ... displays of sexual virility" (89).

91. Marotti, *Manuscript*, 80.

92. James, 28.

## Chapter 2

# **Libertinism as Rhetorical Self-Fashioning in Donne's Libertine Lyrics**

Libertinism shows up consistently in Donne's early poetry. Since the mid sixteenth-century, there had been a new interest in naturalism and the works of Ovid, Catullus, and Propertius in England. The depiction of sensual passions in erotic epyllia, Samuel Daniel's portrayal of a sexual age in "A Pastoral" (1573) and Thomas Nash's sexually explicit "The Choice of Valentines" (1594) indicate a new interest in countering the prevailing courtly love convention that prescribed a chaste love. But Donne is the first English poet to explore libertine thought in the lyric mode.<sup>1</sup> Several of his poems specifically argue for sexual freedom, and their provocative rhetoric sets a precedent for the inflammatory poetics of seventeenth-century libertine lyrics. Most important of all, Donne creates a model for the libertine lyric "I."

In discussing Donne's treatment of libertinism, critics consistently point to his creation of an aggressive masculine poet-lover. This chapter suggests that the "masculine persuasive force" of Donne's libertine speaker and the rhetorical playfulness that has been commonly noted in his early poetry can be explained in terms of the poet's rhetorical construction of a self whose pleasures and authority are founded upon its inconstancy. Unlike earlier erotic poems,

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Donne's libertine lyrics are not concerned with accounts of sexual experiences; his libertine speakers deliver reports of imaginary bliss and speeches on libertinism. In fact, as we shall see, Donne formulates libertinism in terms of the libertine's will and his articulation of desire. His libertine rhetoric of desire as self-fashioning introduces a new lyric poetics of radical individualism. It also presents libertinism as a creative paradigm to explore the nature and problem of mutability in the context of libertine selfhood--the question of authoritative self-presentation and individual freedom.

In my examination of Donne's libertine selfhood, I will confine my study to the poems where Donne most clearly depicts libertine thought, that is, the lyrics which exalt the pursuit of pleasure and explicitly advocate sexual freedom and variety. Discounting "Variety," which Helen Gardner has persuasively argued for excluding from Donne's canon, only "Change," "Loves Progress," and "To his Mistris Going to Bed" in the *Elegies* establish the cardinal libertine tenets of glorifying sensuality and sexual liberty. From the *Songs and Sonnets*, I will focus on "Confined Love," "The Indifferent," "Loves Usury," "Communitie," "Loves Diet," and "Womans Constancy."<sup>2</sup>

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### **The Libertine's Self-fashioning**

In Donne's lifetime, he commissioned many self-portraits, and they mark the different roles and stages of his life. Whether as the fashionable young gentleman in the Marshall engraving, the melancholy lover in the Lothan portrait, or the saintly figure in the St Paul's Cathedral portrait, Donne reveals himself to be skilled in the meticulous presentation of specific roles and identities.<sup>3</sup> In his later years, the ordained "Doctor" Donne separated himself from the literary fruits of his younger self, whom he called "Jack Donne."<sup>4</sup> "Jack" Donne actually points to many different literary selves: the Inns-of-Court satirist and libertine poet, the amorist in many poems of *Songs and Sonnets*, and even the royal propagandist in *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610). Donne's libertine lyric "I" constitutes one of his early personae, in a stage of his life when he was still experimenting with different literary modes and looking for an authoritative literary and social identity. He takes the vocabulary and value system of libertinism to construct a speaker fascinated with shaping different identities and who projects a fluid sense of self. We shall see that of all of Donne's literary modes, his libertine verses epitomize his craft of self-fashioning.<sup>5</sup> The construction of a rakish "I" easily arose from the Inns of Court--the "gentlemanly finishing school" that fostered a lifestyle of leisure, which included drinking, gambling, and womanizing.<sup>6</sup> Most of Donne's elegies are written during his student years at Lincoln Inn, and it is commonly

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accepted that his cynical and libertine lyrics of *Songs and Sonnets* are also written during the 1590s.<sup>7</sup> According to Sir Richard Baker, Donne was the urbane man-about-the-town: he was "a great visitor of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, [and] a great writer of conceited Verses." Despite his protestations, his life-style was evidently enough to secure him a reputation with the women. Later he had to defend himself to his father-in-law against "that fault wch was layd to [him] of having deceivd some gentlewomen before."<sup>8</sup> "Whether Donne himself was a rake or not," Gardner concludes that "he had a rake's imagination and presented himself with gusto in such a light."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Donne adopted a libertine pose in several of his elegies and lyrics, but his stance appears to have less to do with a particular type of "imagination" than with his social milieu and lifestyle at that time. He only adopted the libertine mode when he was at Lincoln Inn, which undoubtedly formed a unique subculture that fed the "rakish" ideas of Donne's poetry.

In *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, Arthur F. Marotti establishes the importance of the Inns-of-Court context of Donne's early writings. It was in this environment that Donne became fascinated with genres that question orthodoxy and undermine Petrarchan conventions. In the 1590s, Donne's main output consisted of paradoxes, epigrams, Ovidian elegies, and satires--genres that were associated with the milieu of the Inns and were prominent in the works banned and denounced as salacious and vituperative in 1599.<sup>10</sup> Not

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surprisingly, several of the writers whose writings were burned came from the Inns-of-Court milieu, including Marlowe, Joseph Hall, Everard Guilpin, John Marston, and Sir John Davies.<sup>11</sup> The Inns and universities obviously relished the outrageousness of erotic works, such as Nashe's infamous "The Choice of Valentines."<sup>12</sup> Marlowe's translation of the *Amores*, the Ovidian book eradicated from the school curriculum, was so popular that it went into six (private) editions by the 1590s. Donne's libertine writings, particularly the elegies, are greatly influenced by the *Amores*--he may in fact be one of the first writers to pen an Ovidian elegy in English.<sup>13</sup> Marotti notes that there was "a strong anticourtly impulse shared by many Inns men, reinforced by their common frustration in their search for preferment."<sup>14</sup> In the 1590s, there was an intense competition for patronage and preferment, partly as a result of too many young and ambitious men coming out of the Inns and universities and too few openings in the government and in the church. At the same time, the late Elizabethan court was plagued with problems of corruption, which provoked an anti-courtly response from the public, especially amongst the disenchanted men at the Inns and universities.<sup>15</sup> Stimulated by the intellectual freedom of amateur literary circles in the academic environment, the student poets could at once disdain the court that appeared to have rejected them and express their defiant rejection of literary fads associated with the court and its dictates of poetic decorum.<sup>16</sup>



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Donne introduces a rebellious and aggressive poet-lover to the lyric tradition of male desire--a subjectivity in direct opposition to that of the courtly Petrarchan lover of the popular sonnet form. Alan Armstrong points out that Donne's libertine rhetoric is modelled after Ovid's *Amores*. In contrast to the figure of the love-slave of the Augustan conventions, Ovid "recovers for the elegiac lover a degree of rationality and self-control, reflected in his urbane wit and complete self-consciousness."<sup>17</sup> For Donne's libertine rhetoric, it is precisely this masculine self-assertiveness that Donne accentuates to create the libertine poet-lover. But the poet also finds an example of the inconstant "I" in Ovid's writings. Linda S. Kauffman comments that Ovid creates a capricious and inconstant self who "subverts the Platonic values of consistency, clarity, and unity."<sup>18</sup> Donne's libertine, with his changing poses, masks, and inconstancy, likewise challenges these Platonic values. The controlling and decentering aspects of the Ovidian self are two traits that Donne adopts in his libertine rhetoric of radical individualism.

Petrarchan courtliness was at its peak when Donne turned to Ovidian models. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) and Spenser's first three books of *The Faerie Queene* (1591) started the vogue of urbane courtliness in epic and sonnet forms. Patricia Parker shows that these poetic conventions dramatize a specific political relationship: "Petrarchan lyric in the era of Elizabeth was inseparable from the structure of a politics in which political and erotic codes

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interpenetrated to a remarkable degree, in which Elizabeth's courtiers related to their queen as Petrarchs to an often cruel mistress, and in which the male poet was 'subject' in both the political and in the Petrarchan lyric sense."<sup>19</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter on the changing social and politicized manifestations of honor, courtly Petrarchan love rhetoric and epic romance under Elizabeth were inseparable from state service. The constancy of the Petrarchan lover also demonstrates the honor and loyalty of the courtier. Given the political resonance of amorous poetic discourse in Elizabethan times, Donne's libertine poet-lover refuses to be the faithful Petrarchan and political subject when he deliberately upsets the Petrarchan hierarchy.

In "Womans Constancy," for example, Donne dramatizes the capricious character of a changeable self. The speaker argues that each day brings a new identity freed from yesterday's responsibilities. In such a world of variable selves and short-lived relationships, oaths and vows are invalidated by time, "So lovers contracts . . . / Binde but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose" (9-10). What is also evident is that such changeability brings with it personal advantages. After all, it is "purpos'd change" (12) for "[one's] owne end to Justifie" (11). Then, one "can have no way but falsehood to be true" (13). For the libertine, to be true and constant is to be committed to one's will and desires. The libertine ethics of self-interest and instant gratification plainly undermines the honor-bound structure of society and Elizabeth's personal

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prescriptions for her courtiers. Donne illustrates the subversiveness of naturalistic thought through the creation of a changeable self and demonstrates that the inconstant lover is ultimately a "false" and unreliable subject.

Where "Womans Constancy" suggests the transgressive implications of a changeable sense of self, "Communitie" intimates that the libertine's sexual ethics and his vision of a naturalistic sexual freedom undermine the moral fabric of society. The speaker dons a mask of virtue and apparently conforms to the general principles of acceptable morality:

Good wee must love, and must hate ill,  
For ill is ill, and good good still....

(1-2)

He then goes on to argue for men's sexual freedom based on Stoic principles of indifference, moral reasoning, and the ideal of harmonious living in accordance with nature's laws. Sexual pleasure falls under the Stoic category of "indifferent" morality, and hence does not deserve condemnation nor praise.<sup>20</sup> Since nature makes women "indifferent," male promiscuity is justified because they are not "good" enough to merit love and fidelity, nor "evil" enough to hate. Thus Donne's persona argues, "All, all may use" (12). The reasoning appears to focus on the moral worth of women, but in fact it is an argument for men's predatory consumption of women.

In the next stanza, the speaker imagines a sexual banquet where men are the privileged guests. He declares that women "are ours as fruits are ours" (19).

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But he professes not to advocate promiscuity but indifference:

He that but tastes, he that devours,  
And he which leaves all, doth as well....

(20-21)

Yet the food metaphor belies this supposed male prerogative: more than enticing treats, women represent essential sustenance. Sexual conquests are thus necessary for libertine existence. Indifference as such is not so much a disinterest in women but rather the unfeeling treatment of the female sex. Donne illustrates that behind all the libertine's philosophical and ethical rationalizations, his sexual will is entirely self-justified.

The lyric portrays a world driven by male predatory appetites, where the only communal ties were amongst men and based on their common sexual treatment of women. Such appetites are anarchic when they destroy all kinds of bonding based on service and allegiance. Donne intimates the political dimension of sexual license in this poem when he presents a libertine version of the Stoic conception of a community based on the individual. But unlike the Stoic ideal of a community of judicious men, where actions are determined by the individual's moral reasoning, the speaker in this poem argues for an individualism based on the sexual prerogative of each man. The speaker in fact rewrites *adiaphora*, the Stoic state of indifference, which requires the rejection of sensual indulgence and passion. For the libertine to achieve true freedom and harmony with nature, *adiaphora* turns into the state of moral indifference

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where male sexual license reigns.

Donne effectively employs the naturalistic delineation of appetitive human nature to create a masterful "I" that counters the prescriptions of the ideal Elizabethan courtier. The virgin queen enjoyed playing the role of the pristine and superior Petrarchan mistress who, according to Bacon, "allows of amorous admiration but prohibits desire."<sup>21</sup> Not only did she forbid unsanctioned desire towards herself, but she also wanted to control the sexual attentions of her courtiers towards other women. Marotti observes that "the Queen's reaction to the sexual misdeeds or the unapproved marriages of courtiers like Leicester, Raleigh, Southhampton, and Pembroke was to punish masculine assertiveness as a violation of her social prescriptions, which required subservient passive-aggressive posturing and patient devoted service."<sup>22</sup> Essex was one courtier who rebelled against such prescriptions and, more vehemently, against the queen's tight control over grants of honors as rewards for political service. He was part of what Stone notices as the new generation of young rebellious rakes that emerged in the 1580s and 1590s.<sup>23</sup> The earl's rhetoric of honor proclaimed the *noblesse d'épée* code of assertive autonomy in opposition to the humanistic idea of honor as state service, the *noblesse de robe* that the faction of Cecils exemplified at court.<sup>24</sup> Donne, who might have written some of his libertine elegies while he was under the service of Essex, showed sympathy for the earl's cause. Like Essex, the poet was

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ambitions and discontented with the court of the 1590s. Donne must have been only too aware that his description of a "community" based on aggressive male sexuality in the poem violates the ideal of a male community centered on chivalric service to the queen. In supplanting the Elizabethan courtly code of honor, the radical will of the libertine threatens the royal fount of honor and the chaste reign of Elizabeth.

Donne also exploits the market values of profit and consumption to undermine Platonic constancy and the Elizabethan code of honor, and at the same time create a rhetoric of self-aggrandizement. "Loves Progress" and "Loves Usury" illustrate how the libertine cunningly carves out a new position of authority by introducing the power dynamics of the marketplace to the Petrarchan world of courtship and love. The libertine assumes the role of the Petrarchan so he can slyly manipulate the terms of service to his advantage. In "Loves Progress," the speaker recommends a mercantile approach to courtship. Beginning with his proposed "right true end of love" (2), he challenges conventional attitudes and values, then redefines love and women according to the doctrine of "use," and hence sets up a definitive approach to seduction. Women, he asserts, are valuable like gold because, "'tis made / By our new Nature, use, the soule of trade" (15-16). The "use" in the metaphor of consumption in "Communitie" acquires the merit of commercial pragmatism here. Donne pushes the materialistic bent of libertinism to its extreme as he

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turns the prevailing poetic love discourse inside out. The speaker outrageously reduces women to their "Centrique part" and exhorts that body part as the "right true end of love"--not marriage as the pun on "propose" implies. Instead of the Platonic stair of love alluded in the title, the libertine's "progress" is a trading voyage where the male traverses the female body to obtain "gold."<sup>25</sup> Sexual gain is profit in this extended metaphor, and the metaphor of colonization in the elegy illustrates that pleasure for the libertine is not derived from equal exchange, but from conquest and exploitation.

The mercantile vocabulary dramatizes the libertine's ability to transform an unequal power relationship into a profitable one. For the libertine, the position of subservience is but a scheme to obtain personal gain. In his world of shifting alliances, there is no genuine loyalty; therefore, the libertine's kiss of the hand, "th'Imperiall knee" (83), or "the Papall foote" (84) does not signal fealty or obedience. Donne's speaker praises "Rich Nature" for enriching women with "two purses" (91-92), but "They then which to the lower tribute owe / That way which that exchequer lookes must goe" (93-94). Tribute, a fundamental part of Petrarchan courtship, turns into a way for the libertine to grab the "gold" in the quickest way possible. The libertine's sexual practice is an "art" because it manipulates the courtly dynamics and codes of Petrarchan politics and courtship. It does so by injecting the market principles of use, consumption, and pragmatism into the court's hierarchical relations of power.

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And finally it is also the art of "pragmatic" self-fashioning that helps him to achieve sexual mastery and control.

Freedom is the prerequisite to any kind of authority, and in "Loves Usury," the libertine speaker uses the marketplace of bargaining, contract negotiation, and exchange to liberate him from the conventional bondage of the Petrarchan lover. Donne introduces a rhetorical context that parodies the typical Petrarchan love plea to Cupid. But the cunning and impudent libertine described in the poem refuses to accept the dictates of the god of love, here simply called "Love." This wily "supplicant" depicts Love as a mean tyrant who "covet[s]" his "shame, or paine" (19). But with the commercial rhetoric of profit, he slyly transforms the feudalistic bond of service implied in the absolute reign of Love into a negotiable market contract. In the process he wittily presents a world of self-interest and profit, where even the god of love is interested in a good bargain. To this "Usurious God of Love" he offers the freedom in his old age in return for present pleasures at the "high" interest rate of one year to twenty years. The market model of profit turns the feudalistic structure of service and allegiance topsy-turvy in the poem. When he declares, "Love, I submit to thee" (22), the pledge of allegiance turns into a bargaining chip for power and one's own interest. Like the libertine's "art" in "Loves Progress," the pose of subservience is entirely opportunistic. In fact, the speaker's bid for freedom is itself a refusal to accept Love's present conditions.



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If Love rules the world of "Loves Usury," the libertine nevertheless aggressively asserts his autonomy.

In Donne's libertine lyrics, the pursuit of sexual variety and freedom is but an expression of a masterful will. He transforms the naturalistic argument of a sexuality determined by nature into a sexuality liberated by personal will. Lyrics such as "Change," "Womans Constancy," and "Loves Diet" illustrate that the libertine's inconstancy is really a deliberate and often capricious desire for change--in sexual partners or in the conditions of his world. This desire stems from the drive to improve his situation, and it can be a response to external sources of change, such as the potentially unfaithful mistresses of "Womans Constancy" and "Change." But "Loves Diet" proves that the catalyst to wilful change cannot be separated from the libertine's need for self-sufficiency and control--over both himself and others. In essence, wilful change is his way to counteract nature's law of change. It is also his means of control and autonomy, as we shall see in "Loves Diet." The poem depicts libertinism as an act of will that actually goes against the speaker's instincts.

"Loves Diet" shows how the speaker effectively transforms himself from a Petrarchan lover to a libertine. He brags of how he weans himself from "a combersome unwieldinesse / And burdenous corpulence" (1-2). Donne humorously associates Petrarchan love with overindulgence and libertinism with self-discipline. But his descriptions go beyond a witty inversion of conventional

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understanding of libertinism and Petrarchanism. Donne introduces a psychological complexity to the libertine: the speaker's libertinism is not driven by sensual appetites but his desire for an invulnerable self-possession. The "Loves diet" presented here essentially starves whatever affection nourishes the relationship the speaker has with his mistress because he wilfully interprets her sighs and tears as "counterfeit," and he censors his own declarations of love. This self-imposed discipline, as the last stanza reveals, serves to sharpen his predatory sexual will:

Thus I reclaim'd my buzard love, to flye  
At what, and when, and how, and where I chuse;  
Now negligent of sport I lye,  
And now as other Fawknrs use,  
I spring a mistresse, sweare, write, sigh and weepe:  
And the game kill'd, or lost, goe talke, and sleepe.

(25-30)

The speaker turns the emotions typically associated with a Petrarchan lover--including sighing and weeping--into a calculated pose to procure a mistress. "Love," as this stanza reveals, is not the Petrarchan adoration and devotion for a mistress, but the libertine's "sport" of sexual conquest. As Patricia Garland Pinka points out, this is a "self-styled heroic utterance," where the speaker seems to be boasting about how he regains dominance in the game of love.<sup>26</sup> Libertinism, as Donne illustrates in this poem, is not about sexual instincts. In fact, the libertine's sexual desires are carefully cultivated by the will and, paradoxically, the product of self-denial.

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The real reason behind the speaker's rejection of Petrarchan love is not his professed belief in rationality, self-possession, and "discretion"--the antithesis to excessive Petrarchan ardor. Instead, it is a refusal to adopt the position of subservience and impotence. When he complains, "what doth it availe, / To be the fortieth name in an entaile?" (23-24), the problem with the speaker's situation becomes clear. The woman is an estate that he has little chance of possessing. At the same time, he is jealous of the other admirers of his mistress, and he is clearly terrified of his emotional vulnerability. If he regains his libertine indifference and predatory passions, he also recovers his freedom and self-control.

The poem describes the process of constructing a libertine self-identity, but the description is also part of that process since it serves to confirm the speaker's reclaimed powers. His announcement of an indifference to the success of his "game"--he will "goe talke, and sleepe"--is in fact a recursive reference to the poem itself. The verbal performance becomes almost like a talking cure: a way for the speaker to assert and convince himself of his self-possession and sexual prowess. If he does not succeed in getting his "game," he can "talk" himself into a superior indifference as he is doing now. The libertine identity--the rakish sexuality, masterful self-possession, and carefree nonchalance--is the supreme art of rhetorical construction.

Donne's libertine rhetoric treats identity as a malleable construct in the

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libertine's defiant individualism. Where "Loves Diet" depicts the recent transformation of the inconstant "I," other poems portray the mercurial self who delights in theatrical performances and enjoys adopting different poses and masks. As we have seen earlier, "Loves Diet" and "Loves Progress" illustrate how the libertine adopts the Petrarchan pose to his advantage. The speaker of "Loves Usury" plays various roles: a shrewd bargainer in the opening stanza, a dreamer of libertine fantasies in the second, and Love's willing subject in the final stanza. Donne's libertine poet-lover demonstrates wit and rhetorical mastery with his different poses, and he exerts control of his listeners by manipulating their expectations.

The previous chapter has already mentioned that the discursive aspect of seventeenth-century libertinism points to a growing individualism. Stone perceives a development of private subjectivity from mid-sixteenth century to seventeenth century in England.<sup>27</sup> He concludes that the new market society and its social mobility, along with the Puritan focus on individual conscience and introspection, contributed to a new sense of self in late Elizabethan England. In the literature of the period, Hugh Richmond detects a "heightening of private subjective awareness throughout the Renaissance." He discerns a shift from a "medieval behaviorist view of personality, as defined by cosmology, social pressures, and psychosomatic factors" to a "purely volitional" personality. Greenblatt's analysis of various writers in sixteenth-century England suggests

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that there was "an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process."<sup>28</sup> Donne's libertine speaker, with his calculated self-presentations and sense of an inconstant self, is the ultimate embodiment of self-fashioning. This new poet-lover as such testifies to the literary trend towards a new psychological complexity and to the period's growing individualism.

### **Libertine Sexuality as Rhetorical Display**

Donne's characterization of sexuality as rhetorical display reveals personal and communal dimensions to libertine sexuality. The articulation of desire that displays the self introduces an individualizing character to sexuality, as we shall see in "To his Mistress Going to Bed." At the same time, the discursive nature of libertine sexuality pushes the personal and private into the public arena of shared male enjoyment for the speaker and his fellow libertines. The coterie context of Donne's lyrics noted by Marotti plays a critical role in the formulation of libertinism as rhetorical display. Donne's libertine lyrics turn the female body into an exhibit for male voyeurs, and in the process this

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practice of shared pleasures transforms the intimacy of personal sexuality into male sociability. The two aspects of libertine sexuality can be seen in the image of a sexual paradise. In the libertine's world where desire rules absolutely, the element of fantasy is necessary. Poems such as "Communitie" and "To his Mistris Going to Bed" portray an Edenic picture of unlimited and perfect sensual enjoyment, a male sexual fantasy that is meant to be shared with fellow libertines. Besides fostering male bonding, the speaker also creates an opportunity to boast of his sexual mastery, as does the libertine of "Loves Progress" who vaunts his special art of seduction. The libertine's vision of sexual freedom, however, goes beyond idle male fantasizing. Its naturalistic conception of society, nature, and human nature exploits the ideological significance of sexual desire in early modern England. As we shall see, the rhetorical character of libertine sexuality only intensifies the radical politics of libertinism.

"To his Mistris Going to Bed" is a good example of how the libertine turns his profession of desire for a woman into his self-display. Easthope notes that sexual passion remains at the rhetorical and metaphorical level in Donne's elegy, quite unlike in the poem's Ovidian model (*Amores* I.5), which recounts pleasures of the flesh.<sup>29</sup> For all the description and glorification of sexual pleasures, the poem stops short of portraying a sexual encounter. By the end of the elegy the woman remains clothed, and the love-making might not even

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have begun. In retrospect, the image of his roving hands is not an account of what is happening but part of the speaker's plea for "license." The sensual joys described are really only those of the libertine's imagination. But Donne's goal is not to undermine his persona--there is nothing in the elegy that suggests an imminent humiliation for the speaker.<sup>30</sup> The libertine's confident tone and manner right from the start of the poem indicate an implicit understanding of the nature of the encounter between the lovers, as is the case in Ovid's scenario. Donne is clearly more interested in describing the libertine's profession of desire and its significance than in portraying sexual gratification. He shows that what is important in libertine sexuality is not the intimacy between lovers nor even sensual enjoyment, but rather the display of a potent and masterful "I."

Donne alters the Ovidian model to create a commanding and authoritative poet-lover. If the "Madame" in question is at all like Ovid's Corinna, then she is the one who enters the speaker's room for a romantic rendezvous, which makes the speaker's persuasion for nakedness quite redundant.<sup>31</sup> His imperatives to the mistress to undress are part of an erotic but distinctly gendered game of domination and submission, particularly in the Elizabethan age where Petrarchan courtliness is expected in amorous rhetoric. The hyperbolic praises evoke the blazon conceits only to undercut the Petrarchan convention: instead of glorifying the mistress, they characterize the

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sexually available female body. Like other Petrarchan mistresses, the woman is likened to an "Angel"--but one that arouses and serves male sexual fantasy.

For the libertine, his experiences of power and pleasure come together in the sexual conquest of a woman. As seen in the above praises of his mistress, the exaltation of his lover and sensual joys serves to mystify the speaker's imperious sexual will. For example, his glorification of the woman's beauty is quickly followed by a territorial claim on her body:

Oh my America, my new found lande,  
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd,  
My myne of precious stones, my Empiree,  
How blest am I in this discovering thee.  
To enter in these bonds is to be free,  
Then where my hand is set my seal shall be.

(27-32)

His outburst expresses genuine delight; they extol sensual pleasure and the mistress' body. The preceding request for permission to explore her body is part of a seduction rhetoric that implies a Petrarchan hierarchy between the lovers. But it turns out to be another instance of how the speaker plays with courtship conventions. The "request" is in fact part of his list of imperative demands, and the license desired is not only to explore but also to conquer her body. As some critics point out, these lines suggest a sexual politics linked with the ideology of exploitation, colonization, and absolutism.<sup>32</sup> To the libertine, a declaration of adoration is really a celebration of his sexual conquest.

The rhetorical display of male potency acquires political resonance in



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the elegy,<sup>33</sup> particularly with Donne's portrayal of a paradisiacal state inscribed upon the female body. Without her gown, the woman "such beauteous state reveales, / As when from flowery meades th'hills shadow steales" (13-14). This pastoral comparison is another manipulation of courtly praise because it portrays "A heaven like Mahomets Paradise" (21)--the sensualist's heaven that promises unrestrained indulgence.<sup>34</sup> The speaker's later reference to the New World extends this image of a sexual Eden. At that time, America was commonly described in Edenic terms, and some literature portrayed it as a place "where no laws governed male sexual appetite and nudity and sexual license prevailed."<sup>35</sup> The elegy's image of a licentious Golden Age invokes the naturalistic principle that all human urges are good and therefore not to be restricted. It suggestively undermines the political rhetoric that celebrates Elizabeth as the goddess Astraea of Arcadian England. In the eulogies so prevalent after the defeat of the Armada (1588), the queen was "the transformer of her kingdom into 'a paradise on earth' or, at least, 'a gardein of no smale grace.'"<sup>36</sup> But by the time Donne penned this elegy, the queen's strong reign had declined in corruption and internal strife. Donne rewrites the nationalistic rhetoric in this picture of a sexual golden age, where it is the libertine speaker who transforms the female body into his kingdom of unlimited pleasures.

The libertine rhetoric of desire is clearly provocative, and in the speaker's discussion of carnal knowledge, Donne insinuates the blasphemous

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nature of a sexuality that reduces everything to sensual pleasures. Earlier the speaker cheekily informs his mistress about how men easily discriminate "Ill spirits" (22) from "heavens Angels" (19): the former "set[s] our haire," whereas the latter set "the flesh upright" (24). In the libertine's world, distinctions of good and evil are known in terms of male sexual arousal. Some critics perceive that the poem depicts a physical love that embraces spirituality and equality.<sup>37</sup> But as we shall see, the libertine's conception of sexuality reduces women and all values to their sexual relevance. When the speaker refers to the transcendental joys of "soules unbodied," he appears to add a more profound and elevating dimension to sensual gratification. But Clay Hunt's excellent interpretation illustrates that the elegy offers "a pseudo-theological validation for nakedness and lust"--an argument that parodies both Platonic and Christian thought.<sup>38</sup> In Christian doctrine, true bliss awaits only "till our Soules be unapparrelled / Of bodies" (43-44), as Donne tells us in Satyre I. Unlike the exaltation of devotion and the postponement of bliss and reward in Platonic love and Christian faith, libertinism insists on instant gratification and promotes sexual pleasures as the ultimate bliss on earth. Donne employs transcendental allusions only to accentuate the libertine's reductive materialism. For all his elevated argument for the "imputed grace" of the female body, the speaker ultimately asks the woman to show her body to him, "As liberally as to a midwife" (44). But this analogy discloses that he is not so much interested in

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her grace as her genitals. To the libertine, as "Loves Progress" has already suggested, a woman is but her "Centrique part." This impersonal touch characterizes their relationship. Unlike Ovid's account, the woman remains the unnamed "Madame" throughout the elegy--another suggestion of a casual sexual encounter that is devoid of any true emotional intimacy, let alone any kind of spiritual bonding.

The speaker's brazen self-exhibition is the perfect conclusion to his masculine discourse of sexual prowess and superiority:

To teach thee, I am naked first: Why than  
What need'st thou have more covering than a man.

(47-48)

The libertine is the teacher and literally above the woman when he sexually "covers" her. His display of nakedness does not bare his vulnerable self. The disrobing of the woman, on the other hand, is another matter. Unlike Ovid's account, Donne introduces a social dimension to the love tryst with the speaker's address of his lover as "Madame" and his descriptions of her affluence--the "spangled brest-plate" and "coronet" appear to indicate a lady of high rank.<sup>39</sup> Stripping the woman of her clothes would then symbolically take away her social distinction and demolish the social and courtly relations between a Petrarchan mistress and her "servant." The libertine, however, does not erode social ranking to present the equality of reciprocal love. Instead, as Guibbory discerns, he replaces the social hierarchy of Petrarchism with the

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period's gender hierarchy: the man on top, the woman "one man man'd".<sup>40</sup>

The masculine and narcissistic version of Edenic bliss in "To his Mistris Going to Bed," "Loves Progress," and "Communitie" exalts the libertine's personal will and desire. Donne's libertine never express a real desire for equal sexual freedom for the two sexes. Recent scholars agree that the language of Petrarchan love reveals a subtext of personal ambition in Elizabethan England.<sup>41</sup> With his aggressive libertine persona, Donne strips bare the veiled ambition in the lyric tradition of male desire. Imagery of mining and imperialism in Donne's lyrics aggrandizes the libertine's sexual mastery. "To his Mistris Going to Bed" demonstrates that the libertine's lust is also a yearning for political, economic, and social power. In another poem, "Loves Usury," the speaker imagines a sexual prowess that is renown in country, city, and court (15-16). More than sensual excesses, however, his vision describes a world for his taking.

Earl Miner calls metaphysical poetry a "private mode," but this does not apply to Donne's libertine lyrics. The theatrical playful "I" of the libertine lyrics is the social self that flourishes before an audience. He tests and defines himself in the strife for power--quite unlike the private self that retreats from society in Donne's later love and religious poetry. The social and power-hungry poet-lover of Donne's libertine lyrics correlates to a time when the poet himself was ambitious enough to expect very much for himself. At that time, he was a

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young man with an elite education, a wealthy gentry background, and a reputation for poetic genius. He had yet to face the later difficulties of poverty and repeated obstacles to court preferment. It is only during this period that Donne was attracted to the libertine paradigm of an exhibitionistic self that finds authority and freedom in power struggle. His readers, equally young and ambitious, must also have found the libertine "solution" to mutability appealing.

The coterie context of Donne's libertine lyrics, as mentioned earlier, shows itself in the rhetorical contexts of the poems. As we have seen in "Communitie," "Loves Progress," and "To his Mistris Going to Bed," the rhetoric of libertine desire establishes a male solidarity between the speaker and his like-minded audience. For example, the speaker of "To his Mistris Going to Bed" invokes a masculine "we" that stands in opposition to "you women" (35) in his argument for nakedness. Chapter One has already mentioned that the female body is a discursive subject for male enjoyment in libertine poems. Unlike Petrarchan courtly lyrics, Donne's libertine rhetoric often promotes male superiority and at times feeds misogynistic impulses, as seen in "Communitie." Not surprisingly, the male bonding implied in Donne's libertine lyrics excludes male Petrarchan lovers. The speaker of "To his Mistris Going to Bed" disdains courtly lovers--"fools" and ignorant "laymen" who cannot delight in female nakedness as he and other libertines can. "Loves Progress" also presents a similar fellowship amongst libertines when he declares the superiority of those

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who "practice [his] art" (73) over deluded Petrarchan lovers. Not only does Donne's rhetoric of desire propound the radical individualism of the libertine, it also fosters a male sociability based on denigrating prevailing courtly mores.

The function of male sociability in Donne's libertine lyrics influences his depiction of libertinism, as we shall see in "Confined Love." Although the poem introduces a feminine perspective of libertinism, there is nevertheless the same appeal to a male audience like that seen in the other libertine lyrics.

"Confined Love" presents a female speaker who criticizes the social and sexual subjugation of married women. Although the lyric examines gender ideology in the libertine framework,<sup>42</sup> it does not seriously champion women's sexual freedom. For example, the naturalistic argument that compares women to heavenly bodies, birds, and beasts implies that sexual promiscuity finally reduces women to beasts, the lowest on the hierarchy of beings.<sup>43</sup> Women are possessions of men--as ships or houses--and their function is determined by their owners. Men are the ones who have the choice of being "greedy" or "generous" with their women. The female speaker's argument also reminds us of the predatory conception of male sexual "use" of women that we have seen earlier in "Communitie" and "Loves Progress." According to Andreasen, the notion of use implicit in the third stanza echoes Ovid's idea of use in the *Amores* 1.8, where it is part of a defense of prostitution.<sup>44</sup> Given the coterie context of Donne's writings, the female impersonation that sanctions a male

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fantasy of sexual indulgence and affirms the myth of female sexual rapaciousness must appeal to young men who complain about female honor and jealous husbands.

In presenting the libertine's rhetorical display of desire rather than depicting his sexual performance, Donne formulates libertinism in terms of the libertine's will and rhetorical self-fashioning, where the speaker asserts and even creates his desires, identity, and sexual practice in a self-conscious oratorical performance. The libertine's fantasy of a sexual paradise and his rhetorical creation of a libertine identity illustrate the rakish imagination and rhetoric, but Donne's poems stop short of portraying the speaker's *experience* of sexual license or Edenic bliss. In other words, libertinism remains at the rhetorical level. The speakers of "Communitie" and "Loves Progress" deliver lectures on libertine principles; "To his Mistris Going to Bed" and "Loves Diet" focus on the poet-lover's sexual will; and the speaker of "Loves Usury" dreams more of libertinism than practices it. The rhetorical nature of Donne's lyrics is so remarkable that some critics would go so far as to interpret the speaker's rhetoric as a solipsistic address to himself.<sup>45</sup> In the end the rhetorical dimension of libertine sexuality suggests that the libertine's claim to sexual mastery and freedom is like the self-presentation of libertine invulnerability and control in "Loves Diet"--a rhetorical construct.

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### **Libertinism as Experience of Precariousness**

Libertinism as depicted in Donne's lyrics concentrates on the rhetorical shaping of a defiant and wilful personality. But the rhetorical nature of libertinism suggests certain problems with the nature of the libertine's sexual freedom and mastery. Donne's depiction of libertine subjectivity is complex and subtle. His libertine lyrics portray displaced anxiety and compensatory pleasures as Marotti argues, but they also exhibit the processes and difficulties of acquiring an authoritative self.<sup>46</sup> Donne paints a sensitive psychological portrait of the inconstant and masked self; he probes the motivations, foundations, and means of its radical individualism. As we shall see, the new commercialization of society, the preoccupation with decay in seventeenth-century England, the period's incipient scientific language of exploration and dissection, and along with it, an innovative approach to change--these historical factors, in addition to Donne's own personal experience of social precariousness, suggest that his construction of the libertine "I" is an imaginative exploration of the ontological basis of selfhood and the ideological and political significance of radical individualism in late Elizabethan society.

The previous chapter has already touched on the pervasive perception of a world in chaos and degeneration. Herschel Baker, observes that there was a "poignant Elizabethan obsession with corroding time."<sup>47</sup> Donne's writings clearly manifest the period's preoccupation with mutability. The theme of



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mutability surfaces in his problems and paradoxes, such as "Problem V: Why dye none for love now?" and the paradox commonly attributed to him, "A Defence of Women's Inconstancy." Anti-Petrarchan lyrics and Ovidian elegies like "Song: Goe, and catche a falling starre" and "[Tutelage]" depict short-lived relationships, feckless lovers, and a world in constant flux, where nothing is stable or absolute. Donne's love lyrics show that love and relationships are threatened by change and external forces, even when the lovers are faithful to each other. "Song: Sweetest love, I do not goe," "A Valediction: of my Name, in the Window," "A Lecture upon the Shadow," "The Expiration," "The Relique," and "The Dissolution" portray partings, death, and fear of changes. Donne's libertine lyrics also grapple with time and change in their arguments for sexual license. Mutability, as we have seen, is projected upon the female other.<sup>48</sup> "The Indifferent" and "Womans Constancy" suggest that women have the ability to destroy the libertine's sense of invulnerability and mastery. In the two poems, the libertine stance is simultaneously an excuse to leave a mistress and a defensive response to her demands and power. Donne shows that behind the libertine's mask of aggressive superiority is a fragile male ego.

The libertine argument for freedom and sexual promiscuity in Donne's libertine lyrics is driven by the fear that love brings a loss of control and autonomy. Hence the speaker of "Loves Diet" has to extricate himself from his amorous yearnings and treat relationships as a casual game. "The Indifferent"

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also stresses the importance of emotional detachment and sexual variety. This poem recalls Ovid's *Amores* II.4, where the speaker claims he can love any type of woman.<sup>49</sup> Donne's persona declares a love for all women, with no discrimination of looks, background, or character. The only caveat to his "indifference" is that "she be not true" (9). Donne immediately brings out the irony of the title: libertinism is not a stance of indifference but a strong aversion to constancy, as the rest of the poem demonstrates. The speaker is so antagonistic to sexual monogamy that the next stanza finds him in a mock interrogation and denunciation of faithful women.

Under the naturalistic order, sexual freedom is not immoral, whereas constancy is an artificial imposition--a "vice." The title of "The Indifferent" also suggests the same philosophical argument for male sexual liberty. For the libertine, indifference manifests the ethical ideals of detachment and objectivity, and constancy represents passionate excess and enslavement.<sup>50</sup> The speaker presents a libertine world where sexual variety is the standard, so faithfulness is a woman's perversion "invented" to torment her lover. His professed love of all women in the first stanza now turns into a misogynistic perception of women as the antagonistic sexual other. As the corrupted sex, women indulge in various vices to "serve [their] turn" (11). For the libertine, all relationships are seen in terms of a struggle for power and control, and self-interest rules supreme. This is unmistakable when a specific mistress appears to be the target

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of his present wrath:

Let mee and doe you, twenty know.  
Rob mee, but binde me not, and let me goe.  
Must I, who came to travaile thorow you,  
Grow your fixt subject, because you are true?

(15-18)

In this scenario, constancy is but a woman's scheme to subjugate her lover.

Donne wittily suggests that the Petrarchan courtships played out at the Elizabethan court constitute a "new" and artificial trend. At the same time he underlines the coercive Petrarchan politics behind a sovereign's demand that courtiers declare themselves as her "fixt subject[s]." Guibbory points out that male courtiers' discontent with a female monarch often heightened misogynistic sentiments in all-male coteries.<sup>51</sup> Certainly Donne links his persona's implied rejection of Petrarchan love politics with a misogynistic attitude in this poem. Declaring his libertinism is the speaker's way of insisting on his independence and freedom.

The speaker's plea to a higher authority wittily invokes Petrarchan conventions, but it also reveals his vulnerability, especially to the mistress in question.<sup>52</sup> Just as the libertine of "Loves Usury" turns to Love for his sexual freedom, the speaker here complains to Venus. In the poem's libertine world, Venus becomes a champion of "Loves sweetest Part, Variety" (20), and she executes justice for libertines. But the speaker's need for appeal betrays a fear of women and of falling in love.<sup>53</sup> Like "Loves Diet," "Loves Usury" is

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another oratorical display constructed to bolster a libertine stance that is undermined by a particular mistress. At first the speaker appears to be delivering a public address to listeners that include women, but later he seems to be addressing a specific mistress. In the final stanza, Donne finally gives us the dramatic context of the speaker "[sighing] this song" to Venus (19). This means that the libertine's outrageous challenge of women in general and of his mistress specifically is but an address to a sympathetic authority, which is here reported to what is likely another supportive audience. In this rhetorical construction of the libertine's authority, he wields absolute control. However, it also betrays the intimidating authority of his mistress. After all, she is the catalyst behind the speaker's need to affirm his libertine identity through oral pyrotechnics.

Where "The Indifferent" shows how the constant woman endangers the libertine's independence, "Womans Constancy" demonstrates the male anxiety about a mistress who will leave him. The dramatic situation is unclear here, and Thomas O. Sloane and others argue that the speaker can be either male or female.<sup>54</sup> But given the aggressive and condescending tone, Donne's persona sounds more like the other male libertine speakers than the female speakers of "Confined Love" and "Breake of Day."<sup>55</sup> The speaker initially appears to be a Petrarchan lover accusing his mistress of "falsehood" (11) and broken vows. The twist stems from his attribution of libertine reasoning to the mistress. His

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entire speech is based on the conviction that she will leave him tomorrow. He imagines what she will say to justify her departure and her rejection of him.

In the last stanza, the speaker gets so caught up in the imagined scenario, he bursts out:

Vaine lunatique, against these scapes I could  
Dispute, and conquer, if I would,  
Which I abstaine to doe,  
For by to morrow, I may thinke so too.

(14-17)

The above reversal, in addition to the speaker's censuring and patronizing ways, shows that he is no pining Petrarchan lover. In the end he reveals himself to be the inconstant self who changes with the passing of time. Nothing is absolute in the libertine's world of temporality, so he acknowledges that his stance might change like his mistress. But the implied play for the upper hand suggests a more complex situation. As we have seen, his will to conquer matches the pursuit of self-interest that he sees in his mistress. The speaker's boast of a superior wit and a unique self-restraint acquires an ironic edge in the context that he is the one who initiates a confrontation and who accuses his mistress of infidelity *before* she tells him of a desire to end the relationship.<sup>56</sup> Given the vague dramatic situation, the speaker's motivation can be interpreted in two ways.<sup>57</sup> By denouncing his mistress before she can leave him, he circumvents the possibility of being rejected and hides his vulnerability by first declaring his indifference. The argument then becomes a defensive mask that

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conceals his insecurities and paranoia. Another interpretation is that the speaker imagines his mistress' imminent departure, just as he imagines how she would defend her inconstancy. In this case, the speaker's argument is a wily tactic to end the relationship. It is then a strategy more brilliant than his partner's "scapes." Nevertheless, the same fears propel the two scenarios because the speaker is afraid of losing command of the situation and of being the one who is left behind.

"The Indifferent" and "Womans Constancy" demonstrate that both constant and inconstant mistresses challenge the libertine's sense of self and control. "Change" explicitly traces the libertine's anxiety to women's elusive nature. The lyric begins with the speaker's misgivings about his mistress' declaration of love. He indirectly explains why he "fears" her by expounding on the nature of female sexuality. His naturalistic argument alludes to the old myth about women's insatiable sexual appetites:

Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please,  
Shall women, more hot, wily, wild than these,  
Be bound to one man, and did Nature then  
Idly make them apter to'endure than men?

(11-14)

In the speaker's lecture on female sexuality, he no longer appears to be addressing his mistress. Now he seems to be a libertine imparting his professed expertise on women's appetites to a sympathetic male audience.<sup>58</sup> "Women," he tells his listener(s), "are made for men, not him, nor mee" (10). His

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naturalistic argument ostensibly champions sexual license for women, but it also takes for granted the same freedom for his own sex. Constancy to a woman is envisioned as imprisonment, and men, like their female counterparts, cannot "endure" constancy.

Despite his argument for sexual liberty, the speaker reveals a deep-seated fear of female sexual desires and freedom. The promiscuous mistress in Donne's libertine lyrics, however, undermines the libertine's sense of sexual prowess. She is his mirror image--equally in pursuit of freedom and similarly resistant to external control. If the libertine assumes women to resemble himself, it is not surprising then that he believes that they will dominate and control him if he does not gain the upper hand. Women "are our clogges," the speaker tells his audience. The "us" against "them" tells of the wide divide between the sexes, also evident in the contrast between the male bonding and the speaker's distrust of his mistress. (What is feared is not another "fouler" catching one's own prey by "using ... [the same] meanes" (8) but female treachery.) The speaker appears to recognize and respect women's amazing sexual vigor, but the imagery presented in the poem indicates an underlying male sexual anxiety. In "Loves Progress," the woman's body is a terrain of hyperbolic dangers. Female sexual force--"beauties elements" (90) that can ensnare a man--must be conquered by rendering the mistress faceless and generic, and finally, reduced to her genitals.<sup>59</sup> In "Change," the speaker

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similarly degrades women to the same body part. But his description of an immense female vagina also indicates that female sexual capacity inhibits the libertine's sexual prowess and takes away his sense of mastery.

The speaker conceals his fears and asserts control by portraying female sexuality in deterministic terms and making it serve male lust. "Made for men," women are "prized" only if carnally "known" by men. From their sexual availability to their bestial desire for sexual variety, the speaker describes women as enslaved by their "nature," even as they are preys to men's desires. In a similar way, he undermines female sexual prowess by portraying women in terms of images that emphasize passivity: a ship galley that accepts men, a plow-land that welcomes corn seeds, the ocean that receives rivers.<sup>60</sup> By reducing the vagina to a mere receptacle for semen, the libertine rhetorically limits and commands female sexual prowess.

In the deterministic framework of woman's sexual nature, the mistress' affections mean little despite the "confirmation" of her love:

By nature, which gave it, this liberty  
Thou lov'st, but Oh! canst thou love it and mee?  
Likenesse glues love: Then if soe thou so doe,  
To make us like and love, must I change too?

(21-24)

The speaker's challenge of his mistress' "love" of promiscuity appears to be entirely based on the foregoing argument and sharply contradicts the earlier report of her devotion "which nothing should undo" (2). He now positions



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himself as the polar opposite of female licentiousness, someone who abhors "change" more than his mistress and his male audience. The speaker proposes a solution:

rather let mee  
Allow her change, than change as oft as shee,  
And soe not teach, but force my'opinion  
To love not any one, nor every one.

(25-28)

Unlike the deterministic naturalism ascribed to female sexuality, the speaker's libertinism is an assertion of his own free will and ultimately linked to his need to take control of his relationship with a woman. He will "allow" his mistress to change--although according to his argument, her wantonness is an inevitable fact. The speaker in turn subscribes to a deliberate sexual practice that is superior to women's rampant sexuality. According to William Rockett, this practice proposes the ethical *via media* of Epicurean thought. The river image represents "movement, renewal, and deliberateness"; it embodies the "process and selection" of moderation.<sup>61</sup> The speaker's proposed libertinism does not "stagnate" like constancy, but it is also purposeful and honorable because he limits himself to one woman at a time. Hence his "love" will be more discriminating than the "wild roguery" of women's promiscuity. In this argument, the speaker wittily converts libertinism into an ethical stance, which he maintains is a practice of restraint and moderation.

"Change" is a speech constructed as a negation and rejection of the

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mistress' declaration of love. As in "Womans Constancy," the speaker's entire rhetoric is prompted by the fear of his mistress' future infidelity. His paranoia suggests an apprehension about the relationship, but also a fear of whatever feelings he may have for her. In the end the argument is an exercise in male bravado and power negotiations. The address to his mistress may in fact be imaginary and part of an oratorical act presented to an understanding male audience.<sup>62</sup> In this situation, the monologue is a display of wit in making it seem that it is the mistress' own uncontrollable lust that forces him to embark on this new sexual practice. To his mistress, he plays the role of the constant lover, but the entire scenario with his mistress dramatizes his one-upmanship. To his male listener, he always expresses libertine sentiments. At the end of the elegy when he glorifies sexual variety and nature's mutability, he is not shifting his stance but merely reaffirming his libertine beliefs.

The poem ends on the paradox of inconstancy: "Change'is the nursery / Of musicke, joy, life, and eternity!" (35-36). Rockett argues that Donne's conception of change in the elegy adopts the Epicurean immersion in nature's mutability and its principle of careful judgment (68). But the speaker appears to invoke two different interpretations of nature's law of change: a deterministic nature that dictates women's sexual inconstancy and a liberating principle of change that creates opportunities for the speaker and ultimately justifies his libertinism. His sexual practice of change will be voluntary and deliberate,

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unlike female sexuality. By applying different laws of nature to male and female sexuality, the speaker frees himself from the deterministic law of nature.

The speaker's positive approach to change, where it is liberating, optimistic, and empowering, looks forward to Bacon's conception of change as progress. Like Bacon's belief in human will and power to shape and control his environment and future, the speaker's rhetoric constructs a similar kind of command over his own nature and destiny. The celebration of change in the elegy counters the prevailing deterministic and negative conception of mutability. Low contends that Donne's songs and sonnets reveal the modern and scientific approach that Bacon propounds later on. They often present a Baconian rhetoric that emphasizes exploitation and mastery of nature, as well as a pragmatic and analytical treatment of the subject at hand. Low believes that "Donne was among the first to develop and give expression to the innovative ways of thinking that were beginning to form the cultural opening and the conceptual basis of the 'New Science.'"<sup>63</sup> Certainly, as Low points out, Donne was familiar with and interested in the latest scientific developments. Charles Monroe Coffin's study of Donne and the "new philosophy" concludes that the poet was "a champion of the scientific revolution and regarded the extension of the bounds of human empire as the reasonable grounds for a universal optimism."<sup>64</sup>

Donne might be receptive to new and progressive approaches to human

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nature and the environment, but the libertine lyrics that portray mutability as empowering also register a sense of precariousness and anxiety. At the time when Donne was most open to different and radical ideas like Epicureanism and naturalism, he was also looking for a sense of identity. According to Bald, Donne's years at Lincoln Inn indicate a phase of "restless intellectual curiosity" as "he was in the process of finding himself."<sup>65</sup> It was during this period that the poet re-examined his Catholic faith and background. ("Change" illustrates Donne's ability to toy with the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism.)<sup>66</sup> Coming from a Catholic and trading family background, in a time when an elite education at the Inns could not ensure a position at court, the ambitious Donne in search of a religious identity and court preferment must have experienced an acute sense of insecurity and precariousness. Marotti argues that libertine lyrics create an imaginary moment of freedom and power for a group of young men frustrated with their dependence on the court's system of preferment. Donne's libertine poems plainly manifest a defiant wit, but beyond furnishing momentary relief and entertainment, they also indicate a serious meditation on the problems of finding a stable and authoritative self in the face of displacement.

In the sexualized power dynamics between the libertine speaker and his mistress, Donne illustrates that even for the most wilful and controlling ego, the opportunity for command and freedom paradoxically intensifies fears of

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powerlessness. Donne illustrates the precariousness of the libertine's control by emphasizing the rhetorical nature of his pronouncements. To redraw society's values and terms according to his libertine vision, the poet-lover has to adopt many roles and poses. In "The Indifferent," the speaker plays several different dramatic roles: the liberal-minded lover who professes to love all kinds of women, the outrageous and mock-abusive speaker who accuses women of a new vice, the complaining lover who refuses to be his mistress' "fixt subject," the Petrarchan poet-lover sighing to the love god, and finally the complainant to Venus, his executor of libertine justice. "Change" and "The Indifferent" depict the libertine's performance within another performance--all so that he can stage a rhetorical triumph over the mistress. Poems such as "Womans Constancy," "Change," and "The Indifferent" reveal the speaker's rhetorical inconsistencies, as seen in his vacillations, the shifts in dramatic address, context, and argument. On the one hand, the inconsistencies rhetorically enact the principle of change and demonstrate the contrary nature of the libertine "I."<sup>67</sup> They also illustrate that the libertine's inconstancy appears to be the result of a capricious will, not nature's law of change. At the same time, the speaker exhibits his mastery in the rhetorical display and control of his listeners. But on the other hand, these contortions betray the lengths that the speaker has to go in order to assert his authority; in "Loves Diet" and "The Indifferent," the libertine even appears to be trying to convince himself of his

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own invulnerability.

Libertinism, as a self-protective response to the terrifying threat of change, relies on an aggressive will to acquire a sense of personal power. By instigating change himself, the libertine attains a degree of autonomy and freedom that he would not have otherwise. Through his will and rhetoric, he tries to change existing power dynamics to his advantage. But holding on to the libertine will is not easy--as witnessed in "Loves Diet." To fall in love or become a Petrarchan lover is to fall victim to the power struggle of sexual relationships. The libertine will secures the inconstant self in a world of shifting power dynamics. In order to hone that will, however, he must tame those emotions that make him lose his edge. Hence the libertine's glorification and cultivation of "indifference" in "Communitie," "The Indifference," "Womans Constancy," and "Loves Diet." In Donne's conception of inconstancy as such, it is paradoxically both solution and problem. The libertine's approach to nature's mutability grants new liberties and command. But this freedom exacts a vigilant self-control, even a cultivated callousness, and it is ultimately the experience of constant precariousness.

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### Donne's Libertine Lyrics: A Paradoxical Mode

A few critics like Andreasen and Lindsay A. Mann contend that Donne's libertine poems reveal a moral satirical purpose.<sup>68</sup> Donne, however, is fully aware of the provocative value of the Ovidian model and his libertine poems; hence his later attempt to collect all his early writings. His libertine lyrics would not have escaped censorship if they were published. Even in the more permissive Caroline reign, they were denied license for the posthumous 1633 edition. The outrageous and almost blasphemous content of Donne's libertine lyrics suggests the intent to shock an audience that delights in being shocked. J. B. Leishman understands Donne's exorbitant wit as intended and understood to be mischievous. "There is no point, no pleasure, in being naughty," he explains, "unless you *know* that you are being naughty."<sup>69</sup> The transgressiveness of the shocking in Donne's poetics primarily comes from overturning the expected and the orthodox, but not from reforming or replacing the existing value system and social structure. His defense of libertinism is clearly too brazen to be taken seriously, particularly since Donne enjoys creating outrageous premises and perverse reasoning. In "Communitie," any sense of "community" must be quickly destroyed by arbitrary and self-justified pleasures and self-interests. The speaker of "Change" argues for the distinction of male libertinism in the image of moving waters, but as other critics point out, the river must finally end up in the putrid sea of promiscuity.<sup>70</sup> "Confined

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Love" reveals that the argument for sexual freedom is but a defense for extreme indulgence, where "good" is "a thousand." In the end Donne's fascination with libertine thought does not demonstrate a commitment to libertine ideology nor an endorsement of tyrannical individualism.

To Donne, libertinism presents an individualistic poetic voice and a fascinating mode of self-fashioning for a young wit interested in role-playing. His libertine lyrics are more than mere intellectual or rhetorical exercises. In the context of the rakish lifestyle of students at the Inns, Donne's libertine lyrics display the construction and psychology of the gentleman's social self. By reexamining orthodox beliefs, he questions the poetic conventions and social values of his age. Donne's libertine poetics denounces the sterility of courtly love convention, its stilted decorum, and the hypocrisy that conceals the personal ambition beneath the complimentary and mannered style of Petrarchanism. It is also a criticism of the patronage politics encoded in the courtly mode.

Donne's verse paradoxes, such as "Loves Progress" and "Change," and his outrageous use of syllogisms and philosophical arguments mock the limitations of deductive reasoning and the absolute categories of rigid morality. His ironic wit and sceptical argumentation reveal a paradoxical character, and his libertine lyrics present the same equivocation inherent in the paradoxes of the time. Marotti sees the Donne who treats libertinism ironically as an "Inns-



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of-Court paradoxographer and ironist who could express a critical attitude towards both the poems themselves and the forms of behavior with which they were associated." Rosalie Colie observes that "the paradox does not commit itself, nor does the paradoxist." The "non-committal" character of paradoxes, she explains, is a "reason why, in the melee of Renaissance ideas, there was a paradoxical epidemic, affording man the chance to postpone a philosophical or religious choice he might live to regret." Donne's paradoxical rhetoric emphasizes the dialectical in his juxtaposition of subversive and orthodox ideas, where it finally performs the function of paradox defined by Colie--the "oblique criticism of absolute judgment or absolute convention."<sup>71</sup> The poems, circulated privately, clearly allowed him the freedom to test ideologically radical ideas and poetic modes without repercussions.

Finally, Donne's libertine mode is paradoxical because he presents libertinism as a paradox. Libertinism as the practice of inconstancy is both power and impotence, joy and frustration, precariousness and stability, determination and dissolution of the self. For the poet and his audience, the libertine mode expresses a radical individualism and a sense of displacement. Donne may expose the insecurity behind the libertine's rhetoric of authority, but he never directly takes away his persona's autonomy and self-determination. That is, Donne may undermine the speaker's projected mastery, but he also grants the force of the speaker's articulated desire, which in the

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context of the Elizabethan court and its politicized Petrarchanism claims a defiant license. In that sense, libertine rhetoric always celebrates individualistic impulses.

Donne's creation of the libertine poet-lover is clearly part of a life-long interest in constructing an authoritative selfhood that confronts mutability. The preoccupation with change in his secular poems will later show up in his religious works. In Holy Sonnet XIX, for example, the speaker recognizes a fundamental inconstancy in himself:

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one:  
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott  
A constant habit. . . .

(1-3)

Donne is always trying to anchor the self--in the sensual fulfilment of the libertine and in the exalted love between lovers or between man and God. The changeable libertine self or the timeless "I" in several of the love poems and religious works are Donne's different formulations of solutions to the problem of time and death. In the poems written after his marriage, Donne's persona seeks assurance and stability in the private and contained world of lovers or in the sanctified realm of spiritual contemplation. The libertine self, however, is the only formulation of a self that fully embraces change as liberating and that attempts to engage nature's law on its own terms.

Donne lost interest in the libertine lyric mode soon after he left the

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Inns-of-Court milieu; his disinterest was probably affected by his marriage and subsequent search for patronage and a court position. In addition the politicized Petrarchanism that we saw in Elizabethan court had lost its dominance when James I came into power. Marotti reports that "love poetry no longer served as a major literary means of expressing social, economic, and political ambition" in the Jacobean court. The king was interested in religious and philosophical writings, and Donne was one of the many writers who tried to obtain royal patronage by turning to literary forms now favored at court.<sup>72</sup> But Donne's libertine lyrics exerted a strong influence on younger poets. When the cult of Platonic love at the Caroline court renewed the importance of courtly love rhetoric, the anti-courtly libertine lyric mode became popular amongst the Cavalier poets, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. David Farley-Hills, for example, makes the same comment in *Rochester's Poetry* (Totowa, N. J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1978), 23.
2. "The Primrose" is not in my list because the poem is primarily a clever mathematical paradox. Since I am interested in the inconstant libertine self, I exclude lyrics which depict love and constancy, even if they are part of an illicit sexual union, and also anti-Petrarchan poems that do not portray the libertine sexual practice, such as "Farewell to Love" and "Loves Alchymie."
3. The various portraits are reproduced in Bald's biography of Donne, 54, 76, 430. On a study of Donne's self-representations in the various portraits, see Ernest Gilman's essay, "'To Adore, or Scorne an Image': Donne and the Iconoclastic Controversy," in *John Donne Journal* 5 (1986): 62-100.
4. Donne makes this distinction in a letter to Sir Robert Carr (1619; qtd. in Gardner's Introduction to *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, xviii.
5. The previous chapter touches on Greenblatt's idea of self-fashioning as fundamentally based on language. My use of Greenblatt's term basically refers to the shaping and presentation of a particular sense of self and identity, particularly through the use of rhetoric.
6. Marotti, *Donne*, 31, 30.
7. The libertine lyrics cannot be dated with as much confidence as the libertine elegies, but most scholars believe that they were written before Donne's marriage and most likely during the Lincoln Inn period. Marotti is one critic that specifically places Donne's libertine verses in the Inns-of-Court milieu. See Chapter 1 of *Donne*, and especially pp. 71-82.
8. Baker's *Chronicles* (1643) and letter to Sir George More in 1602, *Loseley MSS.*, ed. A. J. Kempe (1835), p. 334; qtd. in Bald, *Donne*, 72 and 7 respectively.
9. Gardner, xxv, fn. 1.
10. Marotti lists the genres associated with the Inns on p. 33 of *Donne*. The books burned included Marlowe's translation of the *Amores*, the satires of Joseph Hall, John Marston, and Everard Guilpin, and the epigrams of Sir John Davies and Guilpin. See William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Their*

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*Contemporaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), 121.

11. George Parfitt, *John Donne: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 19.

12. Keach, 29. Marotti also noted the "prurient or pornographic" works written by the coterie at the Inns (*Donne*, 306, fn. 75).

13. Alan Armstrong argues that Donne and Nashe may be the first ones to do so in 1593. "The Apprenticeship of John Donne: Ovid and the *Elegies*," *ELH* 44 (1977): 421. Bald speculates that Donne might have known Ovid's *Amores* when he was at Cambridge (*Donne*, 47). Nevertheless, it is during his years at Lincoln Inn that Ovid's influence manifests itself in Donne's writings.

14. Marotti, *Donne*, 33.

15. Lauro Martines, *Society and History in English Renaissance Verse* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 103-104, 69-70.

16. Parfitt, 18; and Marotti, *Donne*, 79.

17. Armstrong, 433. Keach goes so far as to say that the *Amores* "may be seen as a burlesque of the Augustan elegiac tradition" (29).

18. *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 52, *et passim*.

19. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 61. For the political and ideological signification of Petrarchan love rhetoric, see, for example, Marotti's "'Love is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order." *ELH* 49 (1982): 396-428; and Greenblatt's "To Fashion a Gentleman: Spenser and the Destruction of the Bower of Bliss," *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 157-92.

20. The notion of "things indifferent," as Arnold Stein points out, relates to the Stoic ideal of indifference. It also implicitly refers to "dubious and indeterminable points" that appear unrelated to one's salvation in the religious argument for indifference. *John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 117-19. Also see N. J. C. Andreasen, *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 91; and Pinka, 64.

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21. Bacon, "On the Fortunate Memory of Elizabeth Queen of England"; qtd. in Parker, 61. Greenblatt comments on Bacon's praise in *Self-Fashioning*, 166; so does John Guy in his introduction "The 1590s: The Second Reign of Elizabeth I?" *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

22. Marotti, *Donne*, 90.

23. Stone, *Crisis*, 582-83. Guy talks about Elizabeth's control of honors and the resultant discontent of ambitious courtiers like Essex on pp. 4-5.

24. See Guy, 7; and Paul E. J. Hammer's "Patronage at Court, Faction and the Earl of Essex," *Reign of Elizabeth I*, 68.

25. Marotti comments on the "erotic and commercial venturing" in the poem (*Donne*, 50). In "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So': The Politics of Love in Donne's *Elegies*," *ELH* 57.4 (1990), Guibbory points out the Platonic allusion in the title (819); as does Andreasen (74).

26. Pinka, 57.

27. See Stone's Chapter 6, "The Growth of Affective Individualism," in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 221-69.

28. Richmond, "Personal Identity and Literary Personae: A Study in Historical Psychology," *PMLA* 90.2 (1978): 210, 217, 249. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2.

29. Easthope, 50.

30. Donne is of course toying with his audience. At first he makes the reader a voyeur in what seems to be a striptease, but the poem shifts to an anti-climatic philosophical argument for nakedness, ending not with the woman's nakedness (as in the case of Ovid's poem), but with the speaker's.

31. Armstrong sees the woman as "a perfectly agreeable citizen's wife who ... actually requires no such persuasion to disrobe" (430).

32. For example, see R. V. Young, "'O My America, My New-Found Land': Pornography and Imperial Politics in Donne's *Elegies*," *South Central Review* (1987): 35-48.

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33. On the subversive aspects of this elegy, see Guibbory's interpretation in "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So'" (821-23). She contends that Donne's misogynistic satires and elegies reveal deep misgivings about female rule and that they often depict a figurative deposing of the female monarch, especially in the elegies.

34. El-Gabalawy points out that the Koran paradise "abounds with *houris* intended to stimulate desire" (40).

35. Eugene R. Cunnar's "Fantasizing a Sexual Golden Age in Seventeenth-Century Poetry," *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, 186. According to Capp, the idea of a Golden Age was especially in vogue after the Armada (98).

36. Stallybrass, citing Nicholas Breton's "Elogy of Queen Elizabeth," in "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, et al (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 130.

37. Easthope, for example, takes the abstract descriptions of the female body and sexual intercourse to be spiritual (55). Low sees both "mutual loving" and "imperialistic tendencies" in the elegy (*Reinvention of Love*, 39).

38. Clay Hunt, "Elegy 19: 'To His Mistress Going to Bed,'" *John Donne's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Arthur L. Clements, 2nd ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1992), 207.

39. From the woman's rich dress, Carey concludes that she is an aristocrat (106). Marotti reads the poem as "an encounter between a witty young man and a middle-class city woman" (*Donne*, 53). But there is no indication of such a context from the poem. Marotti's citation of Carey's dissertation ironically gives him no support since Carey appears to have changed his reading in his more recent book on Donne.

40. Guibbory explains that "the act of sex confirms what is seen as the legitimate, rightful mastery of man--a mastery that conflicts both with the conventions of courtly love and with the political situation in England in the 1590s" ("'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So,'" 822).

41. For example, Marotti's essay, "'Love is Not Love,'" 396-428.

42. For an ideological reading of the poem, see Ronald J. Corthell's "Donne's 'Disparitie': Inversion, Gender, and the Subject of Love in Some Songs and Sonnets," *Exemplaria* 1.1 (1989): 23-25.

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43. Andreasen, 87.
44. Andreasen, 89.
45. Docherty reads "To his Mistris Going to Bed" as a masturbatory piece (82-83); and Stanley Fish takes "Change" to be aimed at "self-persuasion" in his essay, "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katherine Eisaman Maus (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 231.
46. Marotti, *Donne*, 45, *et passim*.
47. Barker, 75.
48. In the second chapter of his book entitled "The Problem of Women: Authority, Power, Communication," Docherty argues that Donne portrays women as mutability, promiscuity, and uncertainty.
49. Gardner (165) and Andreasen (43) point out the similarities.
50. Cf. Stein's reading (118).
51. Guibbory, "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So,'" 824.
52. This does not mean that the speaker is already in love with the mistress nor that the lyric is a "love poem," as Marotti argues (*Donne*, 78, 82). Whatever his feelings for her, it is clear that he does not want to devote himself to her, and he appears to desire a termination of their relationship. Cf. Pinka who sees promiscuity as used to "relieve his dilemma over power and control in a romantic entanglement" (87). Other critics also note that the speaker's indifference is a front: see Corthell, 20; Ilona Bell, "The Role of the Lady in Donne's *Songs and Sonets*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 23.1 (1983): 117.
53. On "Loves Usury" and the speaker's fear of falling in love, see Bell, 118; and Marotti, *Donne*, 76.
54. Thomas O. Sloane, *Donne, Milton and the End of Humanistic Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 150; also Nardo, 75. Some critics (such as Bell) take the speaker to be definitively a woman, but I find the arguments unpersuasive.



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55. Female speakers of "Confined Love" and "Breake of Day" may be argumentative, but they do not have the domineering tone and the need to conquer that is characteristic of the male speakers in Donne's other libertine poems.
56. Cf. Stein, 104.
57. On the unclear dramatic setting and hence the ambiguity about the speaker's motivations, see Carey, 195; Marotti, *Donne*, 24; and Stein, 104.
58. Marotti also notes the "sympathetic male audience that would be receptive to libertine arguments" in the poem (*Donne*, 308).
59. Guibbory also perceives that the female body is portrayed with "potential entrapment for the unwary male" (818). Parfitt observes that most of Donne's women are "shadowy shes"--nameless and without much personality (72).
60. As compared to men who are seen in the roles of searchers, judges, hunters, and to men described in the image of moving waters. Also see Guibbory on the discussion of these imagery ("Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So," 823-24); and Parfitt on Donne's portrayal of women (34-35).
61. Rockett, "John Donne: The Ethical Argument of *Elegy III*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15.1 (1975): 66. Further references to this essay will be cited in the main text.
62. At first glance, the speaker seems to be addressing a mistress in private, but by line 5, he is giving a speech on women's sexual nature to a sympathetic male audience. On lines 21-24, he switches back again to the mistress before finally addressing the same male audience. To imagine the speaker delivering the entire discourse with both parties simultaneously present is too confusing--although the argument for male and female libertinism involves his assertions to both the mistress and his male listener(s). Some of Donne's other poems, such as "The Flea," portray monologues that respond to interjected responses from the dramatic audience. Here the only suggestion of a listener's response is from the libertine's friend when the speaker says, "More then thy hate, I hate 'it" (25). In the second address to his mistress, everything seems to be conjectured: she never actually says she does not love him, nor does she insist that he must change in order to strengthen their bond. A more plausible scenario implies only one dramatic audience. In this case, the speaker's address to a mistress is part of his presentation of arguments for "change" to his male audience.

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63. "Donne," *Reinvention of Love*, 43-44.

64. *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), 267-68.

65. Bald, *Donne*, 63.

66. The first two lines allude to the Catholic-Protestant controversy over the religious significance of faith versus good works, but they sidestep the issue with a libertine version of apostasy (Carey, 38). On the impact of Donne's Catholic upbringing, see Bald, *Donne*, 41; and Carey's Chapter 1 of *Donne*. In "Donne's Catholic Petrarchans: The Babylonian Captivity of Desire," *Renaissance Discourses of Desire* (77-92), Theresa M. DiPasquale focuses on Donne's use of Catholic language in his love lyrics.

67. N.B. some critics take the rhetorical inconsistencies differently. For example, Andreasen interprets them to show the speaker's irrationality and indecisiveness in the elegy "Change" (102-5). Marotti takes the same inconsistencies for a flawed poem on Donne's part: "the work seems to come apart intellectually and emotionally as well as rhetorically" (*Donne*, 308).

68. Cf. Andreasen; Mann, "Radical Consistency: A Reading of Donne's 'Communitie,'" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 50.3 (1981): 284-99; and Rockett's "Donne's Libertine Rhetoric." Marotti also rejects Andreasen's argument (*Donne*, 73).

69. *The Monarch of Wit* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 154, fn. 2. Readers "would find a wicked pleasure in the thought, 'How shocking this would seem to poor So-and-so or old So-and-so,' etc., etc." (154).

70. For example, Andreasen, 104.

71. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 38, 10. The earlier quote of Marotti is from *Donne* (73).

72. "'Love is Not Love,'" 420, 427.

## Chapter 3

### Libertine Lyrics in the Caroline Court

Unlike Donne who came from the Inns-of-Court milieu that bred youthful rebelliousness, the Cavalier poets who produced libertine lyrics were themselves from the court and they exhibited public dutifulness. Carew, Lovelace, and Suckling all served their king with alacrity in the Bishops War (1639-41). But their private lives were not that different from the Inns students. According to Izaak Walton, Carew was "a great libertine in his life and talke"; Lovelace also led a life of sexual promiscuity; and Suckling, with his reputation for brawling, gambling, and debauchery, was the epitome of Cavalier licentiousness, particularly in the eyes of the Puritans.<sup>1</sup> The disjunction between the Cavaliers' public and private lives carries over to their writings as well. On the one hand, they were members of the "tribe of Ben" who subscribed to the classical ideals of the "good life"--virtue, integrity, and self-control.<sup>2</sup> Carew and Lovelace were not averse to adopting the rhetoric of Platonic love at one time or another. Lovelace was in fact known for his patriotic and Platonic poem "To Althea, from prison."<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand, their libertine lyrics insist on defiant nonconformity, personal satisfaction, and control.

The three poets' libertine poetics, as this chapter will demonstrate,

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manifests one of two aspects of Caroline court culture. James notes that honor in Stuart theater is characterised by "a specific style of behaviour," and it was the subculture of duelling and wenching that "contribut[ed] to the vain, dissolute, lecherous and violent cavalier image of the Puritan and parliamentary propagandists." But there was also another facet of Caroline honor, and it "merged with the idealized monarchism of Charles I's court to recreate a social dimension for honour as the chivalrous community of honourable men, whose loyalties centred on the king's person."<sup>4</sup> This chapter studies Cavalier libertine lyrics in the context of this two-sided character of Charles I's court. Libertine lyrics, as the first chapter has already indicated, belong to the courtly subculture of licentious living and private recreation. The Caroline poets propound the sexual freedom that is obviously part of their own practice; their libertine lyrics indicate the courtiers' enjoyment of the outrageous and the risqué. But the poems go beyond mere entertainment as they interrogate the nationalistic court culture that the king cultivated. Indeed, the courtiers often combine the discourses and values of the two different sides of court life in their examination of royal ideology and the problems of self-determination and stability in a world of transient pleasures and power struggles.

The Cavalier poets extend Donne's model of libertine subjectivity to create a rhetoric that undermines the styles, values, and practices of the Caroline court. In contrast to Donne's argumentative defense of libertinism, the

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Cavalier poets often present libertine ideas in the form of seduction poems, where they introduce libertine values and tactics to Platonic and Petrarchan courtship scenarios. The first section of this chapter analyzes the anti-Platonic and anti-courtly strategies of Caroline libertine rhetoric. In the second section, I investigate the changes in the libertine lyric mode, particularly during the socially and politically unstable times before and during the Civil War. Where Donne intimates the libertine's difficulty in achieving a real sense of mastery, the Cavalier poets explore that dilemma by dramatizing the libertine's discontent. Unlike Donne's lyrics, several of Suckling's and Lovelace's poems explicitly portray the libertine's weariness and frustration--even with libertinism itself. Even as they demystify the courtly discourse of Neoplatonic love, they also undermine libertine rhetoric. The chapter's last section contextualizes the Cavalier poets' contradictory treatment of libertinism in terms of the court milieu and the political background. As we shall see, Caroline court culture influences the production and interpretation of libertine lyrics. Toward the end of Charles I's reign, however, the libertine lyric mode is already showing signs that it is a transitional mode.

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### **Cavalier Libertine Sexuality and the Politics of Transgression**

The complex dual character of Caroline court culture is reflected in Cavalier libertine lyrics. Where Donne highlights the radical character of the libertine argument, the Cavalier poets reveal the libertine behind the mask of the Platonic lover, a rhetorical tension that mirrors the reality of their lives as courtiers in Charles's court as we shall see. Seduction rhetoric and *carpe diem* motifs become the ideal vehicles for the Platonic-turned-libertine expression of desire. Neoplatonic ideas and Petrarchan love conventions are evoked before they are undermined. I will examine the radical character of Cavalier libertine sexuality by focusing on three different aspects: its anti-Platonic politics, its mercantile transaction of pleasure, and its paradisiacal dimension. All three aspects undermine and question the politicized rhetoric of Platonic love at court. With the libertine persona, the poet adopts an anti-authoritarian stance that insists on individualistic freedom from particular ideological, political, and social constraints of Charles's court.

### *The Anti-Platonic Politics of Libertinism*

Henrietta Maria brought French *préciosité* to the English court and started the cult of Platonic love around 1630. In a letter to a friend (1634), the Caroline courtier James Howell described the new amour as "a Love abstracted

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from all corporeal gross Impressions and sensual Appetite, but consists in Contemplation, and Ideas of the Mind, not in any carnal Fruition."<sup>5</sup> Howell's tone in the letter testifies that there was no instantaneous acceptance of the French Neoplatonism at the Caroline court. Erica Veevers documents that there was a mixed reaction among writers and courtiers, which ranged from confusion, mockery, to outright rejection. Nevertheless, the queen's particular preference quickly made its impact on the drama and poetry of the court. By 1635, "court audiences ... required something more French, more feminine, an art of talking about love moulded by Platonic idealism or the niceties of pastoral and romance" in their court plays.<sup>6</sup>

The cult of Platonic love at Charles's court was more than the fashionable interest of an idealized chaste love described by Howell. It was incorporated into the ideological representation of the royal couple and their policies. Kevin Sharpe discerns that the Neoplatonic metaphysics implicitly prescribes "an ethical and political system":

Platonic love was the love of minds, not of minds and bodies. In the body politic, the constitution of Platonic love was that of the absolute rule of the king, as the soul of the commonwealth, over creatures inhabiting a world of sense and illusion.<sup>7</sup>

The politicized Platonic style is most evident in the royal masques, where the king and the queen assumed the roles of deities and allegorized figures of virtue. Court masques such as Davenant's *The Temple of Love* (1635) and

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*Britannia Triumphans* (1638), and Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* portray the royal couple as the embodiment of Beauty, Love, Virtue, and Wisdom, under whose rule the nation flourishes. This nationalistic version of Platonic love introduces a public and political dimension to the amorous discourse of courtly love such that the commitment and refinement of a Platonic lover is also that of the dutiful and patriotic subject. It also dramatizes the Caroline myth of halcyon days and implicitly exalts the king's pacific politics.<sup>8</sup>

Charles and Henrietta Maria incorporated Neoplatonism in their reform of court behavior and customs. Veevers reports that the particular *préciosité* code that Henrietta Maria brought to the court "was modelled on, and addressed to, an ideal of behaviour at court."<sup>9</sup> Charles implemented various reforms at court to instill a high moral tone. The establishment of ceremonial customs in the royal household and at court indicates that the decorum of his courtiers was as important to Charles as their accountability.<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Smuts records that the king "delivered moral aphorisms to young men who came to pay their homage ... [and] fined courtiers for swearing."<sup>11</sup> The court's interest in controlling and structuring civility extended to the realm of private sexuality. In line with the image of virtue and self-restraint that Charles personally cultivated and the Platonic style that the royal couple adopted, the court exhibited a different tone on sexuality from the previous court of James I. Stone observes that "it was not until the reign of Charles and Henrietta Maria that a serious



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effort was made to sublimate ... sensual promiscuity in the ideal of neo-Platonic courtly love."<sup>12</sup> According to Lawrence Venuti, Charles resorted to "repressive legal action" in his attempt to restrict any perceived sexual misdemeanor of his courtiers.<sup>13</sup> Sexual indiscretion would lead to prompt punishment, as Harry Jermyn found out when he was dismissed from court for making one of the queen's maids pregnant.<sup>14</sup> Charles's high expectations of his courtiers were reflected in the royal masques. Themes of reform were common in the masques, and they were meant for the moral edification of courtiers, who were supposed to serve as moral exemplars for others.<sup>15</sup> In *Coelum Britannicum*, for example, the reform at court leads to the transformation of the entire nation. The masques show that the Platonic reform of a lover is equivalent to the moral reform of the king's subjects. In this framework, fulfilling the goal of public good leads to personal happiness; royal policy and reform are then depicted in terms of moral persuasion and spiritual growth.

Recent scholars stress that there is no ideological dominance that is absolute. Louis A. Montrose emphasizes that ideology is "heterogeneous and unstable, permeable and processual," especially since there are "manifold mediations involved in the production, reproduction and appropriation of an ideological dominance."<sup>16</sup> It is undeniable that Caroline court culture was often linked--in perception, even if not in fact--with social, moral, and political goals, as exemplified by the royal masques, the Van Dyck portraits of the king

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and the queen, and the paintings on the ceilings of the Banqueting House at Whitehall. But Smuts believes that there was an "absence of any attempt at a centralized system of control and lack of effort to organize court culture as part of an overarching government policy."<sup>17</sup> Historians such as Smuts and Sharpe, as well as literary critics like Annabel Patterson and Venuti, counter Stephen Orgel's and Roy Strong's interpretation of the Caroline masque as an outright reflection of royal ideology. Even the royal masques, they argue, reveal implicit criticism of Charles and his court.<sup>18</sup>

The courtiers' libertine lyrics are excellent examples of limitations to any kind of ideological "propagation." They clearly stem from a reaction to the *précieux* fashion and the sexually restrictive style and reforms of the royal couple. Even Davenant, who was a member of the queen's group, initially rejected and ridiculed Platonic love in his early plays before finally adopting the Neoplatonic style in his later works.<sup>19</sup> Libertinism, with its anti-authoritarian and aggressive individualism, advances antithetical values to the rhetoric of Neoplatonic love. It offers the perfect anti-courtly poetic alternative and self-presentation to rebellious courtiers, especially those who did not conform to the royal stance on sexual morality and propriety. Clarendon reports that Charles "was so great an Example of Conjugal affection, that they who did not imitate him in that particular, durst not brag of their Liberty."<sup>20</sup> But with the pose of a defiant libertine poet-lover before congenial friends and peers, the

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courtiers found the opportunity to "brag"--the perfect antidote to the restrictions of Caroline court life.

In its justification of sexual freedom, libertinism strips away the nationalistic dimensions of honor to insist on personal gratification. James informs us that it was "at the Caroline court [that] the integration of honour into the service of the crown and the state was completed."<sup>21</sup> Cavalier libertine lyrics, however, wittily undermine this nationalistic definition of honor with a more liberating and self-serving code of ethics. Suckling's "Perjury [disdain'd]" and Lovelace's "The Scrutinie" defend inconstancy by rejecting the honor code that exalts allegiance and trust, and in the process they erode the basis of all relationships.<sup>22</sup> The speaker of "The Scrutinie" disputes his mistress' accusation that he has been unfaithful. He denies he is "forsworn" because time has turned yesterday's vows of devotion into today's "fond impossibility."<sup>23</sup> Implicit is the naturalistic conception of a self that is determined by the flux of time and changeable human nature. Suckling illustrates a similar defense in "Perjury [disdain'd]." The speaker blames "Fate" and "Destiny" for his inability to keep promises.<sup>24</sup> He wittily tells his mistress to leave him because she cannot "love ... so foul a perjur'd man" (12). The title, however, submits another perspective on perjury: the speaker's honesty and integrity force him to "disdain" the falsehood of an impossible constancy and to remind his mistress of her own scruples. Both "Perjury [disdain'd]" and "The Scrutinie" invert

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society's value system to suggest that libertinism offers a superior code of ethics that defends the individual's autonomy, freedom, and integrity.

Where Suckling's and Lovelace's poems justify the libertine's own brand of honor, William Cartwright's "No Platonic Love" and Suckling's "Upon my Lady Carliles walking in Hampton-Court garden" expose the Caroline court practice of chivalric honor as hypocritical. According to Cartwright's speaker, Platonic lovers "who profess they spirits taste / Feed yet on grosser meat."<sup>25</sup> Likewise Suckling's poem points to the discrepancy between what they say and do. The exchange between T.C. (Thomas Carew) and J.S. (John Suckling) is a witty debate on Platonic beauty and language, with the courtiers' responses to Lady Carliles as the focal point. T.C. and J.S. represent the opposition between the Neoplatonic and the libertine outlook, with a corresponding tension between the lavish figurative rhetoric of Petrarchism and the libertine's prosaic and demystifying language.<sup>26</sup> Like the speaker of "No Platonic Love," J.S. emphasizes the materialistic definition of human nature as a composite of natural sexual urges. He tells his companion bluntly, "Alas! Tom, I am flesh and blood" (24). This amusing dialogue between the courtiers goes beyond the joke on the unimaginative J.S., who cannot appreciate the eloquence and value of Petrarchan rhetoric. Towards the end of the poem, Suckling demonstrates that behind T.C.'s indignant response to J.S.'s lewdness is an unmistakable familiarity with the latter's carnal thought patterns:

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'T was well for thee she left the place,  
For there's great danger in that face;  
But had'st thou view'd her legg and thigh,  
And upon that discovery  
Search't after parts that are more dear,  
(As Fancy seldom stops so near)  
No time or age had ever seen  
So lost a thing as thou hadst been.

(32-39)

The professedly Platonic courtier reveals that he is no different from J. S. In his analysis of the poem, Charles L. Squier discerns that T.C. "is forced to drop his polite courtly pose and accept the libertine values and voice of the Suckling of the dialogue, to admit, in other words, his own libertinism."<sup>27</sup>

The last stanza in the manuscript version of "Upon my Lady Carliles" makes Suckling's debunking of the Platonic cult and its Petrarchan language indisputable. Here the previously literal-minded J.S. playfully applies the metaphoric language that Carew has been using to a bawdy context. The allusion to the lady's vagina as "the lovely fountain" and the audacious claim that he would be a fool not to have "done as well as seen" (47) obviously degrade a distinguished lady to a trollop. This is not only an attack on the Countess, but also what she stands for. Lady Carliles participated in several of the royal masques and is herself the subject of several complimentary Platonic verses--including two written by Carew. She was the queen's closest female friend for a long time and was the focal point of the *salon* circles of Platonic

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love at court.<sup>28</sup> Suckling significantly gives the final word to the libertine J.S.<sup>29</sup> This poem uses the libertine stance to make cynical observations about those who embraced Neoplatonism in the Caroline court. J.S.'s outrageous libertinism turns out to be more honest and closer to the truth than Carew's Platonic pose. Lady Carliles was in fact not a Platonic model of chaste beauty; everyone in the court circles knew that she was Buckingham's mistress. Carew, for all his Platonic phrases and complimentary verses to the Countess, was of course a philanderer. In the poem "[The Answer]," Suckling makes fun of another favorite of the queen, Sir Toby Matthew, by depicting him as more licentious and cynical than the brash libertine speaker in "[The constant Lover]," the poem that accompanies and precedes "[The Answer]."<sup>30</sup> These lyrics by Suckling illustrate that Neoplatonism is but an artificial and hypocritical discourse that covers up the underlying sexual promiscuity.

Suckling also indirectly subverts Charles's attempts to recover the traditional image of courtly honor and virtue through the Neoplatonic paradigm of chaste desires. The king's success in reforming court sexuality could only be limited and superficial since institutional control of private sexuality is only possible up to a certain degree. Robert Reade wryly noted the perverse veneer of court sexuality to his friend in 1640: "We keep all our virginities at court still, *at least we lose them not avowedly*."<sup>31</sup> What Reade and Suckling point out was the disparity between public and private selves at court. Most of the

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courtiers adopted the public self-representation that the king expected, but for many it was a brittle facade. In the libertine lyrics discussed so far, the poets wittily contend that libertines are more scrupulous than Platonic lovers because they reject the hypocrisy of the latter.

Another way Cavalier libertine lyrics undermine the royal model of sexuality is by insisting on the individualistic and private character of sexuality --which ultimately cannot be determined nor regulated by an external authority. We shall see that poems such as Lovelace's "A Paradox" and "La Bella Bona Roba," and Suckling's "Of thee (kind boy) I ask no red and white" reject the court's prescription of the appropriate love object and the behavior codes in amorous courtship. In opposition to the Platonic mystification of love, these lyrics depict undisguised lust. To invert the courtly mode of adulation and compliments, they debase common Platonic tenets by depicting the low and the grotesque. "La Bella Bona Roba" expresses love for fat prostitutes, "A Paradox" favors "the foul" mistress over the beautiful, and Suckling's sonnet declares that a "hand or trick" would suffice in the "sport" of love. The discussion that follows shows that such singular sexual preferences dramatize the libertine's refusal to conform and his need to define and assert his own sexuality.

"A Paradox" evokes Petrarchan rhetoric only to use it to defend opposite goals. The stanza opens with the speaker explaining to a male friend why he spurns a beautiful mistress for one less deserving of his attention. His old love

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is "the beauteous Starre" (1), but "gazing on that light / So long" (6) almost blinded him. Hence he turns to one whose beauty is inferior, yet "shines with more delight" (5). Lovelace wittily turns a typical Petrarchan hyperbolic praise into a complaint. The rejection of Platonic beauty counters the queen's cult of Platonic love and her self-representation in the masques. She frequently took the role of divine beauty; the imagery of light, as the metaphoric depiction of Platonic beauty, virtue, and its reforming powers, is common in the court masques, and often used to glorify the queen. As Indamora in Davenant's *The Temple of Love* (1635), for example, Henrietta Maria's divine beams "search what ev'ry Heart doth mean," so that "she will heal, / And make the foully tainted clean."<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the poem's ironic depiction of a pitiless radiance playfully mocks the transformative effect of Platonic beauty. For the speaker of "A Paradox," such beauty is too overwhelming and destructive because it blinds him from all other reality, particularly more "comforting" alternatives. He initially portrays himself in the position of subservience to his mistresses--from the woman to "which [he] first did bow" (2) to "that which leads [him] now" (4). But his Petrarchan rhetoric becomes ironic when his self-interested practice of sexual freedom indicates a refusal to submit to the reign of chaste love and its reforming influence.

In the next stanza, the speaker argues for the intrinsic value of contrast. He is not rejecting the Platonic principle of beauty because he claims that



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"through foule, we follow faire" (8). Only the experience of difference, he contends, can teach us the true appreciation and value of the beautiful:

For had the World one face  
And Earth been bright as Ayre,  
We had knowne neither place;  
*Indians* smell not their Neast;  
*A Swisse* or *Finne* tastes best,  
The Spices of the East.

(9-14)

Not only does the epistemological significance of contrast brings a genuine understanding of the good, but we are told that it can also produce self-knowledge and exciting discoveries.

Lovelace, however, pushes the argument to the breaking point by arguing for the appeal of the grotesque and the low in the third stanza.

So from the glorious Sunne,  
Who to his height hath got,  
With what delight we runne  
To some black Cave, or Grot?  
And Heav'nly *Sydney* you  
Twice read, had rather view  
Some odde *Romance*, so new.

(15-21)

Instead of depicting some shady grove or comforting shelter, Lovelace deliberately invokes the shock value of the grotesque. The return to the light imagery establishes the first contrast introduced in the opening stanza, so the comparison to "some black Cave, or Grot" suggestively extends the parallel to the new mistress. Lovelace's anti-Platonic argument is provocative precisely

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because of the outrageous preference for the cheap, the low, and the grotesque in the face of glory, genius, and beauty--and all in the name of ultimately pursuing and cherishing the high. But the example of "Some odde *Romance*" explains that the appeal of the grotesque and the low lies in the wonder of newness and the speaker's desire for variety. Beneath the pseudo-philosophical reasoning for difference is the defense of sexual freedom. To the libertine speaker, the known is familiar and hence boring, so even the perfection of Platonic beauty cannot induce his unswerving allegiance.

In the poem's subversion of all that is high, references to the sun and to Sidney take on political overtones. The image of the powerful noonday sun suggests the ideology of *le roi soleil* and by implication, the absolute rule of Charles--what was called "the eleven years of tyranny" when he ruled without Parliament. Sidney was the model courtier, representing the courtly ideals of valor, grace, honor, and culture--all that Charles wanted to recover for his court after the debauchery of James I's court. The reference to Sidney's *Arcadia* would allude to the cult of Platonic love at court. Pastoral romance was recognized as the queen's favored mode to convey her version of Neoplatonism. In addition, Sidney's romance, as Patterson points out, was assimilated into Charles's "own visions, his own program of English arcadianism, the halcyon days of the 1630s."<sup>33</sup> In this political context, the speaker's argument for the low subtly challenges the Platonic and pastoral basis

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of the royal couple's personal mythology and exposes its underlying absolutism, which advocates the courtier's complete and unswerving submission and obedience.

The speaker's example of extreme antithesis in the third stanza intensifies in the next and last stanza. He cites the myth of Jupiter, who would abandon "his Deities" and the heavens for "below / To love a Beare, or Cow" (28). This apparent reference to the low and the grotesque in the implied bestiality is facetious since the bear and cow in question allude to the beautiful virgins Callisto and Io that Jupiter ravished and then transformed to conceal them from his suspicious wife, Juno. The speaker's introduction to Jupiter's mythic seductions, as Manfred Weidhorn comments in his analysis of the poem, serves to "deify inconstancy."<sup>34</sup> This libertine vision of the heavens and the gods also runs counter to the images of the king and queen as moral deities in the masques. The fact that Juno is the goddess of marriage, yet unable to exact constancy from her own husband despite her repressive efforts serves to aggrandize the will of the irrepressible libertine--a provocative statement in the Caroline court milieu. According to the speaker, any kind of constancy spells limitation and restriction of personal freedom. Hence he proclaims that even Jupiter "is poore in Joyes" (24) if "imprison'd" in the heavens. But the example of Jupiter also betrays the speaker's desire for the power and freedom of a supreme god.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the poem, Lovelace reveals that the speaker, for

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all his Petrarchan love rhetoric and his defense of the philosophical necessity for difference, is clearly the aggressive libertine insisting on satisfying his sexual whims and passions.

Suckling's "Sonnet II" similarly criticizes the cult of Platonic Love by undercutting the Platonic idealization of beauty. But unlike Lovelace, he divests Platonic beauty of its philosophical basis to expose its artificial practice at court. The speaker specifies his request to Cupid by first delineating what he does not want in the opening stanza:

Of thee (kind boy) I ask no red and white  
to make up my delight,  
no odd becomming graces,  
Black eyes, or little know-not-whats, in faces....

(1-4)

He reduces the Platonic idealization of beauty to predetermined and artificial prescriptions, such as the schematic color contrast of lips and complexion typical of Petrarchan blazon conceits. In the second stanza, the speaker goes one step further with the bold contention that "there's no such thing as that we beauty call, / it is meer cousenage all" (9-10). According to him, it is chicanery because the standards of beauty are not objective but opinions made "some long ago" that became tyrannic customs. Given that the masques typically present Henrietta Maria as the embodiment of pristine Beauty and purified Love, and that her own *précieux* style emphasizes beauty as inseparable from virtue, this materialistic degradation of Platonic beauty is hence a defiant repudiation of the

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What in our watches, that in us is found,  
So to the height and nick  
We up be wound,  
No matter by what hand or trick.

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Thomas Clayton reminds us that the watch is a miraculous phenomenon for Suckling's contemporaries. In that period, writers glorified the universe by comparing it to a clock and described God as the supreme clockmaker.<sup>37</sup> Suckling's statement on mechanical responses would then illustrate the male body's amazing prowess. For the libertine, this materialistic definition of sexual enjoyment also indicates the easy availability of sexual pleasure. But despite the seventeenth-century awe of mechanical marvels, Suckling is clearly being provocative when he reduces a mistress to a hand and sex to a trick. The poem's final image serves the inflammatory poetics of libertinism, especially since Suckling sets libertine self-determination squarely against Platonic love and court practices.

"La Bella Bona Roba" is another poem that describes outrageous sexual desires and requirements. In the opening stanza, the speaker proclaims his demand for a naked female body of particular dimensions:

I cannot tell who loves the Skeleton  
Of a poor Marmoset, nought but boan, boan.  
Give me a nakedness with her cloath's on.

(1-3)

He wittily perverts the prevailing aesthetics of feminine beauty. The speaker turns the Petrarchan "red and white" of the face into the body of "white-sattin upper coat of skin / Cut upon Velvet rich Incarnadin" (4-5). At the same time, he humorously inverts the Platonic conception of outward beauty as a reflection

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of spiritual grace and the Christian notion of the body as the raiment of the soul. In his materialistic and reductive approach, the internal is not the soul but strictly "the Skeleton." The dramatic context, as the last stanza reveals, is the common Petrarchan apostrophe where the speaker makes a love plea to Cupid. But love in the poem is merely an appetitive desire for the flesh, and the requested ideal love subject is *la bona roba*--a prostitute. The plea perverts the Platonic conception of beauty into a description of the "largest" woman, and the speaker turns Cupid into a pimp who services his sexual needs.

In the libertine's negation of Neoplatonism, he also debases women. The speaker of "La Bella Bona Roba" describes women in terms of animals, from "a poor Marmoset" to a hunted deer. What is usually an endearment sounds more like an expression of pity and even contempt for the thin harlot. The extreme reduction of a female body to flesh and bone emphasizes that the speaker is specifying a desired commodity of the flesh trade. It also highlights his controlling personality and demonstrates the devouring nature of libertine sexuality. Unlike Donne's egotistical and impudent libertine poet-lovers, Lovelace's persona adopts a deceptively moderate and objective manner. But it is precisely his impersonal and heartless attitude that makes his request of Cupid so shocking.

The speaker flagrantly resists the ideal of the self-controlled and honorable courtier depicted in the royal masques. The desire for the low and

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the grotesque violates what Norbert Elias calls the "noble ethos" of courtly society, that is, "the maintenance of everything that traditionally held the lower-ranking strata at a distance, such things being of self-evident value to the aristocracy."<sup>38</sup> But here the subversiveness of the low is precisely because it is part of the high: Lovelace suggestively alludes to the common practice of whoring amongst those of the upper classes. He implicitly links the aristocratic game of hunting that demonstrates courage and might with the other aristocratic practice--whoring. The speaker implies a completely different test of worth that replaces the aristocratic code of valor and chivalry. His request for "the largest Doe" in the final line is an assertion of his masculine prowess. Besides his preference and expectation of "fat joys" (11), he insinuates that he is man enough to desire and handle a large woman.

These lyrics do not so much present a serious defense of libertinism as a delight in the exhibition of reactionary wilfulness. They flout the aristocratic codes of honor, chivalry, and courtly refinement that were particularly reinforced in Charles's court. The poems depict the superior libertine ego who refuses to conform, reform, and submit to the reign of chaste love. In place of Petrarchan compliments and expressions of devotion to the Platonic mistress, this poet-lover is only interested in articulating his wants and drives, and in the selfish preoccupation with his own pleasure, the woman falls from her Petrarchan pedestal, and is deprived of any significance at all. As the poems



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demonstrate, the libertine self and its desires constitute the final authority on aesthetics, sexuality, and morality.

### *The Market Paradigm of Libertine Sexuality*

Cavalier libertine lyrics readily exploit the market dynamics of consumption and profit as part of their politics of transgressive individualism. Following Donne's example of depicting sexuality in mercantile terms, the Cavalier poets portray sex as a commodity for negotiation and exchange in several of their seduction poems. "Love" acquires an exchange value dependent on demand and supply in Suckling's "Profer'd Love rejected," and Lovelace talks about worth in terms of "use and rate" (13) in "To Chloe, Courting her for his Friend." Platonic love supports absolutist ideology because it incorporates the politics of a feudal order, where love is almost akin to vassal service. The market paradigm of human bonds is radical since it values profit and material acquisition above the merit of birth and rank, thereby dismantling the ideological foundations of feudal society, from the cultivation of honor, duty, and fealty as social and spiritual ideals to the divine justification of the king's rule. In the naturalistic argument, free reign is given to the individual's desires and needs; the market ethos also valorizes these drives and provides

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libertinism another rhetoric to counter the Platonic love discourse of service and mystified sexuality.

Lyrics such as Lovelace's "Depose your finger of that Ring" and "The faire Begger" [sic] reveal a mercantile rhetoric that implicitly argue for sexual freedom and transient liaisons. As seduction poems, they affirm personal gratification and self-interest as the ultimate good that benefits all concerned. The speaker in "Depose your finger of that Ring" presents sexual pleasure as a mutually beneficial transaction. After all, as Low points out, the market paradigm suggests a new equality between lovers that was denied in the feudal love bondage.<sup>39</sup> From a loan of the lady's ring in the first stanza to the extended metaphoric "loan" of her sexual "Treasure" in the second, the ring turns into what Weidhorn describes as a "neat sexual symbol."<sup>40</sup> Pleasure clearly becomes profit in the exchange model:

So then inrich me with that Treasure,  
Will but increase your store,  
And please me (faire one) with that pleasure  
Must please you still the more....

(7-10)

The libertine's formulation of a commercial sexuality incorporates the naturalistic belief in the intrinsic innocence of sex: he maintains that the lady's sexuality can be no less "innocent" (5) nor "honest" (6) after granting him her sexual favors. In the promise of reciprocal pleasure, the speaker appears to recognize and grant the same need for personal satisfaction to his partner.

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But the libertine's application of the exchange model turns out to be merely a seduction strategy. He reveals his aggressiveness at the end of the poem. If the woman gives in, he argues, she does not only benefit from the exchange, she also demonstrates her generosity and kindness. In the final couplet, however, the speaker turns his request into moral blackmail, for "not to save others is a curse / The blackest, when y'are ne're the worse" (11-12). Lovelace reveals the irony in the speaker's invocation of conventional moral principles such as altruism and munificence since they contradict his earlier appeal to the woman's self-serving instincts for personal gain. The libertine's reference to the market paradigm is but another opportunistic take on his pursuit of sexual gratification.

Lovelace's poem "The faire Begger" also evokes the principles of reciprocity and fairness in the speaker's seduction tactics. Despite the beggar's position of supplication, the speaker introduces equality in his suggestion of a fair trade:

Comanding Asker, if it be  
Pity that you faine would have,  
Then I turne begger unto thee,  
And aske the thing that thou dost crave;  
I will suffice thy hungry need  
So thou wilt but my Fancy feed.

(1-6)

The speaker insinuates that the beggar's hunger is for food *and* sexual gratification since he requests that which she "craves." What he proposes is a

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trade that satisfies both their needs. "You'll give for Love, I Charity" (24), he tells her. His praises of the beggar's physical charms parody Petrarchan compliments of Platonic beauty and mask his domineering personality. Like the *bona roba* of Lovelace's other poem, the beggar represents the low that challenges the courtly ethos of decorum. In the libertine's commodification of sexuality, pleasure is the coin of exchange, but this "market" is in fact created by the speaker's rhetoric. He projects his sexual desires upon the woman in order to evoke the idea of a fair exchange. So confidently and persuasively does the speaker assert his desire to fulfil the beggar's desires that one almost forgets the alms requested by the beggar is that of food alone. As he did with the speaker of "La Bella Bona Roba," Lovelace again produces a corrupt image of the courtier. The speaker of "The faire Begger" abuses his superior social position to take advantage of a female beggar's hunger. The wit of the poem lies in how he cloaks his sexually aggressive will with professed "begging"--an appealing combination of compliments and plea. He cleverly turns his self-serving sexual demand into an act of generosity and benevolence, arguing that her refusal would be heartless. In both "Depose your finger of that Ring" and "The faire Begger," the speaker's erotic persuasion shifts to emotional and moral blackmail at the end of the poem when he addresses the possibility of the woman's rejection. He may invoke the ideals of fairness and mutual benefit, but in reality he only subscribes to the market principles of self-interest and

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profit.

Finally, the libertine's rhetoric of reciprocity mystifies the actual power hierarchy in the same way that the Platonic love discourse does. The Caroline masques often glorify the relationship between rulers and their subjects to portray a bond of mutual love and devotion. Charles himself adopted the same amorous Platonic language in his speeches to Parliament to obtain their "loving" compliance to his policies.<sup>41</sup> If the politicized Platonic discourse exalts an inherently unequal relationship and mystifies absolutist ideology, the libertine's rhetoric of seduction similarly veils his predatory instincts with the projection of mutual benefit and pleasure. Where the masques present the subjects' obedience to Charles's reign as love and moral reformation, these seduction lyrics figure the woman's submission as pleasure and freedom--when in fact she is the object of consumption.

It is not surprising that the libertine employs the mystifying strategies of Platonic love discourse since that is part and parcel of playing the role of Platonic lover. Clearly this is not the same libertine rhetoric avowing sincerity and integrity that is described in "Perjury [disdain'd]" nor that condemning the hypocrisy of Platonic lovers portrayed in "No Platonic Love." But the libertine speaker typically adopts his stance of superiority only when he wants to leave a mistress or give a lecture to his audience. This is the cunning and versatile libertine: at a court where Platonic love discourse configures social interaction,

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particularly between men and women, he is merely taking on the most effective rhetoric for seduction.

Several of Carew's poems depict the opportunistic poet-lover who exploits Caroline court customs and protocol for his own gains. Carew creates the defiant and self-reliant poet-lover who acquires bargaining powers with the rhetoric of trade.<sup>42</sup> The market paradigm frees the poet-lover from the externally imposed condition of service that is part of Platonic love politics and allows him to sell poetic tribute as a valuable commodity in a court society that esteems beauty. Poems such as "Griefe ingrost," "To a Lady that desired I would love her," "Ingratefull beauty threatned," and "On his Mistres lookeinge in a glasse" portray the poetic craft as means of empowerment for the poet-lover--be it for revenge, blackmail, or intimidation. "To a Lady that desired I would love her" and "Ingratefull beauty threatned" argue for the market principles of equality and reciprocity, but in effect they demand sexual favors in exchange for complimentary verses.

"To a Lady that desired I would love her" mystifies a bid for sex behind the rhetoric of mutual loving. The title indicates the lady's proposal, and the poem is the speaker's negotiation of the terms involved in her request. Carew plays with two different conceptions of love here: the Platonic love courtship and the libertine's idea of uncommitted sexual "love." When the opening line of the poem tells us that the lady has "freely given [the poet-lover] leave to love,"

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this "love" is but the permission for him to woo her. "Give me leave to love, and love me too" (11) is a reiteration of the same proposal in the third stanza. This time, however, he is clearly not referring to the "leave" that is already given but to a different kind of liberty. He expects a love

Not with designe  
To rayse, as Loves curst Rebels doe,  
When puling Poets whine,  
Fame to their beautie, from their blubbr'd eyne.

(12-15)

The poet-lover insinuates that the woman plays the role of a Platonic beauty only for the self-serving "designe" to increase her fame. If she "loves" him, he will then be able to produce "happy" verses that exalt her beauty--tributes that are superior to those that come from the whining Petrarchan lovers. His extravagant conceits are double-edged in their compliments because they serve to place him in a position of command over her. He shrewdly makes it known that his praises are actually distortions of the truth. In the fifth stanza, he promises that his verse "shall not mention to express" (21) a beauty that is duplicitous and cruel. In place of "stormes," "nets," and "flames," he will depict mildness and fairness; her "dishevell'd hayre / Shall flow like a calme Region of the Ayre" (29-30). The shift from "express" to the "making" of her eyes, brow, and hair to look a certain way implies that he literally *creates* the image of Petrarchan beauty. Like Suckling in "Upon my Lady Carliles," Carew exposes Petrarchan praises as pure fabrication, and in this case, he also

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discloses how they can be part of a self-interested promotion for both the woman and the poet who praises her.

The sexual subtext of the speaker's talk of "love" becomes all too clear in the last paragraph when he specifies the trade, even as he promotes the principles of equality and mutual advantage:

Rich Natures store, (which is the Poets Treasure)  
I'll spend, to dresse  
Your beauties, if your mine of Pleasure  
In equall thankfulnesse  
You but unlocke, so we each other blesse.

(31-35)

The economic metaphors--"store," "treasure," "spend," "mine"--imply that the speaker buys her sexual pleasures with his poetic "treasure."<sup>43</sup> What he asks her to "unlocke" is not her heart but her body. The speaker cleverly idealizes the crass proposal by describing the barter as a blessed union that is parodic of a requited love relationship. Indeed, the entire poem wittily evokes the idea of an amorous mutuality, as in his deceptive plea for reciprocal love in line eleven. But the joyful mutuality of this mercantile union comes solely from the set agreement. Both the speaker's verse compliments--the demonstration of his "love"--and her "love" are contingent upon the other party's fulfilment of this pseudo love pact. In addition, the insistent tone of his suave proposal betrays a sly attempt to secure his sexual will and influence over the woman.

The masculine aggressiveness of the empowered poet-lover is



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unmistakeable in "Ingratefull beauty threatned." In this unusual seduction poem, the speaker refers to the same exchange of "To a Lady," but this time the poet-lover is exacting payment for services rendered. The allusion to ingratitude in the title refers to Celia's refusal to fulfil her part of the bargain as imputed by the speaker; her denounced pride (1) is in fact her sexual "unkindness" to the once complimentary poet-lover. Low reads this poem as an example of the market contract of equality and reciprocity, where "if ill treated [the poet-lover] will simply go elsewhere" to a more "grateful" mistress.<sup>44</sup> But the speaker's anger goes beyond a natural reaction to Celia's "affrights." There is no assumption of equality in the way that he tries to intimidate Celia into submission. He claims that her fame comes solely from his verse and concludes: "Thy sweets, thy graces, all are mine" (9). On the surface this is an assertion that her grace and beauty come from his verses, and thereby he owns them. But his claim extends to her body since the term "sweets" carries sexual connotations.<sup>45</sup> The speaker tells her, "Thou art my starre, shin'st in my skies" (10), but this praise is followed by an injunction not to reject him because her lofty status is "borrowed" and "fixt" by him. Carew cleverly turns the conventional Petrarchan glorification and its attendant declaration of devoted subservience from the poet-lover into an ironic assertion of his control and ownership of Celia.

To the libertine poet-lover, false and self-serving Petrarchan

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compliments are poets' tales of "wrap't Truth." The poet-lover counters her threat with his own:

Tempt me with such affrights no more,  
Lest what I made, I uncreate:  
Let fooles thy mystique formes adore,  
I'le know thee in thy mortall state:  
Wise Poets that wrap't Truth in tales,  
Knew her themselves, through all her vailes.

(13-18)

Poetry is but one commodity to be exchanged for another in the market of free love, thereby completely debasing Platonic conceptions of truth and beauty.

"Wisdom" would then come from the shrewd exacting of sex for poetic services. The speaker's insistence on carnal knowledge of Celia's "mortall state" (16) reminds her of her vulnerability and weakness--and that her "killing power" is only a fiction created by him.

Carew's depiction of the opportunistic poet-lover points to the libertine subjectivity. Although the lyrics do not directly present an argument for sexual liberty and are fundamentally seduction poems, they portray the transient and self-interested liaisons of the libertine. If the poems "Perjury [disdain'd]" and "The Scrutinie" liberate the lover from his vow, "To a Lady" and "Ingratefull beauty threatned" divorce the poet from his words. Here the poet's role is another mask that the libertine speaker dons for his own personal gain. The creation of such rhetorical selves is obviously incompatible with Platonic poetics.<sup>46</sup> In "To a Lady" and "Ingratefull beauty threatned," the speakers use

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the set conventions of Petrarchan praise only to expose their artificiality. Their commodification of poetic praise illustrates the courtly dynamics of praise and reputation that engender personal rewards for both the lady and her poet-lover. Where Suckling's "Upon my Lady Carliles" and Cartwright's "No Platonic Love" denounce the hypocrisy of Platonic love discourses, Carew's two poems illustrate the ulterior motives that shape such rhetoric. In fact, all the seduction poems perform the same function when they expose the libertine's mask of a Petrarchan lover. To the poet's knowing intimates in the court milieu, the lyrics that depict the market of sexual transactions refer to the common practice of manipulating courtly rhetoric and conventions. Understood in the historical context of a court that politicizes Neoplatonic love, the poems in effect depict the libertine poet-lover as the one most adept at playing the game of Platonic love to his advantage--a scenario that would delight licentious courtiers and poets.

The Cavalier poets may present an empowering paradigm of market sexuality in their libertine lyrics, but they are also fully aware of its exploitive character. In the process of demystifying the Platonic love discourse, they also expose the rhetoric of libertinism to be a sly combination of courtly love codes, naturalistic values, and market principles that serves the libertine's personal agenda. In "To Chloe, Courting her for his Friend," Lovelace shows how the libertine's mercantile mentality outrageously treats his mistress as a trading

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commodity between his friend and him. The title indicates the situation where the speaker woos Chloe for his friend, Damas. His rhetoric of Petrarchan courtship--"again I bowe, / Againe possest, again I woe [sic]" (1-2)--humorously conflicts with the perverse rhetorical context. Instead of demonstrating Platonic love service, his renewed courting and passion are in aid of a friend. And instead of Chloe's beauty and moral purity being the catalyst to Damas's passion, it is the speaker's original "heat" for Chloe. Lovelace's ironic wit turns the speaker's conventionally subordinate position of wooer into one of superiority. The speaker's courtship of Chloe for Damas quickly reveals itself to be a self-interested promotion of his sexual power and generosity in the second stanza:

I'd not be King, unlesse there sate  
Lesse Lords that shar'd with me in State;  
Who by their cheaper Coronets know  
What glories from my Diadem flow:  
It's use and rate values the Gem,  
Pearles in their shells have no esteem;  
And I being Sun within thy Sphere,  
'Tis my chiefe beauty thinner lights shine there.

(9-16)

According to the speaker, Chloe's beauty and sexual value will increase when she accepts Damas as her lover. Such valuation of beauty completely invalidates the Platonic exaltation of beauty that comes from spiritual and physical purity. Chloe is reduced to a mere sexual object devoid of any volition. Suddenly the Petrarchan wooer of the first stanza is the proud owner

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of her sexual favors. By the end of the stanza Lovelace wittily replaces the conventional praise of the Platonic mistress's beauty with the speaker's glorification of his "chiefe beauty."

The speaker denounces sexual and political monopoly as tyrannic, but his notion of sexual liberality only extends to men and ultimately glorifies his sexual will. Behind the market paradigm of equality and freedom is the libertine's desire for complete control, as indicated by his references to the king and the sun. The market of competitive value radically challenges both the Platonic-Augustinian conception selfhood and the traditional understanding of kingship since they both center and draw on God's authority. But the reference to the political and social support system of kingship reveals a pragmatic understanding of government that incorporates market valuation into the traditional hierarchy of distinction.<sup>47</sup> The speaker propounds that the principle of power lies in its display. His professed beneficence is in effect a demonstration of his superiority. It serves to gain the approbation of his so-called sexual inferiors, just as the display of the crown's "glories" is needed to obtain the reverence of its subjects.

The speaker adopts a double standard in his application of market worth. Men's sexual demands determine the value of Chloe and women in general, but the market valuation of self worth, however, does not apply to him. As seen above in the metaphor of the sun, he relies on the royal ideology

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of intrinsic worth and supremacy to assert his superiority. Lovelace playfully shows how the speaker manipulates the ideas of market dynamics for self-promotion. After the first stanza, the entire poem centers on how this system benefits and glorifies the speaker. He turns into the middle man who gains part of the "profit" in his marketing of Chloe--an idea that Lovelace develops in the next stanza in the image of the usurer.

Chloe may be praised in the typical Petrarchan comparison to gems and pearls, but by the end of the lyric she is likened to capital and meat. The images of the coveting usurer and the compulsive glutton illustrate the libertine's self-indulgence and rapacity. For the speaker, Chloe is but a means to grasp some kind of authoritative control and to regenerate his sexual appetite. In this market model, the woman loses significance in the circuit of male desire, where the speaker's "heat" (3) fires Damas's passion which in turn re-ignites the former's appetites. The market model of sexuality initially appears to dignify female desires, but as the poem unfolds it actually serves to dramatize the primacy of male desire.

The libertine market of free love obviously reshapes courtly love rhetoric and the dynamics between the mistress and her poet-lover. For the Cavalier poet attracted to the self-fashioning of the defiant libertine figure, the market paradigm introduces a new pattern for the old Petrarchan love hierarchy. The conventional love rhetoric of Neoplatonism and Petrarchism

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addressed to mistress, female patron, or the queen herself typically expresses praise, adoration, and most of all the pledge of allegiance and service. In contrast, the language of commerce provides the libertine with the values of self-interest, freedom, and autonomy. At the same time, the market valorization of individualistic desires, consumption, and profit allows the poets to create a witty inversion of the politicized Platonic love discourse when they obscure the power play in the seduction rhetoric of reciprocal pleasure.

However, in the final analysis the Cavalier poets look at the marketplace from the conservative and aristocratic position when they focus on the profiteering mentality. In the poem "To Chloe," Lovelace blatantly degrades the commercial principles of "use and rate" to the avarice and perversion of usury in the last stanza. The poets exploit commercial values to dramatize the subversive elements in libertinism. They portray market economics and libertinism as materialistic and reductive: the former valorizes money, the latter turns sexual pleasure into the ultimate value. In the transgressive poetics of libertinism, the poets undermine both the aristocratic and the emerging "bourgeois" practices to construct a flagrantly rebellious poet-lover who locates his center completely in himself and his sexual demands.

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### *The Libertine Edenic Sexuality*

From the early models of Ovid, Tasso, Tibullus, and Propertius, to Jean de Meung's *Romance of the Rose* and Spenser's "Bower of Bliss," a Golden Age of sexual bliss has a long tradition.<sup>48</sup> Eugene R. Cunnar's essay, "Fantasizing a Sexual Golden Age in Seventeenth-Century Poetry," points out the popularity of a sexual Eden in seventeenth-century England. Donne, Carew, Lovelace, Randolph, and Cartwright are some of the poets who depict a sexual golden age in their lyrics. Descriptions of a sexual paradise can serve didactic purposes. In Spenser's Bower of Bliss, for example, the poet conjures up the realm of the senses only to exorcise its temptations. The sexual paradise finally serves to affirm the restraint of desires and to celebrate the reign of the virgin queen.<sup>49</sup> Other depictions of the erotic pastoral, such as Suckling's "His Dream" and Stanley's "Loves Innocence," carefully contain its subversive potential within the rhetorical context of dreams. Then there are poems like Cartwright's "A Song of Dalliance," Lovelace's "To Amarantha, that she would dishevel her hair," and "Amyntor's Grove" that follow the example of Donne's "The Exstasie" by limiting the licentiousness of a sexual utopia to the privacy of a couple's exalted love.

The Golden Age of libertine sexuality depicted in Carew's "A Rapture" and Lovelace's "Love made in the first Age: To Chloris" is different from the above examples because it deliberately emphasizes the provocative aspects of a



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sexual Eden. Its anti-authoritarian and anti-moralistic naturalism opposes the selfless ideals of Neoplatonism and Christian humanism. The vision of individualistic freedom specifically attacks contemporary mores and institutional constraints. In contrast to the utopia featured in the court masques and other mythic glorifications of the Stuart reign, the courtiers' portrayal of a libertine Golden Age exhibits an unmistakeable anti-courtly edge to its outrageous eroticism. Patterson observes that "Caroline Arcadianism was, if anything, more explicit and more pervasive as cultural statement," especially since the pastoral was the queen's "personal style."<sup>50</sup> Pastoral romance was the perfect vehicle for nationalistic idealism. Caroline court masques, for example, typically depict England as a bucolic realm of harmony, order, and felicity. The Caroline myth of halcyon days is also a distinctive part of the Stuart royal iconography, epitomised by the Rubens paintings of paradisiacal England in the Whitehall Banqueting House.<sup>51</sup> When they draw upon the erotic tradition of a sexual Golden Age to shape an individualistic and empowering vision of paradise, Cavalier libertine lyrics challenge the nationalistic and royalistic rendering of pastoral romance.

One important model for the Caroline descriptions of a sexual Eden is Carew's "A Rapture." It sparked off several parodies, rebuttals, and imitations.<sup>52</sup> From the bold description of an Edenic sexuality to the attack on honor and society's morals and laws, "A Rapture" was recognized as an

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outrageous poem in its time, so much so that Carew was permanently identified with it.<sup>53</sup> The work gained so much notoriety that in one parliamentary session of 1640 it was blacklisted as one of the "swarming of lascivious, idle, and unprofitable bookes" of all time.<sup>54</sup> Some critics even forgot that the poem was composed before the Caroline reign. (It was written during the early 1620s, probably between 1622-24.<sup>55</sup>) Nevertheless, these critics are not wrong to read the poem in the political context of Charles I's reign. Carew's poem later circulated amongst Caroline courtiers and poets, and it influenced other libertine lyrics like Randolph's "A Pastorall Courtship." This Jacobean piece obviously acquired a new relevance in the Caroline court. Both Stuart courts drew upon the Golden Age mythology to project an idealized version of themselves. Jacobean masques such as *The Golden Age Restored* make explicit references, but even the more subtle Caroline masques present the myth of halcyon days.<sup>56</sup> The libertine politics of a sexual Eden, as we shall see, remains no less applicable to Caroline readers than to Jacobean.

Carew's persona begins his seduction by questioning the very principle that holds Celia back. He metaphorically transforms honor into an intimidating giant that guards the gateway to "Loves Elizium." He declares Honor to be "a Masquer":

He is but forme, and onely frights in show  
The duller eyes that looke from farre; draw neere,  
And thou shalt scorne, what we were wont to feare.

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We shall see how the stalking Pageant goes  
With borrowed legs, a heavie load to those  
That made, and beare him; not as we once thought  
The seed of Gods, but a weake modell wrought  
By greedy men, that seeke to enclose the common,  
And within private armes empale free woman.

(12-20)

The reference to masques and pageants alludes to the distinctive practices of the court and their ideological function. Since the court is traditionally the source of chivalric honor for the rest of the country, Carew suggestively diminishes its authority when he exposes an ugly gap between show and reality, form and content in Honor's display of grandeur and supremacy. There was indeed a great disparity between the image of James's reign as a "Golden Age restor'd" in the masques and the reality of a debauched and unruly court. The Jacobean masques often tacitly criticize the king and his politics, and this lyric does the same behind the facade of a seduction poem. In debasing Honor, Carew is also undermining the king who is the national fount of honor. James I was often careless in his distribution of titles, and many saw him as personally responsible for devaluing honor in early seventeenth-century England. The "old" aristocracy certainly complained about how "greedy men" could badger the king for titles and royal favors. When Carew describes Honor as "the seed of Gods," we are reminded of how James personally advanced the theory of divine kingship. From 1610 to 1621, James effectively ruled without Parliament, and in 1622, he dissolved Parliament when the winter meeting on

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foreign policy ended bitterly. Given this political context, these lines appear to interrogate the concept of divine kinship and absolute rule. In 1609, James told Parliament that "Kings are justly called Gods for that they exercise a manner of resemblance of Divine power upon earth: if you will consider the attributes of God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King."<sup>57</sup> Ironically, James's own behavior undermines his rhetoric of divine kingship. His crass and brutish conduct violated court etiquette; the unruly nature of court life and entertainment also did not uphold the traditional paradigm of royal dignity and courtly decorum.

The lines quoted earlier from "A Rapture" were also politically apt for Caroline courtiers. Charles I participated in the court masques, and some critics take the poem's masquer as an allusion to him. Venuti, for example, observes that this masquer is like the king since he commands his subjects' obedience on line 5, and later lines refer to the "imperious sway" of "this proud *Usurper*" (149-50).<sup>58</sup> Like his father, Charles I dispensed with Parliament during the Personal Rule (1629-1640). Carew's courtly readers of "A Rapture" would not be going against the poet's own sentiments in giving the lyric this new interpretation. After all, Carew's later poem "Upon my Lord Chiefe Iustice" indirectly criticizes Charles I's personal rule. It is addressed to Sir John Finch, a notable champion of the royal prerogative.<sup>59</sup> Carew's image of "the golden Age" (15) in the poem is more like the libertine's than the Platonic version

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depicted in the Caroline masques. The male sexual fantasy of a paradise of sexually compliant women seen in "A Rapture" finds its equivalent in the poem's "Loves free state" (4), where "the fayre shall all be kind" (19). Both poems spurn the picture of happy subjection and obedience inscribed in the politicized pastoral that exalts royal absolutism as a Golden Age. Carew's version of paradise extols an individualistic freedom that is only possible without any kind of external restraint.

When Carew wrote "A Rapture," he frequented the Jacobean court, but he was also experiencing difficulties in finding patronage after being dismissed by Lord Carleton. His frustration must have been exacerbated by James's openhanded generosity, for only those close to the king's favorites could take advantage of the change from Elizabeth's parsimonious distribution of titles. Patronage was askew in the Jacobean court because the traditionally broad-based network of power became narrowly channelled through the king's favorites, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.<sup>60</sup> The libertine's Golden Age, with its anti-courtly thrust and presentation of a male fantasy of sexual plenty and mastery, understandably appealed to rebellious poets and courtiers constrained by the pressures of Stuart court life and/or their search for patronage.

In "A Rapture," the seduction rhetoric helps to heighten the transgressive character of the libertine's lust as it illustrates his calculating

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exploitation of conventional love courtship and language. As in the rhetoric of libertine market sexuality, the speaker of "A Rapture" offers the seduction of reciprocal pleasure. He avows sexual equality to Celia and proposes a world of pleasures and freedom for "the nobler traine / Of Valiant Lovers" who dare to challenge the unreasonable dictates of conventional morality. He paints an alluring picture of a naturalistic first age ruled by "the Queene of Love, and Innocence, / Beautie and Nature" (25-26). This is the realm of idyllic pleasures; not even sleep can disrupt the lovers' enjoyment. Their dreams, the speaker tells Celia, would replay the "past pleasure" of waking moments (42). But the Edenic togetherness of "us" in the mode of persuasion quickly slips to a self-serving fantasy of his own desires.<sup>61</sup> The land of raptures turns out to be the preserve of the speaker alone, for his "delicious Paradise" (60) is Celia's body. He metaphorically transforms her body into an erotic garden of flowers ("Rosebuds," "Violet knots," lilies, eglantine) and fruits (apple, cherry, berry) for him to taste and "ravish." The subject of the poem is clearly not Celia but the speaker's desires.<sup>62</sup>

The libertine sexual dynamics of conquest and domination is unmistakable. For one who professedly opposes the tyrannic possessiveness of women (19), he consistently projects Celia as property, object, or territory that is to be possessed, exploited, or collected by men.<sup>63</sup> Metaphorically reduced to a sexual body part--a "virgin-treasure" that is "ready still for mintage" (34), a

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sea primed for the invasion of the ocean, or a harbour awaiting its ship--Celia turns into a sexual prize. She is a body for the speaker to "enjoy" and conquer. He compares himself to a bee "deflowring the fresh virgins of the Spring" (58); he is also a pioneer preparing "a tract for lovers" (72) upon Celia's snow-white body. The speaker's portrayal of "Loves Elizium" serves to aggrandize his sexual prowess. He is the magical and potent lover "with [the] Chimmique skill" to "bring that great *Elixar*" (78) to her "hive." Repetitive references and descriptions of coition from the second to the fourth verse paragraph clearly convey his sexual vigor.<sup>64</sup> Aggressive verbs (*deflower, rifle, seize, ravish, invade, ride*) emphasize his mastery, but along with the period's secondary meaning of rape and abduction implicit in the title, they portray a libertine fantasy where his sexual desires cannot be denied.<sup>65</sup> The speaker's self-glorifying identification with Jove, the ruler of the heavens who imposes his sexual will upon mortal virgins, clearly indicates that his sexuality thrives upon the complete domination of his sexual object.<sup>66</sup>

A sexual Eden is the paradise of the libertine because it legitimates and sanctifies his will and desires. The speaker's naturalistic framework turns society's normal relationships and values on their head. At the start of the poem, he presents a similar argument to that seen in "Confined Love"; he wittily inverts the common association of sexual freedom with limitless indulgence so that constancy itself is insatiable greediness. Later he deliberately

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perverts contemporary morality by adopting religious terms to valorize carnal bliss. The speaker speaks of a different religion to Celia: the "perfume" from the "juyce of kisses" is the "religious incense" that will "send up holy vapours, to those powres / That blesse [their] loves" (94-95). At first Carew appears to describe a "higher love," as Lynn Sadler calls it, since this blessed love brings "such Halcion calmenesse" (97) and "steadfast peace" (98) in the souls of the lovers.<sup>67</sup> But this is not the exalted union of Donne's "The Exstasie" for the unfolding paragraph portrays the appetitive instincts of the libertine:

No wedlock bonds unwreathe our twisted loves;  
We seeke no midnight Arbor, no dark groves  
To hide our kisses, there, the hated name  
Of husband, wife, lust, modest, chaste, of shame,  
Are vaine and empty words, whose very sound  
Was never heard in the Elizian ground.  
All things are lawfull there, that may delight  
Nature, or unrestrained Appetite;  
Like, and enjoy, to will, and act, is one,  
We only sinne when Loves rites are not done.

(106-15)

The religion he describes is the libertine's creed of carnal indulgence. Carew evokes Spenser's "Bower of blisse" (68) to accentuate his radical treatment of naturalistic thought. Carew's line, "All things are lawfull there," does away with the condemnation of hedonism implicit in the phrase Spenser uses: "And each vnto his lust did make a lawe."<sup>68</sup> Here legal, social, and religious system and values are but "vaine and empty words" (109). This is the libertine's paradise where his sexual will and its gratification is one and the same--and



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that in itself is the law.

The fifth verse paragraph continues the inversion of the world and its ethics in the presentation of a "heaven" for chaste women. In this Elizium, renowned exemplars of virtue who suffered and died for their chastity can now reap all the pleasures so long denied to them. Lucrece, Penelope, Daphne, and Laura throw away society's moral fetters and enjoy the luxury of sexual abandonment. In the way that the speaker has earlier projected his own lust upon Celia, the scrupulously chaste women here assume the immoderate and urgent sexual passions of their seducers. The speaker's vision of Lucrece learning the various sexual positions from "the divine / Lectures of Loves great master, *Aretine*" (115-16) and of Penelope "display[ing] / Her selfe before the Youth of *Ithaca*" (128) effectively turn them into courtesans. He also transforms Daphne and Laura into devoted and adoring fans of their once rejected lovers: "full of her God" (137), this version of Daphne adores and reveres Apollo, and Petrarch's Laura is now attentive and loving in his arms. The speaker is in fact expanding the private garden of love that seems to exist only for Celia and him into a heaven for all libertines. Lucrece, Penelope, Daphne, Laura, and all women who reject men's sexual advances turn penitent, amorous, even "gamesome." When he declares that "These, and ten thousand Beauties more" (143) would scorn Honor's laws and "pay into Loves Exchequer double rent" (146), he is also slyly describing a male fantasy of a

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paradise of lusty beauties.

In the last verse paragraph, Carew shifts to a serious and radical examination of the basis of aristocratic honor. As noted by M. L. Donnelly in his reading of the poem, Carew rejects the *carpe diem* depiction of nature's mutability to focus on the social barricades against sexuality as an individualistic pleasure.<sup>69</sup> First he refers to the conventional naturalistic argument of how honor forces women to go against their natural constitution since "Nature made [them] unapt for abstinence" (152). But he provides an original angle on sexual freedom when he exposes the contradictions inherent in the gendered code of honor. The speaker tells Celia of the darker side to "the Tyrant" Honor:

When yet this false Impostor can dispence  
With humane Justice, and with sacred right,  
And maugre both their lawes command me fight  
With Rivals, or with emulous Loves, that dare  
Equall with thine, their Mistresse eyes, or haire:  
If thou complaine of wrong, and call my sword  
To carve out thy revenge, upon that word  
He bids me fight and kill, or else he brands  
With markes of infamie my coward hands,  
And yet religion bids from blood-shed flye,  
And damns me for that Act. Then tell me why  
This Goblin Honour which the world adores,  
Should make men Atheists, and not women Whores.

(154-66)

The questioning of honor here is part of the period's re-evaluation of the meaning of honor, first brought on by the humanist movement in Elizabethan

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England and intensified by the devaluation of honor in the Stuart reign. Where other arguments for libertinism subvert the honor code by redefining it according to appetitive human nature, Carew undermines the honor code by exposing male honor as a ridiculous and debased remnant of medieval military valor. Here the chivalric code is a corrupt custom concerned less with the nobility of character than with social prestige. In fact, it is but a facile pride in petty male rivalry. The question of chastity and valor answered in bloodshed reveals a perverse tradition that has nothing to do with truth or virtue. Carew illustrates the contrary character of the honor code and how it is incompatible with other laws and principles, both civil and religious, and thereby repudiates honor with the very values and ideals it is supposed to uphold. In his attack on the irrationality behind all the value systems of society, the speaker shows Celia that she is better off without the artificial and corrupt dictate of honor. A libertine order, as such, would make more sense than the outmoded and degenerated behavioral codes handed down through the ages.<sup>70</sup>

In demonstrating the different valuation of honor for the sexes, however, Carew shows us that there is in fact no corresponding inconsistency with female honor. Although a woman's honor is supposedly incompatible with her sexual nature, it is in line with religious and civil laws on female sexual constraint. Many readers have pointed out that the last question undercuts the speaker's argument. After all, the pejorative "whore" would remind Celia of all

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the moral and social condemnation of female sexual freedom.<sup>71</sup> J. W.

Ebsworth demonstrates that much of the negative impact of the original lines could be erased by using the period's euphemism for women's sexual generosity:

This goblin "Honour", whom the world enshrined,  
Should make men Atheists, and not women kind?<sup>72</sup>

Carew's choice of word--"whore" rather than "kind"--is deliberately provocative; it is part of his tactics to shock and corresponds to his exploitation of the transgressive character of a sexual Golden Age. The word may also indicate the speaker's unstated wish that women should be "whores" like in the imaginary heaven of courtesan-like beauties. Carew has clearly abandoned the mode of persuasion when he embarks on the lecture against the social institution of honor. The unusual speech reveals that his focus in the poem is not seduction nor eroticism, but rather the anti-authoritarian and anti-moralistic poet-lover who dramatizes his mastery and demands personal gratification above all else.

Ultimately, however, the speaker's sensual Elizium is itself like the masque of honor that he depicts: a misleading and artificial "show."<sup>73</sup> The imperative "I will enjoy thee" that opens the poem remains unfulfilled by the end of the poem. Carew also exposes the fantastical aspect of this Elizium. Despite the sense of immediacy, he underlines the contrast between "there" and

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"here," the future versus the present.<sup>74</sup> The element of escapism becomes increasingly obvious as the poem unfolds. By the fourth verse paragraph, the outside world and its harsh reality intrude upon the speaker's consciousness such that he needs to protect the paradisiacal realm from jealous rivals, betraying intruders, "envious eyes," as well as the sense of guilt and fear. In the following verse paragraph, the bizarre mixture of references to historical, mythical, and fictional women reveals the fictitious dimension of the speaker's Elizium. The final section shows that the giant Honor who was so easily defeated by the lovers in the first part of the poem is now almighty. Paula Johnson notes that "it no longer merely 'is' a pageant that one can scorn, but it acts, fetters, dispenses, commands, makes."<sup>75</sup> Finally the vision of a sexual Eden loses its immediacy, and the disjunction between will and enjoyment, unlike that in Elizium, remains by the end of the poem.

Where "A Rapture" emphasizes the imaginary dimension of the realm of sexual bliss, Lovelace's poem "Love made in the first Age" describes a sexual Eden that is clearly lost to the past. This lyric is published in the 1659 posthumous volume of *Lucasta*. Although there is no evidence of the date of composition, it was probably written early enough for the poem's implicit references to Henrietta Maria's cult of Platonic love to remain significant, but close enough to or during the period of political upheaval of the Civil War to register a deep sense of loss.<sup>76</sup> The speaker informs Chloris how wrong and

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degraded present courtship and sexual relations are. In comparison to the innocence and spontaneity of the first age, today's "wooing" of "fine words" (9) and "compliments" (8) is forced, ridiculous, and hypocritical. Like other libertine lyrics, "Love made in the first Age" implicitly criticizes the discourse and strictures of Platonic love at the Caroline court. Again the picture of a sexual paradise is evoked to counter the superficiality and constraints of the cult of Platonic love.

Lovelace's sexual Eden is the same garden of love described in Carew's "Rapture," where naturalistic freedom does away with all restrictions. The speaker tells Chloris of a different practice that makes the first age a "thrice happy" place:

When cursed *No* stain'd no Maids Blisse,  
And all discourse was summ'd in *Yes*,  
And Nought forbad, but to forbid.

(10-12)

As the poem unfolds, the reference to "Maids Blisse" is but lip service to the satisfaction of women's sexual needs. This paradise is the counterpart of the heaven abounding with sensual beauties in "A Rapture." Here, "Lads, indifferently did crop / A Flower, and a Maiden-head" (17-18) without the trouble of courtship and society's dictate of sexual restraint. Stanzas three and four present an erotic picture of men enjoying sexual plenty as part of nature's abundance and gifts. Women, reduced to various body parts and stripped of

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their agency, are but flowers and fruits to serve the sexual appetites of men.<sup>77</sup>

The bucolic bliss of lads and lasses suggested in the second stanza turns into a sexual utopia reserved strictly for men.

In the second half of the poem, the speaker suddenly presents a naturalistic version of the Adamic couple. Like the biblical pair, "both broken Faith" (31), but in this revision of the first age, there is no fall and hence no sin: "each touch was naturally Chast, / And their mere Sense a Miracle" (41-42). Lovelace follows the naturalistic argument when he replaces original sin with original innocence. In this private world of bliss and spontaneity, the two, as the speaker claims, live like angels. This version of the Eden is in fact closer to the Golden Age of the Caroline masques than the speaker's earlier depiction of sensual indulgence. This realm of innocence without the serpent is, for example, comparable to the "Loves Hesperides" of Carew's *Coelum Britannicum*, that paradise of "rich golden fruit, and yet no Dragon neare."<sup>78</sup> The poem's focus on "chaste desires" clearly echoes the rhetoric of Platonic love; indeed, the constancy and bliss of this Adamic couple whose love lasts till death and beyond is another reminder of the idealization of conjugal love that Henrietta Maria encouraged in poems, drama, and court masques.

"Love made in the first Age" is not one of Lovelace's better poems; as noted by other critics, some of the images are ludicrous and almost grotesque.<sup>79</sup> The confusing jump from the sexual variety and freedom of the

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leads to the constancy of the Adamic couple appears to offer contradictory versions of a Golden Age.<sup>80</sup> What is clear is that both accounts undermine the rhetoric of Platonic love. The close echo of the masques only emphasizes the differences: here is no subjection to Virtue, a role that the queen typically adopts in the masques. In fact, the final stanza shows in no uncertain terms that the innocent and angelic bliss of the Adamic couple is but the speaker's self-serving bid to captivate Chloris. His wily attempt to persuade her into illicit sexual relations jars with his evocation of the eternal constancy of the couple and their innocence.

The switch from the imaginary past to the present in the last stanza suddenly places the entire fantasy in the proper context. It turns out that the description of the first age is the speaker's response to what has already transpired between Chloris and him. He reveals a bullying aggression in the following lines:

Now, *CHLORIS*! miserably crave,  
The offer'd blisse you would not have;  
Which evermore I must deny....

(55-57)

What initially appears to be a seduction rhetoric turns out to be a love complaint and a method of "revenge." Unlike that first age, Chloris appears to have found the speaker's direct approach "a Crime." She is clearly not one of the maids who said "yes." So he stages a rhetorical victory to gain control of



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the situation. His description of perfect bliss becomes his revenge: she will "miserably crave" what she has given up and he can have the pleasure of denying Chloris "evermore" of such ecstasy.

Lovelace wittily undermines all the reader's expectations with the last paragraph when he turns seduction into revenge and love-making into masturbation:

Whilst ravish'd with these Noble Dreams,  
And crowned with mine own soft Beams,  
Injoving of my self I lye.

(58-60)

The speaker presents his "self-enjoyment" as a triumphant insistence on sexual gratification and a display of complete self-sufficiency. Instead of seducing Chloris, he "ravishes" himself with his own sexual fantasies; and instead of the typical assertion of the libertine's mastery associated with sexual conquest, the "crowning" of autoeroticism indicates an insistence on any kind of sexual gratification. The rhyme of "deny" with "lye," along with the pun on the latter and final word of the poem, hints at the extent of the speaker's denial of his sexual "defeat" to the reader. Even more so than "A Rapture," the poem demonstrates that the imaginary world of sexual bliss is created by the frustrated desires of the present.

The idealized past or the pastoral ideal is an unattainable fantasy, as Elias points. As a vision of spontaneity and freedom, the romantic pastoral

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contrasts the pressures and constraints of court life.<sup>81</sup> The libertine pastoral clearly articulates the same desire for release from the constraining behavioral codes of court society. It translates the utopian abundance of the paradisiacal mode into a masculine fantasy of unlimited sexual prowess and pleasures, but it also emphasizes a private world far away from the experiences of limitation, punishment, betrayal, and shame. In essence, it is escapism and provides a much needed succor from an oppressive court society. Like the romantic pastoral that Elias analyzes, the libertine's version of the pastoral discloses an imaginary and artificial character. A sexual Golden Age, however, serves a different purpose from the courtly pastoral that portrays happy subjects celebrating their king's golden reign. It is an individualistic version of the courtly pastoral, where the nationalistic values of a golden age are countered by an entirely self-serving and self-indulgent perspective on paradisiacal bliss.

Elias discovers that the wish-fulfilment of freedom from courtly restrictions in the pastoral romance inscribes the very courtliness that speaks of the constant formality and self-restraint of court life.<sup>82</sup> For example, "A Rapture" and "Love made in the first Age" depict an urbane gentility, their descriptions of sex remain part of the courtly "high" in comparison to the low of the bestial sexuality depicted in Rochester's poems. The libertine who spins off a seductive rhetoric of reciprocal pleasure, the perceptive nonconformist who tears down Honor's mask in "A Rapture," and the poet who dons the

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libertine persona all exhibit the theatricality that characterized court life. If the Caroline court masques presented an idealized version of the court--courtiers, along with the royal couple, engaged in theatrical enactments of their glorified selves--then the fantasy of sexual fulfilment makes a sexual Golden Age the perfect discursive site for the aggrandizement of the libertine "I."

\* \* \*

The three different aspects of Cavalier libertine sexuality discussed so far--the anti-Platonic politics, the market model of desire, and the libertine pastoral--serve to demonstrate the transgressive politics of libertinism and the poets' insistence on a non-conforming individualism. Caroline libertine lyrics illustrate that the young poets and courtiers enjoyed the complexity of the libertine persona who plays with society's norms and morals and the court's favored Platonic rhetoric. As shown earlier, the courtier could expose the artificial character of court society behind the guise of the worldly-wise and superior libertine and at the same time relish his persona's insistence on complete command and freedom. These libertine poems reveal the changing sense of selfhood for the poet and courtier. They question the aristocratic codes and the Caroline court culture; they also implicitly propose an oppositional model to the humanist prescriptions of the courtier's role. As we have seen in

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the libertine lyrics, the poets replace the courtly decorum of self-restraint and refinement with the sly charm of a seducer, and their playful rhetorical creations become their witty defiance when they eschew the edifying principle instructed by Puttenham's manual *The Arte of English Poesie*. Castiglione's courtier centered on God and his ruler makes way for the assertion of a new self-sufficiency that is all too apparent in these libertine lyrics. The motto on Van Dyck's portrait of Suckling reads, "Do not look for yourself outside yourself."<sup>83</sup>

### **The Libertine's Frustration and Discontent**

The libertine's projection of a world of bliss and a self of unlimited potency and invincibility, as we shall see, is a response to a very different reality. Although the courtiers enjoyed the posturing of their defiant persona, their poetry nevertheless reveals an awareness of transgression and shows the problematic nature of libertine freedom and control. Society's mores and values, from the libertine version of religious rites and prelapsarian innocence to the invocation of such loaded terms as "sin," "guilt," and "shame," clearly

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influence the descriptions of libertine self-presentation. "A Rapture" has to redefine libertine sexuality as innocent and lawful.<sup>84</sup> The implied need for stealth and secrecy at the beginning of the poem--to "passe unseene / Unto the blissfull shore" (8-9)--shows that in the end Carew's Elizium signals peace and sanctity because it is a world free from the fears that come from committing acts of transgression. In defining the libertine perspective against orthodox society, the Edenic poems demonstrate the authority and force of the latter,<sup>85</sup> and at the same time, they underscore the difficulty of attaining the libertine will. In the same way that the poet's individualistic rebelliousness is confined to the rhetorical mask of his lyric "I," he limits his persona's sense of freedom, control, and sensual fulfilment to mere rhetorical pronouncements. Lovelace and Suckling, for example, are not always able to escape from their personal troubles and frustration through their libertine posturing. At times their personae reveal a deep-seated frustration in the perverse insistence on any kind of gratification which, as Lovelace's poems show, is a desperate attempt to close the gap between the libertine's will and act.

One of the obstacles to the libertine's sexual fantasy is the woman's will. Cavalier libertine lyrics typically introduce a speaker who thrives on seducing the reluctant virgin. But in "Love made in the first Age" and "Ingratefull beauty threatned," the rhetorical flexing of machismo muscles is in reality a retaliation against female sexual rejection. Despite the speaker's

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assertion of his influence in "To a Lady that desired I would love her," she alone has the choice to either "torment, or scorne, or love" (5) him. The same applies to Celia in "A Rapture." Since the woman has the prerogative to reject her suitor, the libertine requires a rhetoric of reciprocal pleasure and mutual benefit in order to seduce (or con) her into sexual compliance. In the libertine's vision of sexual bliss, women are easy or passive partners who service his sexual needs. Lovelace's persona of "La Bella Bona Roba," for example, reduces women to game. His rejection of the "*Rascall Deare*" suggests more than a repulsion for thin lovers. It hints at his preference for the docility of the "largest Doe," which is clearly more easily conquered than the "*Rascall Deare*."

Cunnar observes that the fantasy of sexual prowess exposes male sexual insecurities.<sup>86</sup> The libertine speaker recognizes that women hold the key to his envisioned paradise and sexual identity. In "To Chloe," Lovelace's speaker is the "sun within [Chloe's] sphere" (15), but the image of intrinsic and absolute power belies the fact that it is Chloe's (supposed) hierarchical valuation of lovers that places him at the top. A mistress' rejection would strip the lover of his sense of mastery. In Carew's "A deposition from Love," the dejected speaker describes the loss of his lover as comparable to that of "deposed Kings" (30). But the woman who accepts his suit can equally cut down his ego. Suckling's pair of poems "[The constant Lover]" and "[The Answer]" illustrates that even the constancy of a mere three days places a libertine in the position

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of humiliation since his mistress "puts each minute such as [him] / A dozen to disgrace" (15-16). Libertinism in the Cavalier lyrics, as it is in Donne's poems, is the attempt to overcome the changeability of female nature and human relationships either by a rhetorical mastering of women or by his own inconstancy.

David J. Latt finds that certain Cavalier lyrics present "intense eroticism" as a defense against "the effects of time and death."<sup>87</sup> A sexual Golden Age is the realm of perfection because it appears to be inviolable by time and nature's law of putrefaction. But clearly that picture of Edenic bliss is incompatible with the naturalistic principle of change that justifies sexual freedom and variety for the libertine. Carew, Lovelace, and Suckling, however, do recognize the problems and contradictions in the libertine's quest for Edenic bliss. Several of Lovelace's poems emphasize the transitory nature of sensual gratification. The idyllic scene of love and eroticism in "To Amarantha, That she would dishevell her haire," for example, ends with tears, sorrow, and an acute sense of the ephemeral nature of joys. Worse, in the more blatantly libertine lyrics, pleasure is not only brief, it can rapidly lose its compelling nature. Lovelace's more cynical poem "To Chloe" shows that the lover requires the stimulation of another's lust for his mistress to reignite his own flagging sexual interest and enjoyment. Carew's "The second Rapture" depicts the perfect object of lust--a fantasy of "true blisse"--but it also tells of the speaker's

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"old decayed appetite" (24) and his desire for sexual potency and renewal. Sensual pleasures pale rapidly. Suckling's persona informs us that "even kisses lose their taste" after "fruition." To prolong pleasure, the speakers of Suckling's two poems "Against Fruition" [I] and [II] paradoxically advise the postponement of coition. "Fruition is dull," the speaker of the first poem declares. "'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear: / It were not heaven if we knew what it were" (23-24). These paradoxical and ironic arguments against fruition on the libertine grounds of pleasure indicate a deep cynicism about the possibility of true sexual fulfilment. Yet the libertine's vision of a sexual golden age also reveals a yearning for idealistic sexual bliss. It is precisely his constant expectation of a "heaven" that intensifies the libertine's frustration and deep discontentment.

At times desire itself appears to be predetermined and beyond the libertine's control. In Suckling's "Perjury [disdain'd]," the speaker's argument for his inconstancy sounds like a sly subterfuge in the mutability of life and human nature for the purpose of extricating oneself from a relationship. But in Sonnet I, Suckling seriously ponders on how changes in desires are beyond one's will and comprehension as he considers the inconstancy of human passions and relationships. If these poems contradict the mastery that the libertine poet-lover typically claims, other lyrics undermine his freedom. In Suckling's sonnet "Of thee (kind boy) I ask no red and white," the final image



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of easy gratification is strangely passive in the portrayal of sensual gratification as mechanical response. The naturalistic definition of human nature that the libertine uses to justify his sexual freedom is also the relentless "itch" of Cartwright's "No Platonic Love" that compels a frantic search for release. In these poems the libertine's search for quick gratification appears to be more compulsive and mechanical than liberating.

Suckling's "[Loves Feast]" illustrates the plight of the jaded libertine.

The speaker's heart has grown

Sullen and wise, will have its will,  
And like old Hawks pursues that still  
That makes least sport, flies onely where't can kill.

(8-10)

There is no longer any excitement for the "sport" of testing one's seduction skills.<sup>88</sup> Not only does he give up the thrill of the hunt, he also does away with civility and finesse. He is the impatient and belligerent guest at the "[Loves Feast]," where he would "be carving of the best, / [and] Rudely call for the last course 'fore the rest" (14-15). Sexual release however delivers no contentment. "How short a time the Feast doth last!" the speaker laments. He realizes that there is something lost in the predatory hunt for sexual satisfaction:

Men rise away, and scarce say grace,  
Or civilly once thank the face  
That did invite, but seek another place.

(18-20)

Donnelly points out Suckling's ambivalence in this portrait of the libertine. The

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speaker who shows a selfish greediness in place of common courtesy is hardly a positive contrast to the youth who believes that "the pain's the glory" (12) and who will "mannerly sit out Loves Feast" (13). Indeed, as Donnelly observes, the last three lines express a regret that such sexual liaisons cannot maintain the barest form of civility at the end of a sexual encounter, let alone provide real intimacy.<sup>89</sup> Unlike the other poems that characterize the libertine's pursuit of gratification as witty defiance and individualistic freedom, "[Loves Feast]" hints at the darker side of appetitive drives that strip men of any refinement and sensitivity. As Donne's "Communitie" has portrayed before Suckling, there is a loss of humanity in the libertine's callous treatment of women. "[Loves Feast]" further complicates the portrait of the libertine with the speaker's full awareness of the degrading nature of his sexual practice. His self-knowledge may indicate "wisdom" as he calls it, but it does not liberate him from his sexual compulsion. It only leads to his "sullen" participation in the relentless cycle for sexual gratification.

Lovelace matches Suckling's ambivalence in his portrait of the libertine in "A Loose Saraband." He presents the same insistent lust, but his persona's deep cynicism about human nature and society brings no self-awareness; and if the sexual compulsion of Suckling's speaker reduces his humanity, the hedonism of the speaker in "A Loose Saraband" appears almost self-destructive in his need for a hedonistic oblivion. The seduction poem opens with the

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libertine offering the woman in question "a double Fire" (3)--a passion that is to be satiated first with Renish, then "Love's posset" (16). His description of the "fury" of such passions suggests a wild abandonment that throws out all decorum, modesty, and self-restraint. From the speaker's complaint of miserly and inhospitable Love to the image of a violent and deranged world, he reveals that this frenzy is propelled by acute disillusionment and cynicism.<sup>90</sup> He tells the woman:

See all the World how't staggers,  
More ugly drunk then we,  
As if far gone in daggers,  
And blood it seem'd to be....

(25-28)

The picture of uncontrollable destruction and violence is meant to contrast that of their lovemaking. But the "sweets" of love are in fact nothing like the bliss of a sexual Golden Age. They too are "ugly drunk," and the earlier description of wild passion (which flames, rages, and drowns) echoes the depiction of a senseless world out of control. Indeed, they seem to be part of a sordid world.

Lovelace deliberately refers to the Elizium of Carew's "A Rapture," but the allusion dramatizes a stark contrast to the present reality:

What of Elizium's missing?  
Still Drinking and still Kissing;  
Adoring plump October;  
Lord! What is Man and Sober?

(37-40)

"A Loose Saraband," like Carew's lyric, is a seduction poem. But Lovelace's

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cynical version turns Celia into a nameless "fair Cripple" (33), Carew's suave seducer to a brazen drunk, and Elizium to an irrelevant question. The speaker's bacchanalian solution utters a staggering redefinition of masculinity, bliss, and life itself. Weidhorn comments that Lovelace toys with the humanistic definition of man's nature by implying that "only drunken reasonlessness brings out true manliness."<sup>91</sup> Whatever outrageous wit displayed here, Lovelace's ambivalent description of the hedonist hardly portrays an authoritative alternative to the conventional conception of manhood. After the negative portrayal of the lovers' intoxication, this exclamation about inebriated virility and exuberance expresses more dark desperation than witticism.

As in "A Rapture," this poem attacks honor and even echoes Carew's line on honor as "the fools Gyant" (42). But instead of denigrating female honor with a naturalistic argument for sexual freedom, the speaker seems to be giving a practical tip to fellow seducers. "What is there left to rifle, / When Wine makes all parts plyant?" (43-44), he outrageously asks. The metaphoric language evocative of Petrarchan love in the first stanza shifts to a bawdy and colloquial diction in subsequent stanzas; and the speaker's courtly stance and seductive rhetoric of reciprocal pleasures in the first and fourth stanzas now disclose a callous and domineering sexual will. Unlike Carew's speaker, Lovelace's persona dismisses honor not by exposing ideological inconsistencies but by suggesting the most expedient means of seduction. The libertine of "A

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Rapture" undermines male honor by citing examples of petty duelling and meaningless bloodshed; in a similar way, Lovelace's speaker also questions honor as valor when he denounces glory. According to him, glory delivers "false riches" that will only lead to grief. The libertine's rejection of honor is clearly not based on ethical or logical grounds. He seems to discard the ideal of honor and its "glory" because they do not further his pursuit of pleasure; and in a world gone awry, only "Love and Sherry" (48) can bring any satisfaction.

Lovelace's poem appears in the 1659 volume, and its dark cynicism places it within the context of the Civil War. The bacchanalian insistence on pleasure in "A Loose Saraband" sounds more desperate than defiant in its attempt to find some sense of consolation from a harsh world. Libertinism in this case loses its earlier contestation of court ideology; instead, it expresses the displaced courtier's need for escapism. Several other libertine lyrics also expose the cracks in the courtier's polished facade of wit and superiority to reveal the underlying disillusion and discontentment. They suggest that despite whatever compensatory pleasures libertine posturing might offer, the poets could not truly get away from their own frustrations and limitations. Suckling's "[Loves Feast]" demonstrates the courtier's awareness of the inherent problems with libertine selfhood. The superiority and aggressive individualism that lead the libertine to reject the values and behavioral codes of his society finally result in a cynical indifference to everything, including his pursuit of sexual

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gratification. In "Loving and Beloved" Suckling explodes the illusion of libertine freedom. He reveals that the various facades that the libertine adopts finally alienate him from his true self. The speaker is so sick of the compulsive and contrary character of libertine sexuality and role-playing that he asks the "God of desire" to "take [its] brands back, and [its] fire" (21). In these poems of Suckling and Lovelace, the mask of libertine superiority and anti-courtly defiance proves to be too brittle and enervating to remain lighthearted posturing for the courtier. Suckling articulates the frustrations and self-doubts of the libertine ego, and Lovelace turns libertinism into one of the "defense measures" against bad times that Miner finds typical of the Cavalier mode.<sup>92</sup>

### **The Contradictory Nature of Cavalier Libertinism**

There is a profound contrariness to the Cavalier poets' portrayal of the libertine's selfhood, sexuality, and transgressive character. The libertine's selfhood is rife with contradictions. His worldly cynicism hides a paradoxical idealism, and his authoritative self-definition ironically expresses fears of inadequacy. Behind his avowal of liberating freedom is an awareness of the

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deterministic law of nature's mutability. The poets also introduce a contrary nature to libertine sexuality. Despite their focus on libertinism, there are few descriptions of sensuality and sexual enjoyment. In several poems, the libertine's insistence on sexual freedom paradoxically reveals an ever-pressing awareness of moral and religious condemnation of sexual freedom; even the pagan paradise of libertinism invokes the biblical context of prelapsarian Eden.

The libertine mode of this period is significantly less concerned with the delight in sensual pleasures than in manipulating the tenets of Platonic love. With the exception of seduction poems, there is little idealization of sensual pleasures in Cavalier libertine lyrics. Lovelace's "La Bella Bona Roba" and Suckling's "Of thee (kind boy) I ask no red and white" present abstract and dispassionate accounts of the libertine sexual drive. The first poem wipes out all eroticism expected of a libertine body catalogue in the reductive reference to skin and flesh; and the second makes the object of desire unimportant in the face of mechanical male sexuality. "To Chloe" shows that the primacy of male desire ironically almost dispenses with the object of lust in the perverse ménage à trois.<sup>93</sup> When sensual pleasures are exalted or described in the lyrics, it is usually part of the speaker's seduction and rhetorical creation. The scant references to sexual experiences only go on to elucidate the libertine's deep discontent, as we have seen in the previous section.

The poets' contrary treatment of libertine sexuality also typifies their

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depiction of libertine transgressiveness. They both extend and limit the radical character of libertinism in different ways. In part this is a result of their inflammatory strategies. Libertine rhetoric serves to interrogate courtly rhetoric and practices, but it does not promote libertinism as a serious alternative to the status quo. The Cavalier poets certainly aim to shock and entertain their audience. Most of Suckling's libertine lyrics are blatantly provocative; and the ingenious arguments in Lovelace's "The Scrutinie" and Suckling's "Honest Lover whosoever" are meant to delight, not convert the listener or reader. Several poems construct perverse premises and contexts: the preference for the fattest prostitute in "La Bella Bona Roba," the desire for the ugly in order to appreciate the beautiful in "A Paradox," and the speaker's inconstancy as a logical response to his mistress' "infidelity" to her original beauty in "When I by thy faire shape." These arguments indicate that the Cavalier poets are more interested in presenting wit and self-conscious rebelliousness than logic and seriousness.

As we have seen earlier in poems like "Love made in the first Age," the poets are also not averse to undermining their libertine personae and demystifying libertinism. They introduce brutal or obnoxious characters and present rhetorical contexts that often undercut the credibility of the libertine speaker. For all their fascination with the libertine's anti-authoritarian stance, they finally repudiate the libertine's extreme radicalism. The contrary character



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of Cavalier libertine lyrics can perhaps be explained in terms of the conditions under which they were written. As we shall see, the courtiers' lives reveal a dual nature as well; they are torn between private and public behavior, leisure and duty, defiance and patriotism, mastery and powerlessness, libertinism and Neoplatonism.

The nature of libertine rebelliousness appears to be linked to the poets' amateur status. Most of the libertine lyrics were written in the younger days of the poets. Both Carew and Suckling were in their twenties when they wrote their libertine poems. Carew produced the infamous "A Rapture" before he obtained a court position, and Suckling's libertine songs were mainly written during the period of 1632 to 1637, when he was away from "political and diplomatic affairs for some years" and "dedicated [to] prodigality and philandering."<sup>94</sup> At the time when he appears to be more fully engaged in his court career, his writings take on a more public and social character, and they mainly consist of occasional and complimentary pieces.<sup>95</sup> The composition of libertine lyrics appears to correspond to a more carefree and licentious phase of Suckling's life. His libertine lyrics would appear befitting to the profligate lifestyle he led, and they provided him a witty channel to expose the hypocrisy and artificiality of court fashions. Besides venting their frustration with the court system, libertine lyrics were the perfect entertainment for a coterie of young poets and courtiers who found pleasure in the outrageous, the bawdy,

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and the subversive. Hence libertine lyrics do not indicate an investment in libertine thought as the poets were more interested in the defiant posturing of the libertine poet-lover and in repudiating the courtly codes and practices that restricted their freedom and individualism.

The complex duality of Cavalier libertine selfhood can perhaps be traced to the constraints of the courtiers' political and social life at court and their different self-presentations at public and private functions. They enjoyed the role of the non-conforming poet and libertine in their circle of intimate friends and peers, but they also performed their duty as loyal courtiers. The courtiers were clearly adept in both Platonic and libertine rhetoric. As discussed in Chapter One, when the poets produced their libertine lyrics, they were ambitious but without the desired stable position of power at court and in society. Chafing at the various constraints imposed by court life and the king, they must have found the libertine self-fashioning for mastery appealing. But they were acutely aware of how transgressive libertinism was in Charles I's court, a fact that they incorporated in the lyrics. The poets took care to circulate libertine poems in manuscript form and only to their sympathetic peers. Both Suckling and Carew published only commendatory poems, and Lovelace published his volume after Charles's death. Libertinism as a literary or lifestyle choice had to be discreet given Charles's authoritative stance on it in court. Although there was no tight control over court culture as discussed

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earlier, there was nevertheless some kind of "constraint," even it was of an internal kind. Criticism that appears in masques such as Shirley's *Triumph of Peace* has to be tacit and carefully coded, and finally mitigated by the concluding praise and celebration of the Caroline reign typical of the masques.<sup>96</sup>

When the courtiers took on a more active political role, they incorporated more of the court fashion in their public and complimentary writings. In the case of *Coelum Britannicum*, it seems quite likely that the profligate Carew, as Sharpe himself concludes, must have "framed his masque in accordance with the king's tastes and values--and possibly under royal direction."<sup>97</sup> There is clearly a discrepancy between the poets' debauchery and licentious writings on the one hand and their public role as Charles's dutiful courtiers on the other hand. For example, Carew's "To the Queen" suggestively revises "A Rapture." Unlike the older poem, this lyric was probably part of a court entertainment for the queen.<sup>98</sup> "To the Queen" evokes an Edenic background, and Carew deliberately echoes the provocative line on "lawful" license in his earlier work. But this time the same idea--"*What ever pleaseth lawfull is*" (12)--becomes part of an entirely Platonic context of "chaste desires" (10), "Modestie, and constant faith" (14). By conspicuously referring to the restraint of "wilde lust" (7), Carew publicly refutes his infamous libertine stance and earlier poem, symbolically bowing down to the queen's "Scepter

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o're the Crowne of Love" (2).

The king and queen could not have been totally oblivious to the courtiers' activities and must have shown what Venuti calls a "discreet tolerance" to certain court favorites.<sup>99</sup> Greenblatt observes that the notion of sexual "excess is virtually invented by [institutional] power," so that it "is defined not by some inherent imbalance or impropriety, but by the mechanism of control, the exercise of restraining power."<sup>100</sup> Obviously the king's selective exercise of control came from such an arbitrary definition of sexual "excess." Constance Jordan insists that ideology must be seen as the "effect of institutions"--which includes "keeping certain conflicts of interest from becoming overt."<sup>101</sup> As long as the courtier's libertine recreation did not openly challenge the king's authority, it was quietly ignored by him. Charles himself appeared to understand and accept the division between public and private selves. Sharpe detects that his position on court sexuality might be part of a king's cultivated public personality:

Charles's enjoyment of some bawdy plays, his love for his playful wife, his fondness for poets like Carew and Suckling, suggest that the austerity of the king's public personality was not simply the outward face of a staunchly puritanical nature, but a gravity self-imposed and donned as an essential garment of majesty.<sup>102</sup>

His own differentiation between public duty and private pleasures at court made it possible for the licentious Carew and the rakish Suckling to flourish at court

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--as Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber and as part of the circle of Henrietta Maria. In turn, the Cavalier poets were the dutiful courtiers before their king and queen. All wrote Platonic love lyrics; Carew created the requisite masque for his king; and even Suckling's *Aglaure*, a play of intrigue that displays much cynicism, condemns lust in the celebration of virtuous conjugal love at the end. Politically they were staunch Royalists: all of them suffered great personal and financial losses in their support of the king.

The dual character of Cavalier writings, however, goes beyond a simplistic distinction between private and public lives, covert defiance and overt patriotism. Montrose rightly warns scholars against simplistic binary opposition between hegemony, power structures, and systems of subjection on the one hand, and individual agency and strategy for resistance on the other hand.<sup>103</sup> The discreet nature of Cavalier libertine verses and Charles's tolerance testifies to the complex dynamics of the court aristocracy's poetic and social transgressions. Certainly the circumspect nature of the courtiers' "license" was not simply a response to institutional pressure. The poets significantly *chose* to limit the subversive politics of libertinism with irony and absurd premises. Their own personal experiences as a libertine would be a factor in their detraction of the libertine's pursuit of Edenic bliss and his sense of mastery--particularly in the case of Suckling. If they could better question Neoplatonic love rhetoric as Charles's courtiers, then they also could better

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examine libertine values as libertines themselves. As Charles's courtiers, they were familiar and adept in reproducing the politicized Neoplatonic rhetoric. They also saw at close quarters the model of a chaste and righteous life in the king and admired him for that even if they did not follow his example. Despite their delight in exploring the transgressiveness of libertinism, in the end they do not condone the libertine's unscrupulous and domineering nature.

In the same way that the poets' "self-censorship" of their behavior and poetics was not entirely imposed by the state, their adoption of Platonic love rhetoric was not always elicited by the royal couple. The Cavalier courtiers grew up in the tradition of courtly amorous conventions, and it is no surprise that the Petrarchan courtly mode is the first convention that they adopted.<sup>104</sup> Petrarchism, merged with Neoplatonism, was more than just a literary style as we have seen. Its language and courtly prescriptions, given the queen's cult of Platonic love, permeated political and social dimensions of court life. In addition the poets' acceptance of the Platonic love rhetoric was as much part of their private and social selves as their public and political personae. The Cavalier courtiers might interrogate the political and ideological values encoded in the court's Platonic love rhetoric, but they willingly embraced it in their personal relations with women, thereby reinforcing the courtly practices of Platonic love.

Suckling, for example, wrote Platonic love letters to all the women that

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he courted. In a letter to Mary Cranfield, he declared service and unswerving devotion because his heart "hath been brought up under Platonicks, and knows no other way of being paid for service, then by being commanded more."<sup>105</sup> Weidhorn noted that Lovelace's Lucasta poems are "Petrarchan, courtly ..., while the erotica prevails in poems addressed to the other ladies."<sup>106</sup> Carew's more courtly amorous lyrics also tend to be focused on one particular mistress, Celia. Several critics deduce that Lucasta and Celia were probably actual women, and so the poems would constitute the practice of courtship like Suckling's letters, and would partly explain the different modes and tone exhibited in the poets' lyrics.<sup>107</sup> Of course personality affects the style of wooing. Lovelace's Lucasta lyrics depict chivalric ideals of honor, duty, and amorous devotion, quite unlike Carew's courtly poems that express physical love. As urbane gentlemen of the court, the Cavaliers apparently assumed both the role of the Platonic, courtly lover and the libertine seducer to real and imaginary women in their lives and writings.

Libertine poetry, like the courtiers' philandering, was a reflection of a particular lifestyle that was in turn supported by the complexity of the social and political structure of Caroline court. A few libertine lyrics were popular enough to be set to music, and they probably became part of court entertainment.<sup>108</sup> Venuti speculates that Cavalier libertine lyrics "offered pleasures which compensated ... for the precariousness of the court aristocracy

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in English society as a whole." He believes that they flaunt "an irreverent attitude toward the royal ideology which legitimized [the courtiers'] class domination" and promoted "the court's hegemony."<sup>109</sup> But as we have seen, the lyrics manifest ideological contradictions. While one hand takes away the ideological basis of the Cavaliers' class supremacy, the other asserts the absolutism of desire, which in essence claims a supremacy derived from an aggressive sexual will. Libertinism is a creative solution to the desire for complete mastery and freedom: the libertine can stipulate a world that is determined strictly in terms of his passions and wishes. In the context of the period's changing conceptions of ontological and epistemological truths (as discussed in the first chapter), the egoistic definition of the world and of human nature in libertinism must have been delightful to toy with and at times even comforting in its simplistic focus on sexual joys and personal satisfaction. Libertine rhetoric combines the class supremacy of aristocratic ideology with the market's emphasis on the individual's desires and interests to produce an ethics that is free from the feudalistic and humanistic strictures of duty, virtue, and fealty, as well as the emerging 'bourgeois' scruples of honesty, hard work, and fairness. Yet in eroding the feudalistic basis of fealty inscribed in the Neoplatonic discourse of the court, Cavalier libertine lyrics also corrupt market values as I have discussed earlier. The ideological inconsistency of libertine lyrics reveals that their solution to the poets' personal and social dilemma lies



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primarily in the realm of entertainment and fantasy since that realm allows contradictions and grants a kind of carnivalesque release as Venuti suggests.<sup>110</sup>

Cavalier libertine lyrics, however, developed beyond their compensatory and escapist function. As I have shown in the preceding section, the poets have turned libertinism into a means of articulating and exploring their frustrations, anxieties, and sense of loss in politically and socially unstable times. In addition, Carew, Suckling, and Lovelace were not averse to playing with libertine conventions. Suckling would contend that "fruition" spoils the libertine's maxim of pleasure and Carew would argue for constancy in the assurance of pleasures for old age in "To A. L. Perswasions to love." In the end the libertine mode could not provide a satisfactory self-definition.

By the time Cavalier libertine lyrics were published, they conveyed a different significance to their Royalist readers. Publication was possible because the state censorship broke down as early as 1641 when Parliament abolished the Court of Star Chamber.<sup>111</sup> Lovelace was the only Cavalier poet to publish his volume of verses during his lifetime, and by then the Civil War was over and the Puritan rule had begun. In the past, gentlemen had not typically gone to printers with their works; Lovelace's act of publication, however, can be seen as a gesture of political allegiance under the changed political conditions. Like the other collected verses of Carew and Suckling, Lovelace's volume included

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Platonic love lyrics along with libertine and anti-Platonic poems. All together these different types of Cavalier verses represented an affirmation of a lost way of life. For the old Cavalier readers dispersed and changed by the war, whatever subversive edge the verses once flaunted gave way to what Graham Parry calls a "dated air" and "considerable nostalgic appeal."<sup>112</sup> But for those outside the court the original anti-courtly strategies of libertine lyrics were insignificant in the face of their moral and religious transgressiveness so that the published editions during and after the Civil War provided more fuel to the Puritan condemnation of the Cavaliers. Clearly, however, the radical character of libertine poetics remained, for it resurfaced in the Restoration for the next generation of courtiers.

### Notes to Chapter Three

1. On Lovelace's reputation as a womanizer, see Weidhorn, 29; Walton on Carew, qtd. in Dunlap, Introduction, *Poems of Thomas Carew*, xxxvi. Also see the letter of complaint written by Carew's father to Sir Dudley Carleton on September 1st, 1616, where he refers to his son's "idlenes and lewd courses," as well as "that natural vyce of dronkennes" (Dunlap, xxii-iii). On the Puritan's perception of Suckling, see Thomas Clayton's Introduction to *The Works of Sir John Suckling* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I: lxvi.
2. Miner, 88; also mentioned in Kevin Sharpe, "Cavalier Critic? The Ethics and Politics of Thomas Carew's Poetry," *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 120.
3. C. H. Wilkinson, Introduction, *The Poems of Richard Lovelace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), lxii.
4. James, 89.
5. Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae*, ed. J. Jacobs (London, 1890); qtd. in Sharpe, "Cavalier Critic?" 24.
6. *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54. On the initial reception of Neoplatonic love at court, see 51ff.
7. Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 282.
8. Veevers, 3. According to her, "the object of Caroline mythology seems to ... raise personal happiness to a state of social and universal harmony." She adds that "plays and poetry attempted to achieve that aim by an emphasis on chastity and an idealisation of married love" (5). Lawrence Venuti remarks that in the masques, "to become a Platonic lover is to submit individual desire to royal authority" *Our Halcyon Days: English Pre-Revolutionary Texts and Postmodern Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 220.
9. Veevers, 3.
10. See Sharpe's essay, "The Image of Virtue: The Court and Household of Charles I, 1625-1642," in *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London and New York: Longman, 1987), 226-60.

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11. Smuts, *Court Culture*, 193.
12. Stone, *Family*, 504-5.
13. Venuti, 228. See pp. 228-30.
14. Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment*, 13.
15. Sharpe, "Image of Virtue," 258.
16. Montrose, "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 22.
17. Smuts, "The Political Failure of Stuart Culture Patronage," *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 171.
18. See Smuts, *Court Culture*, 253-62; Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment*, 26-27, 179-264; Venuti, 165-211; and Patterson (on Carew's *Coelum Britannicum*), *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, With a New Introduction (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 115-19.
19. Veevers, 53.
20. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England Begun in the Year 1641*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Printed at the Theatre, 1707), 3:197-98; qtd. in Venuti, 228.
21. James, 74.
22. J. Douglas Canfield discusses the significance of the word "as the bond of society" in his forward to *Word as Bond in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Restoration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), xi-xvii.
23. *Poems of Lovelace*, 26, line 5. All line numbers for Lovelace's poems refer to those given in this volume.
24. *The Non-Dramatic Works*, ed. Clayton, 21, lines 3 and 4. All quotations of Suckling's writings are from this edition.

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25. "No Platonic Love," *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, ed. Hugh Maclean, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), p. 286, lines 15-16.
26. Farley-Hills comments on the two distinct poetic styles in *Rochester's Poetry*, 32-33.
27. Squier, 110.
28. Veevers distinguishes two versions of Platonic love at court, one led by the queen and the other centered around Lady Carliles (3). She discusses the queen's *honnête* version on pp. 2-3, 6-7, 33-37, and Lady Carliles' *salon* type of *préciosité* on pp. 37-39.
29. This is not a simple desire to bestow the winning position upon himself. In "Upon my Lord Brohalls Wedding," which depicts a similar debate in dialogue form between "B." and "S.," the poet gives the last word to the other party. Suckling also laughs at himself in "The Answer" to "The Constant Lover."
30. N. B. this is a good-natured dig at Matthew as compared to the later one in "The Wits."
31. Robert Reade to Thomas Windebank, 23 January 1640; qtd. in Sharpe's "The Image of Virtue," 259. On Charles's reforms at court and their limited success, see "The Image of Virtue."
32. *The Works of Sir William Davenant*, 1673 (New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 2 vols., 1:384.
33. *Censorship and Interpretation*, 33. On the use of pastoral romance as part of the royal couple's personal mythology, see *op. cit.*, 174-84. Smuts also discusses Charles's image as St. George under the section titled "The Halcyon Reign," *Court Culture*, 245-83.
34. Weidhorn, 100.
35. N. B. Lovelace's Jupiter is the Roman equivalent of Zeus here, as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
36. Donnelly observes that Suckling's anti-conventional stance is "a device for asserting one's superiority to ordinary people who are taken in by conventions and proprieties, or as a way of claiming control over one's milieu by declaring one's freedom from the bondage of convention that governs others" (110).

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37. Clayton, "'At Bottom a Criticism of Life': Suckling and the Poetry of Low Seriousness," *Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben*, ed. Summers and Pebworth (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 236.
38. *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 95.
39. Low, "Thomas Carew: 'Fresh Invention,'" *Reinvention of Love*, 157.
40. Weidhorn, 107.
41. On the king's language of love in his speeches, see Sharpe's *Criticism and Compliment*, 297-301; and Guibbory's "Sexual Politics/Political Sex," 211-13. This rhetoric of love appeared mostly in the political speeches of the 1640s. By then most of the Cavalier libertine lyrics were already written. Nevertheless, the masques alone provide ample examples of how the relationship between the royal couple and their subjects was presented as reciprocal love.
42. According to Low's argument, Carew produces "a radically new kind of love poetry in England--libertine, anti-authoritarian, almost wholly disconnected from the Petrarchan traditions that even Donne felt obliged to parody and dispute" (*Reinvention of Love*, 143).
43. See Venuti's comments on the economic metaphors in the poem (234-36).
44. *Reinvention of Love*, 149. Venuti also recognizes the "individualistic contract" between the speaker and his mistress (255).
45. Cf. similar sexual connotations of that term in line 59 of Carew's "A Rapture," and in line 18 of Suckling's "Lutea Allison."
46. In *Motives of Eloquence*, Lanham illustrates the opposition between the Ciceronian, rhetorical, and double self on the one hand, and the Aristotelian, serious, and unified self on the other.
47. Venuti contends that "the second stanza strikes at the heart of the Caroline ideology by examining the social determinations of kingship" (250).
48. For pictorial representations of the garden of love, see Norman K. Farmer, Jr., "Thomas Carew's 'A Rapture' and Lord Herbert's 'To His Mistress for Her True Picture': Poetic Invention on Pictorial Themes," *Poets and the Visual Arts in Renaissance England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 34-35; and Cunnar, 191-94.

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49. Greenblatt analyzes Spenser's depiction of the Bower of Bliss in Chapter 4 of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 157-92.
50. Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valery* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 147.
51. Raymond A. Anselment, "Clarendon and the Caroline Myth of Peace," *Journal of British Studies* 23.2 (1984): 40.
52. See Dunlap, 236-39; and Paula Johnson's "Carew's 'A Rapture': The Dynamics of Fantasy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 16 (Winter 1976): 145.
53. Dunlap, xlix.
54. Sir Edward Dering, in the House of Commons, qtd. by James E. Ruoff, "Thomas Carew's Early Reputation," *Notes and Queries* 202 (1957): 62.
55. For the dating of the poem, see Dunlap, xxxiii; and Maclean, 156. Both Venuti (244-48) and Guibbory ("Sexual Politics/Political Sex," 212-14) read the poem in terms of the Caroline reign.
56. Smuts, *Court Culture*, 264. Graham Parry talks about the association of the Golden Age with James's reign in "The Character of Jacobean Kingship, 1603-1625," *The Seventeenth-Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1603-1700*, Longman Literature in English Series (London and New York: Longman, 1989), 13-14. Also see his analysis of the Jacobean masque in *The Golden Age Restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-42* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981): 40-63.
57. *The Political Works of James I*, ed. James McIlwain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 307; qtd. in Smuts, *Court Culture*, 230.
58. Venuti also perceives Carew to be attacking the divinity of kingship and the king's absolutism, but in the context of the Caroline court (246). N.B. Honor in the poem does not stand for James in the way that Venuti argues that it does for Charles I. Unlike his son, James did not attempt to restrict the sexual lives of his courtiers. He issued a proclamation against duelling (1614), so clearly his stance is quite different from the picture of Honor that Carew depicts at the end of the poem.

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59. Dunlap dates the poem and imparts its context (255). Cf. Sharpe's reading of the lyric as an argument for "a union of love and justice as the best form of government" (*Court Culture*, 143).

60. On the Crown's sale of titles, see for example, Stone, *Crisis*, 74, 78, 103, *et passim*. Also see McKeon's section "Progressive Ideology and the Transvaluation of Honor" (150-59), especially p. 151. On the "dysfunctional" aspect of the patronage system under James I, see Linda Levy Peck's "Court Patronage and Government Policy: The Jacobean Dilemma," *Patronage in the Renaissance*, 45. Peck also discusses James's problematic generosity (36-37, *et passim*), as does Stone (*Crisis*, 74-97).

61. Johnson, 149. Guibbory gives a political reading of this idealized reciprocity. To veil his absolutist politics, she shows that Charles I adopted an "amatory language" to describe his relationship with his subjects as analogous to that between husband and wife ("Sexual Politics/Political Sex," 209-14). Despite the obvious power dynamics inscribed in male-female, king-subject relations, this reading does not work here. The poem, with its libertine message, specifically goes against the contractual bonds of husband and wife. As for the speaker's absolutism, it stands in inverse relation to the king's because Carew finally exposes the speaker's authority to be merely rhetoric. Finally, such a reading does not account for the presence of Honor and the political overtones associated with it.

62. Renée Hannaford perceives the speaker to be "the focus of the poem" in her essay "'My Unwashed Muse': Sexual Play and Sociability in Carew's 'A Rapture,'" *English Language Notes* 27 (Sept 1989): 35.

63. Guibbory, "Sexual Politics/Political Sex," 208. Also pointed out by Cunnar (200).

64. Despite the implied two "sexual interludes" noted by Sadler (34), Carew suggests coition or its aftermath five times (lines 42, 54, 78, 82, 84). Johnson puts forth the possibility that the peculiar sequence may indicate "a primitive method of contraception similar to coitus interruptus" (153).

65. Guibbory (209) and Johnson (153) comment on the speaker's sexually aggressive rhetoric; and Cunnar refers to the implication of rape and seizure in the title (199).

66. N.B. Carew refers to Jove and "his wild lusts" in *Coelum Britannicum* (*Poems of Carew*, 155).



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67. Sadler observes that the lovers' "union would produce, in the golden world of love at least, the halcyon calm and security that are the marks of Donne's higher love and that partake of the same Donnean application of religious images to secular love" (36).

68. *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Ray Heffner, vol. 4 of *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, and Frederick Morgan Padelford (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935), p. 101 (IV.viii.30.8).

69. Donnelly comments that "Carew concerns himself here with social and conventional barriers to love, not ultimate and universal ones" (126).

70. Ada Long and Hugh Maclean remark that the speaker suggests "the new-building of a just and equal society" founded on reason and unfettered by old customs. "'Deare Ben,' 'Greate DONNE,' and 'My Celia,': The Wit of Carew's Poetry," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1800* 18.1 (1978): 92.

71. See Venuti, 247; and Donnelly, 125.

72. Qtd. in Dunlap, 239.

73. Cf. Hannaford's analysis of the poem as "a kind of miniaturized masque" (36).

74. Johnson's insightful reading of the poem calls attention to the fact that Carew carefully distinguishes the "there" of Elizium from the "here" of reality (148).

75. Johnson, 148.

76. Guibbory presumes that the poem was written after 1649 because it was not part of the 1649 *Lucasta* volume ("Sexual Politics/Political Sex," 214). However, as Weidhorn suggests, it is also possible that it was written earlier and that Lovelace did not select it for the 1649 collection (30).

77. See Guibbory, "Sexual Politics/Political Sex," 215.

78. *Coelum Britannicum*, in *Poems of Thomas Carew*, 178.

79. For example, Farley-Hills (*Rochester's Poetry*, 27) and Weidhorn (116).

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80. Weidhorn suggests that the confusion comes from "an imperfect fusion" of Tasso's and Guarini's Golden Age (113).

81. Elias discusses the unattainable quality of the pastoral ideal on p. 223. He sees the romantic pastoral as the "antithesis of the present pressures and deficiencies" of courtiers (225).

82. See Elias, 263-64.

83. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 224.

84. Sharpe reminds readers that in Carew's Elizium "sexual licence ... is not at odds with social order" (*Criticism and Compliment*, 118).

85. Cf. Turner's evaluation of "the false Edens of the Cavaliers [which] are ... bound to the tracks of narrow morality they profess to scorn." *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 250.

86. Cunnar, 205.

87. Latt, "Praising Virtuous Ladies: The Literary Image and Historical Reality of Women in Seventeenth-Century England," *What Manner of Women*, ed. Marlene Springer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 47.

88. See Donnelly, fn. 19, 121. For his analysis of the poem, refer to pp. 120-23.

89. On Suckling's ambivalent portrayal of the speaker and that sense of regret at the end of the poem, see Donnelly, 121-22.

90. Weidhorn examines Lovelace's "deep streak of skepticism and cynicism" (166) on pp. 166-67.

91. Weidhorn, 53.

92. Miner perceives that wine and love become "defense measures, especially for the happy life in bad times" (122).

93. N.B. It is the male passion for a sexual object--not the woman herself--that fans the libertine's desires in this poem. Damas's love for Chloe is sparked off by the speaker's original passion for his mistress, and the speaker is supposed

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to regain his lust for Chloe as a result of Damas's ardor.

94. Clayton, xxxiv. 1637 appears to be the transitional year when Suckling moved away from libertine verses to a more public and social mode. During that year, which Clayton calls his "literary *annus mirabilis*" (xlii), he completed the court play *Aglaura* and his only prose work, *Account of Religion by Reason*.

95. Squier recognizes the period of 1637-1641 as the time when Suckling developed his "social voice" (see Chapter 7, pp. 135-48). By 1638, Suckling had acquired an "increased courtly influence and prestige" (27). Another factor that might have taken the courtier away from the libertine mode is his affair with "Aglaura," which scholars have placed between 1638 and 1639 (Clayton, Introduction, xlii).

96. Anselment, "Clarendon," 47.

97. Sharpe, "Image of Virtue," 259. N. B. this does not mean that the masque is without any critical commentary. Patterson's analysis of *Coelum Britannicum* shows that Carew's anti-masque allows for a subversive interpretation of the Caroline reign (*Censorship and Interpretation*, 115-19).

98. Dunlap suggests that the lyric was probably "sung or recited at some masque or other entertainment" (258). According to him, "To the Queen" appears to be written no later than 1631/2 (258).

99. See Venuti, 229-30.

100. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 177.

101. Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 6.

102. Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, 192.

103. Montrose, 21.

104. Most of Suckling's conventional Platonic verses were written during 1626-32, and Carew's more Platonic poems, "Loves Force" and "A married woman," are what Dunlap calls "youthful work" (271). Lovelace, who wrote the most Platonic and courtly poems of the three, probably also started his poetic career in the same manner.

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105. *Works of Sir John Suckling*, I:108.

106. Weidhorn, 29.

107. On Suckling's letters, see those addressed to Mary Cranfield (*Works of Sir John Suckling*, 107-12), Mary Bulkeley (*loc. cit.*, 133-39, 161-62), and Anne Willoughby (*loc. cit.*, 129). Squier discusses the poet's letters and his mode of courtship (54-55). For the argument that Carew's Celia is an actual person, see Sadler, 24-25; and for Lovelace's Lucasta, see Weidhorn, 28-29.

108. Examples include Suckling's "Of thee (kind boy) I ask no red and white," "[The constant Lover]," Lovelace's "Depose your finger of that Ring," and "The Scrutinie."

109. Venuti, 259.

110. Venuti sees the subversive poetry as confined to "definite periods which are stipulated as entertainment, festivity, celebration, and hence finally dissociated from any revolutionary thought and action" (259).

111. C. V. Wedgwood, *Poetry and Politics under the Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 68.

112. Parry, *Seventeenth Century*, 83. Also see p. 82.

## Chapter 4

### Rochester's Libertine Poetics

Under Charles II, Whitehall quickly acquired a reputation as the nation's "great bawdy house."<sup>1</sup> Stone observes that "sexual promiscuity became a hallmark of fashion at court and in high political circles"; another scholar would go so far as to say that "debauchery had become a badge of loyalty."<sup>2</sup> According to the historian G. J. Barker-Benfield, there was "a new 'cultural infrastructure'" for men in Restoration England. Places such as taverns, coffeehouses, theaters, and clubs "seemed to be fostering infidelity and the pursuit of pleasure."<sup>3</sup> The new interest in epicureanism as a philosophy and, even more so, as a way of life, made libertine lyrics more popular than ever before. Given the court milieu of open sexual promiscuity, arguments for libertinism are no longer articulated; libertine verses noticeably lose the earlier emphasis on asserting the individual's need for autonomy and freedom. The urbane and refined eroticism of Cavalier poets gives way to Rochester's "profane wit" and shockingly explicit depictions of sexuality that border on the crude and the vulgar. At the same time, Restoration libertine lyrics do not display the argumentativeness of Donne; they also do not depict the exuberant erotic dalliance found in some of the polished verses of Cavalier poets. Early modern naturalism formulates sexuality as spontaneous and innocent, and its

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influence can be seen in the libertine poems of Donne and the Cavalier poets that argue for a sexuality free from institutional restriction and societal judgment. Under the influence of Hobbes's conception of the first age, however, "Nature" in Restoration England loses the "wanton innocence" of the Cavalier sexual Eden. Instead, nature seems more like Hobbes's deterministic picture of appetitive human nature.

Restoration lyrics heighten the sense of weariness and disillusionment that is already seen in some of Lovelace's and Suckling's poems. Obstacles to the libertine's fulfilment, earlier intimated by the Cavalier poets, are fully explored here, especially by Rochester. Questions of individual authority and authentic selfhood, fears of change, death, and impotence hinted by Donne and at times considered by the Cavalier poets, now fully emerge to problematize the libertine self-fashioning. Rochester depicts a darker, even self-destructive, aspect of libertine selfhood and most of all an acute dissatisfaction with the human condition. The Cavalier poets often demystify the libertine rhetoric, but Rochester's lyrics take that trend one step further when he satirizes the libertine speaker. His poems push the provocative character of libertine poetics to a new height, but his inclusion of satire and burlesque alters the libertine lyric mode irrevocably. The culmination of libertine poetics in Restoration England, as this chapter demonstrates, is also the beginning of the end of the libertine lyric mode.

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My analysis of Restoration libertine lyrics focuses primarily on Rochester. The libertine perspective pervades most of Rochester's writings, including his satires and lampoons. Sexual promiscuity occurs even in relationships which include emotional constancy, as in "To A Lady, in A Letter," "Absent from thee I languish still," "Love and Life: A Song," and "A Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne." As a result classification of Rochester's lyrics is not easy, especially since scholars' criteria differ. To David Farley-Hills, for example, "libertine" poems are those that depict "physical sexuality ... as spiritual experience."<sup>4</sup> His application of the term "libertine" is, however, not a definition of libertinism as used in Restoration England; rather, he proffers an *interpretation* of Rochester's conception of libertinism. Marianne Thormählen criticizes Farley-Hills's categorization, arguing that seventeenth-century poems--and particularly Rochester's verses of "inconsistencies and contradictions"--do not separate "amour-désir" from "amour-tendresse."<sup>5</sup> Farley-Hills, however, does acknowledge that some of Rochester's poems cannot be rigidly classified as "Platonic," "anti-Platonic," or "libertine."<sup>6</sup> Thormählen's point is pertinent; nevertheless, Farley-Hills's generic categorizations are useful in examining how the Restoration poets play with certain poetic conventions and traditions. His method seems more enlightening and definitely less awkward than Thormählen's thematic classifications of Rochester's love lyrics under the headings of "non-fulfilment,"

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"fulfilment expected," "fulfilment achieved," "beyond fulfilment," and "post-fulfilment."<sup>7</sup>

Dustin H. Griffin sidesteps the problem of classification altogether by focusing on the speaker and his world view as the main criteria.<sup>8</sup> But he does not clarify the attributes that make a libertine, and his focus also means that the speaker's advocacy of libertinism is not essential. To Thormählen and Farley-Hills, libertine verses are those that glorify sexual joys. In the case of Restoration libertine lyrics which manifest a more self-questioning attitude and even a certain ambivalence towards sexuality, there are few descriptions of genuine sensual joys. Hence I include lyrics which do not describe sexual bliss so long as they clearly present the libertine sexual practice. In this chapter, my study of Rochester's poetry concentrates on the lyrics that defend and propose sexual promiscuity and/or hedonistic living.

### **Libertinism as Defense against Mutability**

The problem of mutability in Restoration libertine lyrics participates in the period's ontological questioning. Part of that acute uncertainty stems from



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the historical event of the Civil War itself. The killing of the king who had been perceived as the head of a divinely sanctioned order and the internal strife of a nation undermined the Royalist's faith in the intrinsic stability of a monarchical state. For an age in search of a tangible and absolute truth, language itself seemed too ambiguous and unstable. The Restoration interest in language reform suggests the society's compelling drive to resolve its epistemological and ontological dilemma. However, the intellectual ferment of the age produced different and often contrary solutions to this crisis. Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and proponents of the "new philosophy" inevitably altered the Restoration intellectual consciousness, particularly on the question of human nature--which led to very different conclusions on the social and political order for Hobbes and Locke. Hobbes, the philosopher associated with libertinism and atheism in England and the favorite thinker in the court of Charles II, could not provide ontological certainty for the individual haunted by the recent Civil War and regicide. It was no wonder that the libertine would rather focus on Hobbes's notion of the appetitive self than on the monarchical authority of his political theory. The Civil War had proven only too vividly that the former was more secure than the latter.

If Cavalier erotic verses are concerned with time and change, Rochester's libertine poetry shows even more vividly how the inconstant poet-lover grapples with the problem of mutability. Although libertinism offers a

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rhetoric of authority in the face of change, Rochester's lyrics dramatize the limitations and uncertainty that are part of the libertine's material reality. He heightens the materialism inherent in naturalistic thought and illustrates a Hobbesian image of appetitive human nature. To the self that is entirely corporeal, what is good and evil is interpreted in accordance with the body's desires and responses. Hobbes effectively strips contemporary moral categories down to basic human physiology. In his materialistic and deterministic conception of human nature, the pursuit of "endless Pleasure" constitutes wisdom as one of the court wits, Sir Charles Sedley, suggests in the poem "To Liber."<sup>9</sup> "Delay no pressing Appetite," the speaker urges his readers, and he even adds that one should "sometimes stir up lazy Nature" (9-10). Underlying the libertine's intense pursuit of pleasure is a heightened awareness of mortality and a *carpe diem* urgency to take advantage of present youth and vigor so that he can "wisely double his short Time" (14) on earth. Another poem, "Out of Lycophron," insists that man will "Perish entirely like a Beast" (8), regardless of "whither he goes to Heaven or Hell" (4). It logically follows that "'Tis vain to think beyond the Grave" (12), as Sedley argues. Consequently the only certainty, meaning, and "good" a man can have on earth are "the Joys" of "Women, Wine and Mirth" (9-10).

In the materialistic rhetoric of Restoration libertinism, the pursuit of pleasure is the libertine's way of transforming the limited corporeal self to the

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sexually potent and authoritative "I." Rochester's "Against Constancy" is a good example of how an epicurean ethics bestows a sense of mastery upon the libertine. As is typical of rationales for libertinism, the speaker redefines traditional conceptions of morality. He takes away all the positive moral, religious, and social connotations of constancy and thereby exalts inconstancy as truth, vitality, youth, and strength. Sexuality turns into a sort of existential test where the old, the dull, and the weak lose the race to the sexually fittest. The redefined scale of human worth in effect defines all men as phallic selves. Hence fidelity does not possess any moral or religious merit, and those who "in love excell" are the ones who dare "higher to advance."<sup>10</sup> Rochester's persona claims that libertines' sense of mastery stems not from arrogance, only self-knowledge and judgement. He informs us that their "hearts do justly swell, / with no vain-glorious pride" (13-14). The solidarity of the libertine "we" against the constant lovers--"duller fooles"--recalls a similar male bonding in Donne's "Loves Progress." A sense of superiority seals the solidarity in these two poems where the speaker glorifies all libertines, and particularly himself and his friends.<sup>11</sup>

In the last stanza, however, Rochester exposes libertinism to be a defense against death itself. While the libertine is young and virile, he refuses to submit to the looming threat of impotence, debilitation, and death. According to this reasoning, the disabled, the old, and the weak are those who have

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already succumbed to the process of time and hence have to hide behind the facade of constancy. In the end, the emotions that propel the argument betray inconstancy as actually driven by the fear of physical deterioration and death. As Griffin points out, the dread of impotence drives the speaker's defense of inconstancy (116). The libertine avows: "Ille change a Mistress till i'me dead, / and fate change me for worms" (19-20). His nightly debauchery is a wilful practice of "change" that counteracts the external change of nature over which he has no control. It also indicates his search for oblivion in "each kind night."<sup>12</sup> Sensual pleasures become the only way to affirm the libertine's vitality. As a rhetoric that affirms the libertine's control and authority, libertinism presents a ready-made defense against mutability, but Restoration libertine lyrics also reveal that whatever consolation it offers is tenuous and brief.

Epicureanism as succor is a common idea in Restoration England, and significantly drinking songs, with their call to pleasure, are popular among the Restoration court wits. Rochester's "Upon his Drinking a Bowl," Etherege's song "The pleasures of love and the joys of good wine" and Sedley's "Drink about till the Day find us" are good examples. Discontent, however, pervades these drinking songs. In Sedley's song, the speaker tells us: "Let no foolish Passion blind us, / Joys of Love they fly too fast" (3-4). Despite the blustering tone and the anti-Platonic message against courtship, both the rejection of such

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futile love for the convenient sport of whoring and the description of a mindless and athletic competitiveness in sexual promiscuity illustrate the same compulsive sexuality described in Rochester's "Against Constancy." Etherege's drinking song conspicuously refers to the need to escape the day's "sorrow" (14)--so much so that the editor of his poems, James Thorpe, tries to explain this "odd" element with reference to the poet's actual physical incapacity for "extensive drinking."<sup>13</sup> In the song, drinking and promiscuity not only "[drown] all our sorrow" but bestow a momentary sense of power and heroism upon the rakes. "Wine and beauty by turns great souls should inspire" (21)--even if they do "relapse again on the morrow" (15) to their melancholy.

Rochester's drinking song follows the Anacreontic model but without the exuberance and joyfulness of this tradition.<sup>14</sup> First, Rochester creates an imaginary microcosmic world in the mythical cup from Vulcan: a "delicious *Lake*" of Sack, with "Vast Toasts . . . / Like *Ships* at *Sea* may swim" (7-8). In this make-believe domain, there is no "*Battail*" nor "*War*" (9-10). There is also no concern for "*Planets* . . . / Fixt *Stars*, or *Constellations*" (13-14) as this is a purely present-oriented realm, with no worries about the future. The speaker describes a languorous world of love and wine, symbolized by the erotic embrace of Cupid and Bacchus.<sup>15</sup> In the first five stanzas, Rochester paints an idyllic realm of pleasures, untouched by war and violence, and protected from time and fate. Rochester's persona, with his rhetoric of imperatives, creates and

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shapes a world before our eyes. Even in the mode of polished lyricism and the description of a fantastic realm, the libertine reveals the characteristic aggressive assertiveness.

In the last stanza, where the speaker pledges his allegiance to Cupid and Bacchus, the poem moves away from the fictive world of the Vulcan cup to return to the concrete and the actual. The speaker asserts:

With *Wine*, I wash away my cares.  
And then to *Cunt* again.

(23-24)

This couplet brutally shatters the picture of untroubled nonchalance. Etherege may introduce the "odd" element of "melancholy reflection" in a boisterous drinking song, but Rochester peels off the veneer of urbanity and sophistication of the Anacreontic poetic convention to disclose the crudity of hedonism. The jarring obscenity in the last line destroys the established lyricism and sense of poetic decorum; it also obliterates the beauty of the imaginary world of instant joys.<sup>16</sup> With the single word "*Cunt*," Rochester suggests a degraded and brutal sexuality that is devoid of any eroticism. It stands in stark contrast to the amorous depiction of the two boys, since the present copulation cannot come close to the mythical "*Type* of future joys" represented by Cupid and Bacchus. Here libertinism is the attempt to escape from an imperfect and frail world--the "cares" and "sorrows" so keenly felt by the rakes of Rochester's and Etherege's poems.

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### **The Libertine's World of "Imperfect Enjoyment"**

As I have mentioned in Chapter One, the increasingly materialistic bent in scientific and philosophical discourses contributed to seventeenth-century ontological questioning. Empirical sciences stressed human fallibility and confirmed the deceptive character of reality as theorized in arguments about the limitation of human senses, first by Descartes and later by Locke. These thinkers inescapably rendered a picture of the decentered and inconstant human. The "new philosophy" reaffirmed the materialistic basis of libertine thought partly because scientists and philosophers such as Copernicus, Galileo, Hobbes, and Descartes picked up the atomistic philosophy of early materialists such as Democritus and Epicurus.<sup>17</sup> Under the aegis of the new scientific definition of life as atomistic interaction under set laws, and under the specific influence of Hobbesian materialism where human nature was reduced to basic and undeniable animal instincts and urges, Restoration libertinism understandably reveals a heightened sense of limitation. Restoration libertine lyrics increasingly focus on the determinism inherent in the materialist philosophy of libertine thought to illustrate how the constraints of time and nature affect the libertine desire for pleasure. Rochester's "Love and Life: A Song" illustrates the libertine conception of the inconstant self. But unlike the earlier lyrics that exalt change, this poem shows that inconstancy is part of a human condition in which meaning is transitory and gratification fleeting. "Flying Houres" (2) turn

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all experience into "transitory Dreames" (3), and they reduce the past to mere images. Since the future is non-existent, the speaker declares, "the present Moment's all my Lott" (8). In this vision of life as fleeting and unreal as a series of disconnected dreams, truth is ephemeral and reality becomes insubstantial. The speaker cannot have any certainty in the present and his past is registered only as a deep sense of loss. Hence to be true to Phillis for a "live-long Minute" (14) is a "Miracle" determined by "Heav'n." Sexual inconstancy does not even constitute an option in this situation. In a world where nothing is permanent nor secure, when the past and future prove to be meaningless, the individual must make the most of each moment as it comes. Only the present validates one's vitality and potency--indeed one's existence and identity.<sup>18</sup>

Rochester's poem adds a deterministic aspect to Restoration libertinism, but it also reveals that the libertine's calculated pursuit of his self-interest persists within the new framework of limitation. The title emphasizes that the inconstant male reduces "love and life" to a minute in the song. The joke is that the speaker manages to declare his devotion with brazen honesty and sincerity in what is essentially a defense of inconstancy. What the speaker impudently suggests is that the mistress should count herself blessed for this minute with him because it is itself a privilege--a "Miracle." By alluding to Hobbes's *Leviathan* I.iii, Rochester exposes the poem's flawed argument. The speaker



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follows Hobbes's statements about the past and future, but rejects the conception of life as an interlocking chain of experiences that allows reasonable expectations for the future and a degree of "*Prudence*" based upon the "experience of things past."<sup>19</sup> As Donne's "Womans Constancy" illustrates, the argument for the dispossession of the past and the future is inseparable from the libertine's pursuit of pleasure. Rochester's persona dramatizes his fragmented sense of time and experience in "Love and Life" so that he need not be responsible for his actions. For the libertine, the only purpose in the present that can extend to the future is his insistence on personal gratification.

What Rochester presents here is a paradox central to libertinism: the inconstant self who finds self-empowerment in flux is himself determined and contained by that mutability.<sup>20</sup> Worst of all, he shows that nature's changeability, which sanctions the pursuit of pleasure, also makes whatever gratification possible frustratingly brief. The idea of the "lucky" and "happy" minute where meaning and reality can be found in the sexual act demonstrates the fragile and ephemeral quality of life found in isolated moments.<sup>21</sup> In the end, such a fragmented self is cut off from any permanent connection with another.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Epicurean philosophy, in which pleasure brings serenity, Restoration poetry shows that libertinism at its best can only offer a temporary release from the pains and cares of the human condition. What results, however, is the compulsive and endless pursuit for that brief respite, with its

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attendant disillusionment and frustration.

Lovelace and Suckling may lament the transitory nature of bliss and pleasure in their lyrics, but several Restoration poems go one step further to illustrate the difficulty of even achieving momentary happiness. Instead of presenting a Golden Age of sexual joys, these verses focus on the *loss* of paradise. Despite the present-oriented perspective in libertinism, there is a paradoxical nostalgia and yearning for an irretrievable perfection in Restoration verses. Sexuality cannot recover the lost Eden because it is part of the fallen human condition. In "The Fall," Rochester's persona describes the "Hell" (4) of the postlapsarian state:

But we, poor Slaves to hope and fear,  
Are never of our Joys secure:  
They lessen still, as they draw near;  
And none but dull delights endure.

(9-12)

In a letter to his wife, Rochester tells her that there is a "greate ... disproportion t'wixt our desires and what is ordained to content them."<sup>23</sup> "The Fall" illustrates that desires only intensify the painful realization that there can never be true satisfaction. Etherege's "The Imperfect Enjoyment," Rochester's "The Fall" and "The Imperfect Enjoyment" all demonstrate how flawed sexual pleasures are, and how far they fall short of the lovers' expectations and the state of Edenic bliss.<sup>24</sup>

In "A Ramble in Saint James's Parke," Rochester invokes the myth of

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England as an Edenic paradise only for satiric purposes. The poem parodies Waller's panegyric "A poem on St. James's Park as lately improved by his majesty" (1661)--an example of the "literary outpouring of enthusiastic typology and millennial self-gratulation" in the 1660s.<sup>25</sup> Waller, along with poets such as Katherine Philips, Dryden, and Davenant, penned panegyrics that glorify monarchical rule and the divinity of kingship.<sup>26</sup> Rochester's "A Ramble in Saint James's Parke" implicitly registers the country's disappointment in the king who failed to restore England's Golden Age. Rejecting Waller's Edenic vision, he turns the park into an "all-sin-sheltring Grove" (25), a vivid picture of the degraded ideal. In poems such as "Upon Nothing" and "Tunbridge Wells," Rochester also presents a dystopia in the social world of Restoration England.

"A Ramble in Saint James's Parke" shows that the speaker's search for Edenic bliss and sexual fulfilment is destroyed by his mistress' indiscriminate sexual appetite. Rochester may depict women with equal sexual freedom as men, but his male speakers have difficulty coming to terms with the sexual drive and independence of their mistresses.<sup>27</sup> Several poems, such as "The Mock Song," "A Ramble in Saint James's Parke," and "To A Lady, in A Letter," describe female promiscuity as particularly disgusting and threatening. A mistress' demand for sexual gratification only aggravates the speaker's sexual anxiety in "The Fall"; and the speaker of "Signior Dildo" reveals his

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fears that female sexual self-sufficiency and voraciousness would completely nullify men's sexual purpose.

In Rochester's world, lovers bent on their own sexual gratification and self-interests can only engage in manipulative and hypocritical relationships, as we shall see in "A Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne." Here the inconstant male is finally betrayed by his old mistress, and she has the last say in the dialogue. Rochester uses the conventions and rhetoric of the pastoral to illustrate that all is not well in the pastoral realm of this poem. Instead of idyllic happiness, innocence, and harmony, there is cruelty, deception, and betrayal. Strephon is not the devoted swain, nor Daphne the innocent and gentle maiden. The love relationship depicted here is a game of deception and one-upmanship--a question of who is the more successful manipulator and cheat. At first, Strephon is the one humbling Daphne with his cruel rejection and heartless defense of inconstancy. He tells her that

Love, like other little Boys,  
Cries for Hearts, as they for Toys:  
Which, when gain'd, in Childish Play,  
Wantonly are thrown away. (17-20)

Love in the libertine conception becomes a masculine game of acquisition in which variety and novelty are all that matter. In the seventh stanza, Strephon defines "love" in terms of a deterministic naturalism. He informs Daphne:

Love, like us, must Fate obey.  
Since 'tis Nature's Law to Change,

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Constancy alone is strange.

(30-32)

In his analogy between love and a thunderstorm, love must run its brief course of tumultuous passions, where "the Show'rs" (39) of sexual consummation "Quench the fire, and quiet all" (40).<sup>28</sup> Despite the deterministic framework, Strephon, when pressed, admits to Daphne that "Change" is *both* "Fate" and "Design." He asks Daphne to follow his example and "Faith to Pleasure sacrifice" (64), but he also implicitly demonstrates that pleasure is part of personal "design," if not part of "fate." Like the speaker of "Love and Life," Strephon uses the deterministic law to further his own interests.

The abrupt switch in Daphne's position and tone in the final stanza is so unexpected that it appears like a desperate attempt on her part to salvage some pride and dignity.<sup>29</sup> "A Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne" is an early poem that shows a rough unevenness; the volte-face nevertheless serves the purpose of undermining Strephon's complacency and sense of reality. Daphne undercuts his naturalistic argument and facade of sincerity and honesty to expose his callousness. She is the betraying and threatening female other who can easily undermine the libertine's virility and control. In the end her betrayal validates Strephon's earlier cynical claim that "women can with pleasure feign" (9). She skilfully plays the expected role of the gentle, unsuspecting maiden just for the delight of "Making Fools" out of men (72). In Daphne's sudden

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reversal, as Griffin discerns, "the libertine's mastery is exposed as a sham" (104). In this poem, Rochester demonstrates that the libertine rhetoric of self-aggrandizement makes him susceptible to delusions of grandeur and betrayal by the female other.

Daphne's practice of sexual promiscuity for the pleasure of fooling men, as Thormählen observes, "[violates] the libertine ethos" (61). Indeed, it is a nightmarish parody of male libertinism. Not only does the poem undermine the naturalistic justification and epicurean basis of libertinism, it also exposes the male desire for dominance and control behind the rhetoric of sexual freedom. Strephon tells us that his new nymph's greatest charm is her "aversion" to constancy. But the shepherd later contradicts himself. The nymph is "Gentle, Innocent, and Free, / Ever pleas'd with only me" (51-52), he smugly declares. His praise of her innocence and devotion is totally incompatible with his exaltation of inconstancy.<sup>30</sup> The poem ultimately reveals that the practice of sexual freedom is a game of selfish pleasures and personal advantage that is hidden behind the mask of sincerity and honesty. The cynicism of each sex toward the other underscores the estranged relationship between the two sexes, and at the same time it justifies the mistrust of each for the other.

In "Upon his leaving his Mistress," Rochester's persona advocates sexual freedom for his mistress, but his description of the sexually voracious female suggests a repulsive monstrosity. On the one hand, he exalts Celia's

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sexual talents so that she embodies nature's principles of fertility and abundance. On the other hand, the speaker ascribes a grotesque immensity to Celia's vagina--the "Seed-receiving" womb of the earth (15). Celia's "mighty Mind" (20) manifests an insatiable and grotesque sexual drive. The backhanded praises finally serve to ask Celia to be "the Mistriss of *Mankind*" (21). if not the national whore (7). His apparent glorification of the mistress' intimidating sexuality turns out to be a rhetorical tactic to control and denigrate this sexually forceful woman. The speaker extols her sexual capacity, but at the same time he slyly reduces her to a prostitute who services mankind.<sup>31</sup> He is in fact articulating an outrageous and novel argument for abandoning a mistress. His denial of inconstancy and his professed "generosity" with her sexual favors hide his own inconstancy and libertine stance. Thormählen rightly argues that "if he were serious about wishing her to be 'the Mistriss of *Mankind*', he could have continued to partake of the 'joy' she was fashioned for, along with all his fellow men"(65). A few critics suggest that her infidelity is his reason for leaving.<sup>32</sup> The first few lines in the poem actually indicate otherwise. He denies that he is "weary grown, / Of being . . . [hers] *alone*" (2), and he says he cannot "damn [her] to be *only* [his]" (4) (italics mine). These lines depict an existing exclusivity in the relationship; the impudent declaration that his mistress' sexual talents should be generously distributed to all other men in effect shows that the speaker is the one who is tired of his commitment.

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Despite the absurd pretext for the speaker's own inconstancy, he reveals an instinctive rejection of promiscuous female sexuality. In both "A Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne" and "Upon his leaving his Mistress," women's inconstancy exacerbates the problem of mutability that male libertinism attempts to overcome. The threatening female cannot be the object of male conquest, nor the means of validation for the libertine. She is the emasculating other that torments the libertine: the sense of impotence becomes both literal and emotional. Wine is the more convenient solace for the epicurean in this scenario.<sup>33</sup> In "To A Lady, in A Letter," Rochester's persona can only "raise pleasure to the Topp" (6) with alcohol, while his mistress takes "the Juice of Lusty Men" (32). Sedley's song "Drink about till the Day find us" asserts that the joys of wine are preferable to those of love and that whoring is the natural companion to wine because both are less threatening than actual relationships.

Instead of the freedom and power of sexual pleasure, Restoration verses illustrate that sex poses many problems to the libertine. Carole Fabricant and Thormählen discover that Rochester's writings actually describe few sexual pleasures.<sup>34</sup> In the poems that defend libertinism, any pleasures mentioned are of the past, such as in "The Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne" and "A Very Heroicall Epistle in Answer to Ephelia." Rochester emphasizes that the libertine's desires are not always gratified. His lyrics reveal a contradictory and ambivalent treatment of libertinism. Several critics perceive both obsession and



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revulsion in Rochester's delineation of human sexuality.<sup>35</sup> He often diminishes sex to mere exertions of individual body parts, such as in "Upon his Drinking a Bowl" and "Upon his leaving his mistress." Rochester depicts the irony in the libertine's striving for individual autonomy and freedom when such effort produces a mechanical self trapped in mindless sexuality. In this way he echoes Hobbes's conception of human nature, where contentment is impossible in the state of incessant appetitive craving. In a world of frail bodies and imperfect pleasures, the pursuit of pleasure ironically leads to more anxiety, frustration, and misery.

### **The Libertine's Self-Destruction and Self-Mockery**

The problems of mutability and sexual fulfilment in Restoration verse invariably alter the libertine's sense of mastery and his identity. Poems like "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy" show that the libertine recognizes hedonism to be a limited defense against human frailty. In the two poems the speakers willingly pay the price of pleasure without illusion, recognizing the necessity of pain in an imperfect world. Not only do they

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display their frail and grotesque bodies, they also find delight in portraying themselves in a negative light. Unlike the poet-lovers of earlier libertine lyrics who invert society's norms and values for self-empowerment and defend libertinism as the true expression of nature's law, these speakers deliberately court social condemnation of libertinism. In fact, the two poems draw a similar portrait of the Restoration rake figure as a symbol of debauchery and social disorder. The term "rake-hell" suggests the derogatory social connotations of libertinism in the period. A character in Thomas Shadwell's *The Scowrers* refers to this public perception of unruly rakes in London when he defines a rake-hell as someone who "[delights] much in drinking, whoring, scowring, beating the Watch, breaking Windows and serenading, and the like."<sup>30</sup> In these two poems, libertinism offers a different kind of power. The speakers relish the stance of defiance and even fashion a charismatic presence as the wilful and corrupt rake-hell of Restoration society.

"The Disabled Debauchee" presents an unusual libertine rhetoric that combines ironic self-denigration with overt self-aggrandizement. From the reported imaginations of the admiral to the debauchee's tale of himself in the future, the poem operates completely on the imaginary and rhetorical level. Rochester's persona first sets up the scene where a retired admiral looks on a naval combat from a hilltop and relives his military days of valor and glory. The descriptions of the admiral's bravery reveal a mock-heroic tone by the

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third stanza<sup>37</sup>:

From his fierce *Eyes*, flashes of rage he throws.  
As from black *Clouds*, when *Lightning* breaks away,  
Transported, thinks himself amidst his *Foes*,  
And absent, yet enjoys the *Bloody Day*. . . .

(9-12)

The mock-heroic rhetoric ridicules the admiral's daydreams of military glory when it depicts his enjoyment of "the Bloody Day" (12). It also undermines the description of libertinism that follows. According to the debauchee, "each bold Action" (7) of the sea battle has its counterpart in the tavern. War ships become "*Fleets of Glasses*" (19) on the table, gunfire turns into "*Volleys of Wit*" (20), and military bravery and combat correspond to the speaker's "too forward *Valour*" (22) in his attacks on watchmen, bawds, and whores. The metaphoric comparison between warfare and debauchery effectively demeans the lifestyle and fantasies of the speaker.<sup>38</sup> Griffin comments that "the libertine speaker wittily exposes his own foolishness and proud viciousness" to "present [himself] boastfully as heroically bad" (48). When the debauchee points to his social, sexual, and moral degradation with mock-heroic rhetoric, he is in fact playing up the role of the rake-hell as a debauched trouble-maker. Unlike libertine speakers of earlier lyrics who justify libertine excess and unruliness by inverting or attacking prevailing social and religious values, Rochester's persona accepts the social perception of the rake as a sensational figure of vice and turns it into a dynamic and playful self-presentation.

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The speaker imagines a time when he is decrepit and retired like the old admiral. But even when the body fails him, he will cling to his libertine will and live vicariously through young rakes. In that projected future, the speaker becomes the tireless champion of libertinism. He offers his past experience of rakish misdemeanour and immorality as inspiration to the next generation. But his account presents no "handsome ills" (36), only petty and lowly misdeeds. Even his scandalous competition with "*Love-fits Cloris*" (37) for "the well-look'd *Link-Boy*" (38) is but an idle and trivial game. His rhetoric of rousing someone to an "important mischief" (42) like the burning of "some *Antient Church*" (43) is in fact more provocative and significant than anything he has ever done.<sup>39</sup> So in his imaginary role as the spirit of Vice, he becomes more influential than he ever was. The last stanza, however, underscores the debauchee's ironic understanding of this future role:

Thus *States-man*-like, I'll sawcily impose,  
And safe from Action valiantly advise,  
Shelter'd in impotence, urge you to blows,  
And being good for nothing else, be wise.

(45-48)

In the above comparison, the politician at the sidelines, the retired sea captain, and the decrepit rake all share the illusion of personal power from an ineffectual position. The "wise" counsel comes by default--an inability to participate in the action, whether due to impotence, as in the case of the debauchee, or cowardice, as in the case of the statesman.<sup>40</sup>

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Rochester suggestively undermines both libertine action and inaction in this stanza. The speaker may mock the politician but he actually has less authority than the statesman. After all the latter's absence from the action is quite different from the impotence and decrepitude of the debauchee and the admiral. In addition, the speaker's vaunted inspirational force would be vividly undermined by his scarred and decrepit body--an unspoken testimony to the devastating effects of libertinism. The debauchee ascribes a certain glamour to libertine "Action," but his descriptions--"blows," "too forward *Valour*," and the earlier account of rake-hell behavior--expose it as reckless, violent, and destructive. In this picture, the glory of military heroism and political power, as well as the "greatness" of the debauchee's rebellious pleasures, proves to be vain and deceptive.

The original title "Upon His Lying In and Could not Drink" indicates the temporary nature of the speaker's present "disability."<sup>41</sup> His immediate condition anticipates that future frailty and explains his present focus on impotence. In fact, his *present* pains suggest that the dreaded future is already here in one form or another. Rochester displays the dizzy force of the libertine's rhetoric and imagination in this poem where the present enacts a future that relives the past. Barbara Everett thinks that the speaker "[toughens] himself with the reminder of the prospects of future impotency--the future pleasure, that is, of remembering a then past potency."<sup>42</sup> The irony is that the

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speaker's imaginary projections help him to repress the fact that his impotence is very much part of the present. For the clearly "disabled" rake, *both* the present and the future depend on past pleasures.

Rochester's poem demonstrates that the libertine identity and its force are paradoxically founded upon fears and a sense of impotence. In this case, imagination serves the libertine's desire for unlimited pleasures by focusing on past and imaginary delights. Fabricant argues that Rochester portrays imagination as the Hobbesian notion of "the decaying sense," where it "preys upon the debilitated body, and which for the most part lacks any creative or redemptive powers."<sup>43</sup> The speaker's imagination may project imaginary and future suffering, but it nevertheless relieves present pains when it focuses on a worse condition. In his enactment of that future scenario, the speaker's glorification of "past joys" (24) and actions in effect delineates a position of command for him *right now*. If his rhetoric reveals that he cannot truly be the figure of inspiration in the future, at least his witty and flamboyant performance makes him the symbol of libertine defiance and inspiration in the present. Only the poem's title suggests the speaker's present impotence--he himself does not mention it at all. His speech is forceful because his tales are not yet negated by an aged and decrepit body. It becomes a witty confrontation with his fears of approaching physical decay. In the final analysis, the imagination does reveal a unique "creative and redemptive" quality: it allows

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the speaker to affirm his libertine identity in spite of his present impotence. His body may finally be restricted to "the dull *Shore* of lazy temperance" (16), but never his expansive will.

The vitality of the debauchee's rhetoric stems from his ability to face the condition of human mortality and the effects of his debauchery, and to turn his frailty into a source of witty and self-ironic defiance. Rochester's persona deliberately shapes a discourse that invites a judgment based upon established social and moral norms, and hence denunciation. Unlike Donne's speaker in "The Indifferent" where the values of society are turned inside out to justify inconstancy, he exults in playing the libertine as the transgressive and evil figure. Whatever authority the debauchee rhetorically constructs for himself, he undercuts it with wilful self-destructiveness. He fully realizes that "*Pox*, and *Wines*" (14) will be the cause of his future impotence. In the poem Rochester places an objective distance between himself and his persona by debasing the libertine argument to a witty but pathetic defense of debauchery and vice. However, even in this satirical picture of libertinism, the speaker is not wholly condemned.<sup>44</sup> At least he pays the price of his joys without the admiral's self-delusion, and unlike the sheltered statesman, he is self-aware and confident enough to reveal his inadequacies and still find a paradoxical delight in them.<sup>45</sup>

"To the Post Boy" also introduces an anarchic and self-destructive

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libertine speaker. The poem provides an important insight into libertine selfhood as Rochester deliberately evokes the figure of the Restoration rake. Here is the paradoxical masquerade--that of parodying oneself--in this self-lampoon. Rochester plays the role of an epic Vice figure, whose depravity takes on mythic proportions. His persona boasts of seduction, cowardice, betrayal, murder, blasphemy, and disloyalty to his king. Rochester evokes the image of the Restoration rake as the anarchic and degraded subject. The speaker in "To the Post Boy" shares similar qualities with the Don John character who ends up in hell at the end of Shadwell's play *The Libertine* (1675). Raman Selden's essay on Rochester's relation to Shadwell suggests that Rochester "may have been impressed by Shadwell's understanding of the sinister side of a fashionable sensationalism."<sup>46</sup> This is well supported by Rochester's description of a different kind of power--destructive and corrupt--for the libertine. In "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy," the power and freedom the libertine desires does not bring him untainted freedom and satisfaction. The inviting of society's condemnation, the self-destructive bent, and the ironic rhetoric of libertine invincibility all produce a perverted sense of self and authority. Both the debauchee and "Rochester" brag of a grotesque body. In the self-lampoon, for example, the speaker exhibits a body covered with "sear cloaths and ulcers from the top to toe" (8). Rochester has created a libertine self that is defined in terms of its moral, social, and physical



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deformity.

The paradoxical conception of power and pleasure depicted in "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy" is intricately bound up with the pervading sense of limitation, pain, and frustration that is part of Rochester's world of "imperfect enjoyment." Mutability is not just externalized in the sexually voracious and betraying female but also internalized within the libertine's own body. His incessant desires work against the attainment of true fulfilment, as demonstrated by "Absent from thee I languish still." In "The Fall," "The Imperfect Enjoyment," and "The Disabled Debauchee," Rochester describes the grotesque impotent self which does not have the capacity to achieve sexual pleasure at will. The seventeenth-century fascination with impotence is a key illustration of this idea. Reba Wilcoxon shows that these lyrics on the inadequate male body "tend to affirm that . . . the actual is less than satisfactory."<sup>47</sup> The Restoration preoccupation with physical breakdown, sexual frustrations and anxieties gives a new twist to the depiction of libertine sexuality. In "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy," the speaker manages to create a vital force and potency in his rhetoric and performance because he boldly accepts the consequences of his debauchery. Even impotence cannot completely destroy the libertine's will and identity. The ability to accept and laugh at one's frailties, and to boast about one's failing and grotesque body becomes a rhetorical mastering of one's own mortality. In Rochester's lyrics,

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self-derision paradoxically turns out to be a necessary feature of the libertine's presentation of an authoritative self.

### **The Restoration Rake**

The paradoxical glamor of the rake's transgressive social role that Rochester depicts in "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy" must be seen in the context of the flamboyant and exhibitionistic behavior of Restoration rakes and the histrionic character of Charles II's court. Unlike earlier libertine lyrics, "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy" emphasize that the libertine is a radical transgressive force in society, and in these poems the common libertine traits of defiance, playful role-play, and rhetorical self-authorization take on a particular social dimension that is not present in earlier lyrics. Donne's libertine in "Communitie" or Carew's poet-lover in "A Rapture," for example, may insist upon a radical sexual freedom, but this license is strictly within the power dynamics of sexual relationships. The earlier libertine lyrics also restrict their licentiousness to imaginary realms, such as in "Communitie" and "A Rapture," or to the confines of a private

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relationship between lovers or between the libertine and his male listeners. But "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy" introduce a public and social character to libertinism. This is clearly related to the actual behavior of Restoration rake-hells. Although their public defiance and debauchery incurred the condemnation of the society at large, they also demonstrated the privilege of the court aristocrats. The double-edged nature of the libertine speaker's license and authority, as we shall see, is a creative dramatization of the Restoration rake's display of autocratic leisure and his diminished function in the social and political structure of Restoration England.

In "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy," Rochester incorporates and dramatizes the exhibitionistic individualism of Restoration rake-hells to produce a more complex sense of self and self-presentation. Like the speakers of earlier libertine lyrics, Rochester's libertine enjoys projecting a particular identity to his audience. In "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy," there is no action, only the telling of sensational stories about the rakish "I." Rochester shows that the libertine's outrageous and ironic self-presentation is inseparable from an intrinsic delight in role-playing. The mock-heroic mode is an indication of the speaker's rhetorical creation of an outrageous persona. But his sportive tone shows that the self-destructive and grotesque aspects of his self-presentation bring a paradoxical pleasure. The difference from earlier depictions of libertine role-playing is a calculated

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transparency in the libertine's mask of sensational vice in the two poems. In the libertine lyrics of Donne and the Cavalier poets, libertine speakers typically strive to project a convincing front to persuade the listener of the authority of their arguments. But Rochester's two speakers adopt a role that is clearly fictional and not meant to be taken seriously by the audience. In "The Disabled Debauchee," the libertine creates a future identity that is almost mythical in quality since he would embody the spirit of libertinism. It is certainly a theatrical role that he creates before a tavern crowd. In "To the Post Boy," Rochester makes fun of his larger-than-life reputation and dons the theatrical role of a legendary Don Juan before his audience. The authority of these speakers comes from showing how they stand apart from an adopted role and how they manipulate it. Where Donne illustrates the construction of a libertine identity in "Loves Diet," Rochester shows that the speaker dismantles his identity as rake even as he constructs it in "To the Post Boy" and "The Disabled Debauchee." The ironic wit and self-awareness of the two speakers redeem them from being totally repulsive; it is primarily this detachment that is the basis of a paradoxical mastery in their frenzied and self-destructive excesses.

In "To the Post Boy," the exhibitionistic libertine exposes his histrionic pose so as to project an authoritative and all-knowing persona. Several critics observe that Rochester follows the manner typical of lampoons in spewing out

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scandalous half-truths. For example, lines nine and ten suggestively allude to Captain Down's death, an event for which Rochester's enemies laid the blame on him.<sup>48</sup> The monstrosity of his self-presentation parodies and undermines his larger-than-life reputation.<sup>49</sup> Rochester takes on the mask of the demonized rake in order to tear down the mask of his social identity constructed by false rumours and vicious gossip. Just as his swearing did not "make Pluto quake," neither did he murder because of "lust denied" (12). "Rochester's" comic urgency to send himself to hell and the ironic scenario where the figure of heroic depravity is himself lost and seeking guidance from the post boy distinguish Rochester from the caricature of himself. Although Rochester rips off the Don Juan mask, he reveals nothing of the real self. In the parodic masquerade of oneself, the earl reveals that the self is always masked, even when it exposes the existence of such facades.

The libertine's exhibitionistic sense of self stems from seventeenth-century conception of selfhood as outward representation. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines a person in terms of his words and actions. "A *Person*," he says, "is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himselfe, or an other." Self-representation then becomes the basis of individuality, a kind of role akin to stage performance. Greenblatt notes that Hobbes's "conception of self ... does not anchor personal identity in an inalienable biological continuity."<sup>50</sup> In the

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broadside advertisement for his assumed identity, Alexander Bendo the astrologer and healer, Rochester expounds on the idea of identity as theatrical spectacle. He demonstrates the paradoxical complexity and mixture of truth and falsehood, and in the process discloses the difficulty of separating the projected identity and the inner subjectivity. When Rochester concludes that the imitator, with his skilful masquerade, looks more authentic than the original himself, he suggests that identity is a question of public display.

Rochester's exploration of libertine identity, selfhood, and theatricality in his poetry is an extension of his own personal experimentation with disguises and of his involvement with the Restoration stage. If Rochester adopts theatrical roles, the stage makes him a prototype for the rake figure on the Restoration stage--the "nature" that art imitates. It is the theatrical nature of the libertine that makes the rake a figure of fascination on the Restoration stage. Restoration drama typically defines the rake as the perfect role-player adjusting to each different social situation.<sup>51</sup> Rochester was in fact personally involved with the Restoration theater. Besides his patronage of certain playwrights, he was known to have trained and transformed Elizabeth Barry into a famous thespian.<sup>52</sup> The libertine poet was notorious for his masquerades as a mountebank and reportedly also as a merchant, a porter, and a tinker.<sup>53</sup> He later confessed to Gilbert Burnet, who wrote the first biography of the earl, that he took on disguises for pure pleasure and entertainment.<sup>54</sup> In the same

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manner that Rochester toys with his own identity in "To the Post Boy," he manipulates his self-representation in his portraits--another natural medium for self-display. The famous Huysmans portrait, for example, shows him playing the role of the mocking satirist.<sup>55</sup> But a later portrait (by Wissing) presents a very different Rochester--this time with full darkened lips and languorous eyes. Here, he appears to play out his reputation as the notorious libertine. His portraits, poems, and prose, like his masquerades, demonstrate the individual's ability to recreate himself, and they reveal self-display to be a source of pleasure and power.

Rochester's fascination with role-playing was part of the theatrical court milieu of Charles II. Men and women at Whitehall delighted in masks and disguises. Burnet reports how "the Court fell into much extravagance in masquerading, both King and Queen, and all the Court, went about masked, and came into houses unknown, and danced there with a great deal of wild frolic." Courtiers and ladies paraded in the Mall during summer nights, frequently wearing masks and disguises.<sup>56</sup> These masquerades acquired a certain glamor because of the players--the court aristocrats. Only the upper classes in Restoration society had the leisure and freedom for such indulgence. Role-playing was risky for the middle class, even if it was on stage, which Greenblatt considers as one of the "spaces specially marked off for the exercise of impersonation."<sup>57</sup> In 1669, the actor Edward Kynaston imitated Sedley on

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stage and was soundly beaten for his audacity.<sup>58</sup> Rochester adopted both real and fictitious identities, but unlike Kynaston, he managed to escape punishment for his daring masquerades and adventures. At worst, as recounted in one case, he could depend on the king's pardon.<sup>59</sup> Not only did Rochester's extravagant masquerades push the court's theatrical sensibility to a new height, he also publicly tested and demonstrated the license accorded to court libertines. Indeed, he himself was the leader and archetype of the new flamboyant behavior that characterized Restoration rake-hells.

Rochester, his fellow court wits, and other boisterous groups of young rakes following in the footsteps of the court wits, quickly gained a reputation for making public spectacles of themselves. John Harold Wilson, in his book on the court wits, points out that they were often accused of indecent exposure. One infamous episode involves the drunken Sedley displaying his nakedness and preaching a blasphemous mock-sermon from a tavern balcony. The scene soon turned into a riot. Offended observers started throwing stones at Sedley; in retaliation Sedley and his friends, Sackville and Sir Thomas Ogle, threw wine bottles at the crowd.<sup>60</sup> From indecent exposure and heretical addresses to brawling and other riotous mischief, the rakes' acts of public defiance introduce an unprecedented exhibitionistic character to libertinism. The licentious rake is the histrionic actor who delights in rebellious self-fashioning, be it from the tavern balcony or the mountebank platform. In Restoration England, the court



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wits set a prominent pattern for other raucous groups of young rakes, with names such as Ballers (of which Rochester was once a member),<sup>61</sup> Hectors, and Blades. Such exhibitionism indicates a theatrical sense of self, and it certainly demonstrates the extravagant individualism that is part of Restoration libertinism.

The rakes' transgression of civic order is more than a delayed reaction to the strict regime of the Interregnum days. It is symptomatic of a breakdown in aristocratic norms and ethos at this time. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note out that the unruliness of life at Charles's II's court testifies to a "crisis of nobility." The court "made a farce of the chivalric and classic icons of aristocratic and regal identity."<sup>62</sup> During the Civil War and the Interregnum, the aristocracy experienced acute displacement. The costly support of the king's cause and the additional loss of property during Puritan rule reduced the economic force of the aristocracy. As pointed out in the first chapter, the extreme strategies to protect threatened bloodlines, the increased need for the legal protection of reputation, and the new inheritance law of strict settlement indicate the desperate attempts of the aristocracy to protect its status and property in Restoration England. For the Restoration courtier there was the additional sense of displacement, which Christopher Hill describes as follows:

The aristocrats who regained their privileged position after 1660 had no significant role to play in the reconstructed social order. Flocking to the court, they ceased even to take their traditional

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part in local government; and at court their role was decorative rather than functional. Courtiers were freer than other men to indulge their passions; but this only emphasized their social irrelevance.<sup>63</sup>

Charles II's own licentiousness and tacit permission of his courtiers' debauchery and misadventures meant that there was no need for the Restoration courtiers to keep up a front of virtue like Caroline courtiers. Nevertheless, they observed the distinction between public duty and private pleasures like their predecessors. The debauchery and even unruly behavior of the court wits fell within the realm of "permissible" pleasures under Charles II's reign, but the courtiers kept their criticism of the king and state affairs covert. Like the earlier poets, their libertine lyrics were written for coterie readers and only circulated in manuscript form. As Hill's comments suggest, the difference between Caroline and Restoration courtiers lies in the latter group's decreased public function and increased freedom to indulge private pleasures. The new freedom, along with Charles's contradictory personality and the ambiguity in certain aspects of the aristocratic code of ethics, heightened the uncertainty of the courtier's position at Whitehall.<sup>64</sup> According to Hobbes's political theory, morality is the responsibility of the state. But Charles provided no authority on that count. He issued a royal proclamation against swearing, adultery, and debauchery,<sup>65</sup> yet his personal practice contradicted his official stance. To the court wits, he was the ultimate libertine, but he also occupied the conflicting

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roles of the supreme authority figure and the good-humored fellow wit.

Charles's own inconsistency and predilection for playing political games meant that not even his devoted followers could rely on him for support.<sup>66</sup> But he was unusually tolerant of the wits' sexual license and misconduct--a fact deplored by the public. There was a glaring discrepancy between what was acceptable before the king and at court on the one hand, and what was morally upheld by society at large on the other hand. In Restoration England, the aristocratic honor code revealed profound contradictions: aristocratic privilege and fashionable "gallantry" clashed with the ethical refinement and responsibility expected of nobility and those in high office. For the courtier and the aristocrat of Charles's court, there was an unprecedented ambiguity--and hence license--that allowed for the growth of the obsessive individualism characteristic of libertinism.<sup>67</sup>

The rakes' flagrant disregard of the codes and propriety of their class can be seen as an extreme attempt to test and assert their social superiority and privilege. In a period when the courtier and the aristocrat had to contend with a reduced status, the libertines sought to reclaim the autocracy of the class of leisure through their flamboyant display of aristocratic license. Barker-Benfield observes that the rake-hell behavior of Rochester harks back to the "public manners of an older male leisure culture." In an ironic way, what he calls the libertines' "consumer psychology" in their treatment of women also discloses

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the "status-consumption ethos" that Elias identifies as part of court society.<sup>68</sup>

After all, the libertine pursuit of unlimited pleasure attested to the consumption capability of the leisure class. Besides the prominent sites of self-display, such as malls and parks, the haunts of Restoration rakes--taverns, coffee-houses, and theaters--were typically places of consumption. But in the end the rake-hells' profligate lifestyle and public misconduct only further eroded the dignity and status of the court aristocracy.

If the exhibitionistic excesses of court wits and young rakes in Restoration England indicate a desire to reclaim the lost autocracy of the upper class, Rochester's self-fashioning definitely betrays an intense search for validation, whether as the caustic satirist belittling others or the sinner seeking divine forgiveness at his deathbed. Likewise, libertine selfhood in Rochester's lyrics reveals an acute sense of instability. The libertine may adopt playful masks and enjoy various roles, but he is also the Hobbesian self with uncontrollable and compulsive appetites and desires. Greenblatt argues that there is "either a chaos of unformed desire that must be tamed to ensure survival or a dangerous assembly of free thoughts . . . that must--again to ensure survival--remain unspoken." He contends that Hobbes defines identity in terms of a theatrical mask, one that is ultimately "secured" by royal authority.<sup>69</sup> For the libertine, however, it is his will that is the final authority. But as several of Rochester's poems disclose, the libertine cannot even trust the

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functioning of his own body in his pursuit of pleasure. Rochester shows that the libertine, with such tenuous command over his body and the world around him, must rely solely on the rhetorical construction and pronouncement of his prowess and control; masks and theatrical performances are his means to affirm and anchor a fragile atomistic self.

### **Rochester's Modification of the Libertine Lyric**

To capture the complexity of Restoration libertine subjectivity, Rochester incorporates elements traditionally incompatible with the lyric form. The following two sections examine how he modifies the libertine lyric with the introduction of grotesque and satiric elements. His use of imagery and rhetoric of the carnal, profane, and vulgar suggests a poetics of the low that corresponds to the libertine's grotesque body. Rochester's poetics then degrades the original libertine lyric mode of suave persuasiveness and urbane self-assuredness. At the same time, however, he highlights the transgressive nature of libertine rhetoric. As we have seen earlier, he feeds the increasingly derogatory perception of the rake as the degenerate aristocrat. But Rochester's

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poetics always functions within the confines of *aristocratic* license--even when it demonstrates the extravagance of such license. His poems may obliquely indicate the courtier's frustration with Charles's reign, but they are hardly seditious. Rochester's lack of interest in a radical agenda can be seen when he completely abandons the subversive poetics of libertinism to ridicule the libertine "I" in his satires on John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave. Besides venting personal animosity against a personal adversary, the poems also promote the solidarity of a particular coterie of court wits against the outsider, including fellow wits and libertines like Mulgrave. The libertine lyrics of Rochester, like those of poets before him, primarily serve to strengthen social bonds and provide entertainment. But unlike Donne and the Cavalier poets, Rochester's experimentation with the lyric mode and libertine rhetoric alters the seventeenth-century libertine lyric of male self-fashioning almost beyond recognition.

### *Rochester's Inflammatory Strategies:*

#### *The Low, the Carnal, the Obscene*

Charles Sackville and Rochester suggest that the libertine's poetic inspiration, motivation, and writing stem from sexual drives. In a verse epistle

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to Etherege. Sackville declares that "God Priapus" is the source of poetic wit and inspiration.

For what but prick and cunt does raise  
Our thoughts to songs and roundelays,  
.....  
and so proceed  
To bays, the poet's sacred weed.<sup>70</sup>

Rochester's persona in "Satyr. [Timon]" declares a similar poetics: he "never Rhym'd, but for [his] *Pintles* sake" (22). In place of the sublime poetic inspiration and the lofty poetic creed, these two court wits outrageously present poetry as part of a vulgar sexual sensibility. These statements express the materialistic basis of libertinism by locating the poetic sublime and genius within the carnal body. The poetics of Rochester and Sackville obviously stands in direct contrast to the traditional courtliness of the lyric mode and to poetic standards in general. Dryden, for example, defines wit as a "propriety of thoughts and words," and Mulgrave, in his influential *Essay on Poetry* (1682), echoes Dryden's words, characterizing a song in terms of its "exact propriety of words and thought." Mulgrave obliquely refers to Rochester's songs-- "nauseous" because of their "bare ribaldry" and "words obscene."<sup>71</sup> Rochester certainly betrays the generic codes of the lyric form when he incorporates the incompatible language and imagery of the crude, the obscene, and the grotesque.

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Earlier libertine lyrics undermine courtly conventions and rhetoric, but they never violate poetic protocol the way Rochester does with his poetics of the low. A poetics founded upon sexual drives is not new: Carew anticipates Sackville and Rochester when he depicts the exchange of complimentary verses for sexual pleasures. But his poems never veer from the courtly mode of smooth lyricism and suave gallantry. In fact, Caroline libertine lyrics consistently display polished refinement in tone, language, and treatment of subject matter. A sexual poetics obviously need not embrace the rhetoric of the low. Like Donne before them, the Cavalier poets present a sexual realism that counters Platonic mystification of sexuality. After all, the naturalistic argument emphasizes freeing the sensual body from repression and shame--key components in courtly self-control and self-discipline. The difference between Rochester and the other poets is that his sexual poetics is based on the vulgar and profane body. For all their eroticism, the Cavalier picture of a sexual Golden Age portrays an innocent prelapsarian body that still retains much of the courtly refinement that characterizes the pristine Platonic body. In his book *The Court Society*, Elias observes that the refined love ethic is a ritual that allows the aristocrats to "distinguish themselves from the 'coarser' sexual relations of non-aristocratic classes."<sup>72</sup> Donne and the Cavalier poets may reject the chivalric code of Platonic love, but their descriptions of libertine sexuality do not manifest the degree of vulgarity seen in Rochester's lyrics. In



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fact. Rochester's poetics of the low strips the body of class-encoded distinctions of decorum and civility to the levelling commonality of primitive sexuality.

Although the private verse epistles exchanged between Etherege and Sackville come closest to the rhetoric and poetics presented in Rochester's poems, these two never veer from the tone of urbane courtliness in most of their own poetry. Sedley, Dorset, Etherege, and Buckingham attacked the high and the pretentious in all kinds of writings. Most of them made fun of panegyric and heroic modes in poetry and drama.<sup>73</sup> Their lampoons and parodies mercilessly ridicule the poets and dramatists engaged in courtly and elegiac forms and rhetoric. The court wits also enjoyed dismantling the conventions of Platonic love and romantic pastoral in some of their poems. Rochester, however, is the only Restoration poet who explores the significance of libertine transgressiveness in the language and subject of his lyrics. In the process, he also imaginatively transforms the private discourse of the rakish court wits into the poetics of libertinism.

The Restoration preoccupation with the reform of traditional rhetoric makes Rochester's use of profanity more provocative. Various writers and thinkers, particularly those in scientific circles, contended that language should be plain, mathematically precise, and utilitarian. Swearing is rhetorical and emotional excess, and obscenity demonstrates the degradation of language; both are certainly against the proposed ideals for Restoration use of rhetoric.

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Rochester views decorous and standardized language as facile and hypocritical.

He told Burnet that morality is but "a decent way of speaking," exploited to develop a "reputation . . . necessary for [people's] credit, and affairs."<sup>4</sup>

Rochester's calculated use of profanity and obscenity, like his personal code of ethics, is clearly a defiant refusal to conform to society's demands. But it also intimates a particular ethical stance. His indecorous poetic language rejects hypocrisy, and since it reflects the court wits' personal discourse, it also introduces a certain degree of veracity.

Rochester may refer to Sedley's poetry as the art of the "Mannerly obscene" in "An Allusion to Horace," but unlike Sedley's "prevailing gentle Art" (64) of instilling lust into maiden's hearts, Rochester's obscenity can exhibit a verbal violence unseen in any of the court wits' poetry. His profane wit redefines the Restoration conception of wit, a component of the courtly code that can be traced back to the high culture of the courtier in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century courtesy books. Rochester strategically places obscenity in his lyrics to dramatize the outrageousness of certain lines, such as in "Upon his Drinking a Bowl" and "The Disabled Debauchee." The gratuitous swearing in "To the Post-Boy" pointedly illustrates that such verbal license violates moral, religious, and social codes. Rochester juxtaposes his persona's declaration of being the "Peerless Peer" with the preceding line of random oaths: the peer's verbal retching dramatically shatters all notions of aristocratic dignity.

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Pierre Bourdieu, in his evaluation of social decorum, concludes that "the concessions of *politeness* always contain *political* concessions."<sup>75</sup> This certainly applies to Rochester's self-lampoon. "I have blasphemed my god and libelld Kings" (14), the devilish earl of the poem proclaims. The political significance of such verbal transgression is clear when Rochester places the boast as the culmination of his catalog of debauched and deprave acts. Obscenity expresses wilful excess and masculine aggression; it serves as the oral counterpart of the sexual and social unruliness of the libertine. On one level, the speaker's boast of "Oaths [that] wud fright furies and make Pluto quake" (4) sounds almost facetious. But on another level, the libertine is attuned to the intrinsic power of words. After all, his anarchic force, like that of the disabled debauchee, depends solely on rhetorical self-aggrandizement. It is the exploitation of socially and ideologically laden words that allows him to construct a forceful sense of self.

Rochester uses the language of the low in conjunction with the mode of the refined and the courtly. For example, the poem "Upon his Drinking a Bowl" develops the easy and urbane lyricism of the classic Anacreontic tradition only to destroy the idyllic and self-contained world with the obscenity in the last line. Ronald Paulson perceives that obscenity was characteristic of the Restoration modes of low burlesque and travesty.<sup>76</sup> By injecting the language and imagery of low genres--epigrams, burlesques, and travesties--

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Rochester mixes the low with the high to produce hybrid modes. Margaret Anne Doody notices a loss in "generic trust" in Restoration writings, and she considers Rochester's "work on the lyric [to be] part of the process of dismantling, of de- and re-creation, that is the most striking poetic activity of the Restoration period."<sup>77</sup> Consequently, Rochester completely alters the generic vision associated with the confessional lyric discourse of male desire. As we have seen in "To the Post Boy" and "The Disabled Debauchee," the satiric, parodic, and mock-heroic elements alter the self-fashioning of the libertine "I." But for all of Rochester's experimentation with the lyric mode, he favors traditional and rigid forms. Farley-Hills observes that the poet favors quatrains of common or long hymnal measure in lyrics and heroic couplets in satires (7-8). The self-lampoon, for example, demonstrates formal restraint even as it dramatizes excess. Its concise form of eight heroic couplets contrasts and hence magnifies the speaker's passions, yet it also demonstrates his paradoxical sense of control. Most of the poems discussed here conjoin elements of high and low genres and combine rhetorical excess and emotional violence with formal discipline. Rochester's manipulation of generic and thematic tensions creatively highlights the contradictions of libertine selfhood and of libertine rhetoric itself.

The dualistic character of Rochester's lyrics extends to his inflammatory strategies. For all its transgressiveness, his poetics of the low is also aristocratic

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in its license. His blunt rhetoric, shocking use of vulgarity, and description of the grotesque and the low in his poetry might easily be mistaken for a more egalitarian poetics that undercuts the poetic discourse of courtly decorum and propriety. After all, both naturalism and the Hobbesian state of nature used to support libertinism posit equal natural rights. In addition, Hill observes that libertinism shares a similar materialistic rhetoric with the Ranters and other radical sects.<sup>78</sup> But unlike the political radicalism of the Levellers, Restoration libertinism does not aim to tear down the status quo. In practice sensual excess was a privilege of the leisure class, and libertine self-fashioning was distinctly rooted in the hothouse of sexual license, the court of Charles II. In the end, the libertine lyric is no more an egalitarian mode than the courtly pastoral lyrics that depict maids and shepherds.<sup>79</sup> The libertine rhetoric of self-proclaimed superiority, with its tyrannic assertion of one's desires, effectively proclaims the elitism of the licentious aristocrat, which in historical terms would be no different from the aristocracy's class advantage.

Even the use of profanity is an aristocratic license. It was associated with the Cavaliers and their defiance of Puritan rule. In fact, the Cavaliers were called the "Dammees" for their swearing habit, and during the Interregnum Parliament targeted them in its law against profanity and blasphemy. In 1666, however, the House of Lords failed to reinforce the bill against atheism and profanity that was earlier passed by the House of Commons.<sup>80</sup> Such license

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plainly violated the conception of gentility and courtliness. Etiquette, as Elias argues, is crucial to the ethos of nobility that serves to exalt the aristocracy above the rest of society.<sup>81</sup> But in this case, vulgarity violates *both* aristocratic and bourgeois propriety. The emerging bourgeois morality of the period took on much of the aristocratic behavioral code when it focused on the inculcation of politeness and good manners. This process made the special license associated with the Cavaliers particularly unacceptable. In fact, the swearing habit of the aristocrats became one of the characteristics associated with the debased gentleman in the late Restoration. Jeremy Collier, the famous anti-theatrical polemicist, vehemently decries such "aristocratic" vices:

A fine Gentleman, is a fine Whoring, Swearing, Smutty, Atheistical Man. These Qualifications it seems compleat the *Idea* of Honour. They are the Top-Improvements of Fortune, and the distinguishing Glories of Birth and Breeding!<sup>82</sup>

By adopting the rhetoric and images of the low, Rochester increases the transgressive character of libertine rhetoric, but he also debases the libertine's force to the purely anarchic and self-destructive. He shows that in a world of chaos, limitation, and decay, the only power possible is appetitive and destructive.

Rochester's anti-courtly poetics demonstrates the particular disillusionment of Restoration courtiers. This disillusionment is different from the Caroline courtiers' frustration with Charles I's restrictive reforms and

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Henrietta Maria's cult of Platonic love, where their discontent was mostly directed at the confining nature of court culture, not the fundamental character and rule of the king. Rochester's personal attack on Charles II in several lampoons vividly illustrates his frustration and disenchantment with the restored monarchy. In "[A Satire on Charles II]," he announces his hatred for "all Monarchs, and the Thrones they sit on" (32). By the 1670s, the political frustration of the wits was no longer limited to expression in satires and lampoons. As a result of the exclusion crisis, most of the court wits--Rochester, Sackville, Buckingham, and Henry Savile--moved to the camp of the "Country Party," the name given to the Whigs.<sup>83</sup>

Libertine lyrics, unlike the pointed satirical mode, are naturally more concerned with articulating the wants and interests of the desiring subject than expressing political criticism. Their political subversiveness remains oblique and mainly pertains to the inconstant, atheistic, and self-serving subject. After all, libertine lyrics function primarily within the realm of private leisure. Hugh M. Richmond mentions that French libertines, such as Théophile de Viau, combine "an Epicurean satisfaction of private rewards and pleasures" with "stoic dutifulness in public."<sup>84</sup> The wits also limited their rebelliousness to "private pleasures" because there was more ambiguity and hence more freedom in that area. There was a clear distinction between the public political activities of the court wits and their private leisure. Before the late 1670s, they acted the loyal

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subject at parliamentary meetings and typically voted according to the king's wishes.<sup>85</sup> They might tease the king in private, but Charles's discovery of any lampoon on himself or his mistress would mean swift punishment. Rochester was himself banished by the king for his satire in 1674.<sup>86</sup> Despite the licentiousness at Whitehall, the courtier had to keep his sexual freedom within certain limits. Rochester tested the limits of courtly behavior when he abducted the heiress Elizabeth Malet. Although Charles was the personal matchmaker for the pair, the earl's crime landed him at the Tower for weeks.

The manuscript status of Rochester's licentious works kept them within the confines of private leisure. His poetic license was made possible by the support of a coterie of peers who clearly enjoyed his profane wit. None of the court wits published any of their provocative writings--not even anonymously or under pseudonyms, as Rochester did with his broadside advertisement for the services of his persona, Alexander Bendo. The court wits' writing and circulation of manuscripts took place in coffeehouses, taverns, and Rochester's home at Woodstock Park; libertine lyrics were part of the courtiers' sociability and libertine lifestyle.<sup>87</sup> These manuscripts also reached readers outside the group of Rochester's friends. Professional scribes and readers at coffeehouses and taverns made copies of the poems and passed them on to other interested readers.<sup>88</sup> Control and censorship of Restoration manuscript transmission was difficult; political satires, libels, and licentious works were voluminous at that



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time. Although Charles gave the state licenser the authority to search and confiscate material in 1662, Roger L'Estrange, the Surveyor of the Press, complained that "not one in forty libels comes to press, though by the help of manuscripts they are well-nigh as public." It is ironic that Restoration England had the most restraining press conditions since Elizabeth's reign.<sup>89</sup> Many knew and possessed the licentious manuscript poems of Rochester--including his enemies. These readers obviously respected the unstated code of manuscript transmission, that is, to protect the special license of such writings. Poets and readers alike recognized libertine lyrics as the "private pleasures" of disgruntled but not seditious courtiers. Even with their anti-courtly sentiments, the lyrics enforced the elitist character of court sociability amongst the poets and their intimate readers.

### *Rochester's Inclusion of the Satiric*

The satirical and grotesque elements that Rochester introduces to the lyric form degrade libertine selfhood and sexuality. Vulgarly, for example, emphasizes the materialism and subversiveness of libertine thought, but it also dramatizes a degenerate kind of sexuality. The unexpected profanity in "Upon his Drinking a Bowl" immediately debases the libertine's pursuit of pleasure. In

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poems that include satirical elements, such as "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy," obscenity plainly illustrates a perverted sexuality. Paulson notes that sex in Restoration England has become "a vehicle . . . [close] to the tenor of the satire." He contends that Rochester's use of vulgarity is part of a "satiric function of awakening the reader and, by laying bare in the most vivid way his animal origins, making him reassess customary humanist values."<sup>90</sup> This is unquestionable, especially in the poet's satires and lampoons, where the language of obscenity fits the low subject, such as in "The Imperfect Enjoyment," "A Ramble in Saint James's Parke," and "The Mock Song." Given Rochester's ironic treatment of libertine subjectivity and sexuality in some of his poems and his strategy of dismantling literary languages and genres, it is no surprise that libertine rhetoric is itself undermined in his two satires on Mulgrave, "An Epistolary Essay" and "A very Heroicall Epistle in Answer to Ephelia."<sup>91</sup> In these poems, Rochester presents a distorted version of libertine rhetoric to mock Mulgrave. But in satirizing the speaker, he also discredits the self-fashioning process of the libertine "I." As the following examination of the two poems shows, Rochester completely alters the original transgressive poetics of libertine rhetoric when his satirical target is the libertine speaker himself.

The subheading found in most of the manuscripts of "An Epistolary Essay" reads "From M. G. to O. B. upon their Mutual Poems." It would appear to refer to Mulgrave and Dryden (whose nickname is "Old Bays").<sup>92</sup> David

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Vieth, Farley-Hills, and other recent critics persuasively argue that Rochester adopts the persona of Mulgrave to mock his favorite satiric subject.<sup>93</sup>

Mulgrave, like Rochester, is both a poet and a rake.<sup>94</sup> In fact before his falling-out with Rochester, he was part of Rochester's gang of court libertines. The problem with this satire is that the speaker is at times too witty and shrewd for a satiric target. I agree with Farley-Hills that the irony is not consistent and at times unclear (131). To add to that confusion, many of M. G.'s ideas sound rather like Rochester's; and Griffin points out that the speaker's witty defiance can easily be taken for a "playful celebration of an egotistic theory of writing" (68). This confusion is partly due to Rochester's presentation of the typical libertine pose and rhetoric. But as we will see, the poet strips away all the libertine's redeeming qualities to produce a repulsive, obdurate, and ludicrous persona who misapplies the rhetoric and values of libertinism to poetics.

Like the libertine who flaunts his defiant license, M. G. insists upon complete literary freedom--rejecting poetic conventions and opinions of critics. He throws away all rules except one:

But from a Rule (I have upon long tryall)  
T' avoyd with care, all sort of self denyall  
Which way soe're desire and fancy leade  
(Contemning Fame) that Path I boldly tread;  
And if exposeing what I take for Witt,  
To my deare self, a Pleasure I beget,  
Noe matter tho' the Censring Crittique fret.

(14-20)

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When M. G. argues for the primacy of "Sense" and his personal judgement (73-76), he articulates the libertine position of anti-intellectualism and anti-abstraction. His goal is thoroughly individualistic, that is, "to write, as none ere writ before" (49). This poetic practice forms the literary correlative of libertinism in its focus on delight and total freedom from all kinds of restraint. M. G. himself establishes the link between his writing and lifestyle when he observes that those who criticize his poetry also attack his "Course of life. / The least delight of which, [he would] not forgoe" (21-23). His lifestyle clearly exalts the pleasure principle, especially if M. G. represents Mulgrave, a reputed womanizer. He plainly manifests the superiority complex of the libertine shown in "Against Constancy":

But I, who am of sprightly Vigour full  
Looke on Mankind, as Envious, and dull.

(71-72)

But in this satiric portrait, there is none of the bonding with other libertines that is depicted in "Against Constancy." The speaker insists upon his absolute superiority as he condescends to the rest of mankind.

M. G., like Rochester, rejects all kinds of refinement, both physical and poetic. Following Sackville in his verse epistle to Etherege and Rochester's persona in "Satyr. [Timon]," the speaker also presents a poetics based on the vulgar body. "I'd Fart just as I write, for my owne ease" (36), he declares.<sup>95</sup> But instead of the association with sexual power that is portrayed in Sackville's

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verse epistle to Etherege and in Rochester's "Satyr. [Timon]," writing is reduced to shitting and farting--functions of the uncontrollable crude body. Rochester's depiction of the speaker's "anal" compulsion wittily produces a grotesque version of the libertine's sexual drive. After all, both sexual and anal impulses are instinctive, imperative, and unruly. In this satire, "Nature," the libertine's justification for all kinds of freedom, is merely the excremental.

In "Allusion to Horace," the poem that is generally taken to indicate the poet's own voice, Rochester evokes the traditional understanding of poetic genius. He describes Waller as "by Nature for the Bayes design'd" and calls Shadwell's writings "Great proofes of force of Nature, none of Art" (45). When Rochester criticizes Dryden's imagination, he harps on the "want of Judgment, or of Witt" (90). More pertinent is his criticism of Mulgrave "the Purbblind Knight" (115), who "squints more in his Judgment, than his sight" (116). Hence in the context of Rochester's denigration of Mulgrave's poetic skills and his advice to Dryden to "Weigh ev'ry word, and ev'ry thought refine" (101), M. G.'s literary precepts are meant to be taken ironically.<sup>96</sup> This is clearest when M. G. boasts of the following talent:

In all I write, shou'd Sense, and Witt, and Rhyme  
Faile me at once, yet something soe Sublime,  
Shall stamp my Poem, that the World may see,  
It cou'd have beene produc'd, by none but me.

(44-47)

But as Rochester sarcastically implies earlier, M. G. rejects the value of

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imagination and poetic inspiration for "the Excrement of [his] dull Braine"

(40). M. G.'s twisted understanding of libertine freedom and individualism only leads to scatology, not sublimity. His vaunted originality is that of a bad writer. Even he himself acknowledges that possibility:

If then I'm happy, what does it advance,  
Whether to merit due, or Arrogance?

(79-80)

Rochester shows that the dictate of pleasure in M. G.'s poetics is actually one of the reasons for his poetic mediocrity and results in wilful self-delusion. M. G. perverts the transgressive force of libertinism into a mean option of being a vile and inferior poet in this poem. In Rochester's satirical portrait of Mulgrave, the libertine's typical insistence on free self-expression degenerates to M. G.'s demand for the "leave to shit" (43).

The speaker's many contradictions further undermine his position and betray the deluded "Purblind Knight." On the one hand, he admits the possibility that he may be deficient in wit. On the other hand, he defends himself as a wit--and in quite a witty manner at that--when he argues that others actually possess less wit than they believe themselves to own. M. G. also contradicts himself when he first denies that he is one of those writers "who thinke themselves inspired" (12), and then later announces the sublimity of his pen (45-46). Farley-Hills observes that such inconsistencies "reinforce the impression of a blustering, dogmatic personality" (130). But more than that,

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Rochester uses the contradictions to expose a basic craving for all that the speaker professes to reject. M. G. may righteously dismiss the "World" and its "musty Customes" (85) and "Common Fame" (90), presenting himself as the only brave soul with integrity, common sense, and true judgment. Nevertheless, his rhetoric betrays an undeniable yearning for acclaim, especially when he talks of "deserved Bays" (6) and of how he merits the critics' "thanks" (7). Even his explanation for why he is "noe Poet, of the tymes" (50) is a desperate rationalization for his marginalized status as a poet. This is only too apparent when M. G. ends the poem by announcing that he will "keepe at home, and write" (100). In the end, the character who centers his whole world and poetics on himself must also keep to himself. M. G.'s moral and poetic victory over the world proves to be quite hollow when his extreme individualism is the path to complete alienation and isolation.

In "A very Heroicall Epistle," Rochester again uses the libertine rhetoric of self-aggrandizement as a satirical tool, this time with more success.<sup>97</sup> The satire answers Etherege's "Ephelia to Bajazet," so that the two poems form a pair in the tradition of Ovidian love epistles. Mulgrave as already noted was known for his vanity, ambition, and womanizing. These characteristics are not exactly alien in the figure of the aggressive libertine poet-lover, and as in "An Epistolary Essay," Rochester skilfully magnifies all the offensive elements of libertine rhetoric to mock Mulgrave.

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Bajazet discounts each of Ephelia's complaints with a few common arguments for libertinism: the universal practice of libertinism, the constancy of inconstancy, and nature's law of change. Griffin says that "Bajazet's answers restate the standard arguments [of libertinism] with great flair, and pretended plain-dealing" (61). Farley-Hills disagrees with him, claiming that Mulgrave's speech, with its avoidance of pain and lack of honesty and generosity, goes against cardinal libertine tenets (125). What Rochester does in this poem is to produce the libertine discourse in a distorted form for satiric purposes. Bajazet answers Ephelia's charge of cruelty with the defense of inconstancy, but Rochester undermines his rationalizations by exposing an utterly heartless and self-absorbed character. The poem opens with the same argument brought up in Donne's "Womans Constancy," that is, the consistency of inconstancy.

If you're deceiv'd, it is not by my Cheate,  
For all Disguises, are below the greate:  
What Man, or Woman, upon Earth can say,  
I ever us'd 'em well above a Day?  
How is it then, that I inconstant am?  
He changes not, who always, is the same.

(1-6)

Bajazet reduces the moral value of constancy to mere habituation in order to free himself from the charge of inconstancy. But the tone and delivery immediately undermine the character of Bajazet. His reference to himself as "the greate" and the way he sees both men and women as mere objects of sexual "use" expose his cruel insensitivity to Ephelia's feelings and the



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ruthlessness of his indiscriminate sexual practice.

At first glance, Bajazet's brazen rationalization of his sexual promiscuity appears to be no different from the typical libertine pursuit of pleasure. Even his outrageous code of ethics appears to be aligned with the radical individualism of libertines:

In my deare self, I center ev'ry thing,  
My Servants, Friends, my Mistresse and my King,  
Nay Heav'n, and Earth, to that one poynt I bring. . . .

(7-9)

The speaker's self-centered ethos demolishes all levels of social, political, and emotional hierarchy. He also rejects all conventional manners and values which restrict his freedom:

Well-Manner'd, Honest, Generous and stout,  
(Names by dull Fooles, to plague Mankind found out)  
Shou'd I regard, I must my self constraine,  
And 'tis my Maxim, to avoyd all paine. . . .

(10-13)

His refusal to "constrain himself" accords, after all, with the libertine tenet of following one's nature. In "An Epistolary Essay," M. G. accuses the world of wrong judgement in its pursuit of "Common Fame." Here the same satiric object reduces society's values to oppressive but essentially meaningless words. In his display of rebellious difference, the speaker is like the debauchee and the earl in "To the Post Boy." However, the pompous Bajazet reveals a blatant lack of the self-awareness and ironic playfulness shown by the debauchee and the

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earl. Just a few lines earlier, he proclaims his integrity and declares that he is above falsehood and pretence--a flagrant contradiction of his present rejection of society's esteem of virtues such as honesty. His contradictions demonstrate an absence of genuine self-knowledge. Bajazet also perverts the pleasure principle of libertinism. He articulates the Hobbesian physiologically-based morality, where pain is evil, and pleasure is good, such that the former leads to aversion, and the latter to attraction. The Epicurean idealization of pleasure, however, admits the necessity of pain;<sup>98</sup> certainly Rochester's libertine ethic embraces pain as part of intense and authentic living. The debauchee and the fictive earl, for example, accept pain and physical limitation in their bold pursuit of pleasure. Bajazet, however, espouses a maxim of pleasure founded on the fear of pain. This passive and distorted articulation of hedonism discloses a cowardly character behind the brash assertion of his sexual mastery.

Rochester consistently exposes and undermines his persona's boastful character. This can be seen in Bajazet's next defense to Ephelia:

For 'tis as Naturall, to change, as love:  
You may as justly at the Sun repine  
Because alike it does not allways shine. . . .

(17-19)

Griffin observes a similar naturalistic argument in "A Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne," where Strephon compares love to the changing weather (60). But Bajazet's analogy to the sun picks up the earlier reference to himself

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as the center of the world. He outrageously usurps the symbol of the sun that is typically reserved for the king in the discourse of divine kingship.<sup>99</sup> Next Bajazet compares himself to a comet: his "Blazeing Starr" is "never seene, but some great Lady dyes" (23). Rochester subverts the implicit reference to the speaker's sexual prowess since the comet's glory is notably brief and its brilliance comes from its dissolution. Furthermore, comets were taken for bad omens--another of Rochester's deft satiric stroke that undercuts Bajazet's imperial rhetoric of self-importance.<sup>100</sup>

Rochester illustrates that the speaker is as vicious as he is arrogant. Instead of letting down his old mistress gently, Bajazet maintains that her suffering is all of her own making. In fact, she should be grateful for what she has received from him. Bajazet takes their intimate liaison to be a fair sexual transaction: "What e're you gave, I paid you back in Blisse!" (26). It is common in libertine lyrics to portray sex as an equitable exchange of pleasure without any obligation or guilt. Bajazet, however, makes it into a sly accounting of favors, where his are worth much more than hers. He even insinuates a largesse on his part for which she should be thankful. Bajazet thoroughly humiliates her when he compares her to beggars who "still haunt the Doore, / Where they've receiv'd a Charity before" (31). His contempt for an old lover betrays a mean spirit which is completely incompatible with his professed "Charity," particularly since he has just renounced generosity as a

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virtue.

Bajazet's defense of libertinism suddenly shifts to a reverie about a sultan's life, as if he is tired of answering Ephelia's complaints. He abruptly calls out:

Oh happy Sultan! whom wee Barb'rous call!  
How much refin'd art thou above us all?  
Who Envys not the joys of thy Serrail?  
Thee, like some God, the trembling Crowd adore,  
Each Man's thy Slave, and Woman-kind, thy Whore.

(32-36)

What Bajazet envies is the sultan's unconditional power. His description of the sultan's command evokes the biblical genesis of the world:

Thy crowching Slaves, all silent as the Night,  
But at the Nod, all Active as the Light!

(39-40)

Unlike God, the sultan does not even have to utter a sound for his orders to be carried out. He also subverts the concept of divine kingship. This image of a despotic sultan "Secure in Solid Sloth" and interested only in his tyrannic pleasures would support Parliament's argument for a limited monarchical rule. (Significantly, laziness and indulgence in "the joys of love" are two traits commonly ascribed to Charles II.)<sup>101</sup> Rochester's goal in this poem, however, is not political criticism. In "An Epistolary Essay," he attacks Mulgrave's poetic abilities; here he mocks the ambitions and egotism of his personal enemy. Bajazet's libertine rhetoric manifests nothing of the playful and sometimes

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ironic quality of the other libertine speakers' defiance that Rochester portrays. In fact, Bajazet's glorification of the sultan's oppressive rule serves to disclose a sinister and brutal aspect of his egotism.

The vision of absolute power is Bajazet's understanding of "the joys of Love, without paine" (41). It is like a perverse version of the sexual paradise depicted in libertine lyrics. Edenic bliss portrayed in terms of secular power is not new in libertine verses. In "A very Heroicall Epistle," however, the speaker's pursuit of pleasure seems almost devoid of any sexual passion.<sup>102</sup> There is no pain associated with libertine "love" because the women are compliant and eager to please in Bajazet's fantasy. Every woman courts the sultan, and any female he chooses is suitably "submissive" and "thankfull." By having all possible sources of irritation destroyed, the sultan avoids pain. In effect, Bajazet imagines a sadistic answer to the problem of the complaining Ephelia, that is, the "True-Love-Knot" that silences a woman's reproach forever. Earlier he refers to the mistaken common perception of the barbaric nature of sultans, claiming that a sultan is "much refin'd above us all." But his extolling account of horrible abuse of power plainly reveals that he is the "Barb'rous" one in question. Rochester demonstrates that Bajazet's maxim to avoid pain is extreme self-indulgence achieved at the expense of others. He turns the libertine insistence on sensual gratification upside down with Bajazet's rhetoric. An ethos based solely upon the interests of the self can be used to

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sanction the most trivial justification for murder, as we have seen, and in the end, it is immoral.

Bajazet's interpretation of the sultan's freedom from pain finally reveals his own pain and anxiety. He tells the imaginary tyrant:

Thou fearst noe injur'd Kinsmans threatning Blade,  
Nor Midnight Ambushes, by Rivalls laid;  
While here with Akeing Heart, our joys wee taste,  
Disturb'd by Swords, like Democles his Feast.

(53-56)

Bajazet is no bold and dauntless young rake: he is a fearful man who lives in dread of his enemies. Wilson notes that the lines on "injur'd Kinsmans" and "Midnight Ambushes" are mocking references to actual episodes in Mulgrave's life.<sup>103</sup> Bajazet's "Akeing Heart" is not at all comparable to that of Dionysius or lovers such as Ephelia. For him, the pains of "love" have nothing to do with heartbreak. Instead, they pertain to complaints of old mistresses and threats of love rivals and angry kinsmen of spurned mistresses.

Bajazet's admission in the last couplet reveals that his rhetoric of invulnerability and control is but a brittle facade. His world is nothing like the sultan's, and his confidence is nothing like what he projected to Ephelia. The egotistic and imperialistic speaker actually finds life fraught with fear and anguish. In the end, his sense of mastery is entirely constructed by rhetoric. This stands in ironic contrast to the despot who does not even need to articulate his orders when a nod suffices. By naming the speaker *Bajazet*, Rochester

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highlights the pathetic contrast between the speaker's ambitions and daydreams and the influence and glory of the historical Turkish emperor. The title "A Very Heroicall Epistle" also indicates the ironic gap between the speaker's self-presentation and the reality of his situation.<sup>104</sup> In the light of his final admission, the maxim to avoid pain actually points to his full awareness and experience of pain, which in the end, can only be fulfilled in daydreams.

Besides these two satires on Mulgrave, Rochester also makes fun of libertine rhetoric in other poems. In "The Disabled Debauchee" and "To the Post Boy," for example, he playfully mocks the sensationalism of libertine rhetoric. His inclusion of grotesque and satirical elements, as we have seen, problematizes the libertine's quest for an authoritative and secure sense of self. This is unmistakable in the satirical poems targeted at Mulgrave. After all, M. G. and Bajazet do not manifest the typical libertine self-consciousness, playfulness, and delight in sensuality. Rochester often depicts the libertine's world as degenerate, perverse, and desperate. Many of the libertine lyrics analyzed here can no longer be strictly classified under the old category of love lyrics because they have crossed over the generic boundary to satire.<sup>105</sup> The rhymed couplet that Rochester is so fond of, as pointed out by Hill, is "more appropriate to poetry of the head than of the heart, to satire than lyric."<sup>106</sup> Rochester appears to find a new potential in satire not found in the lyric mode. It obviously allows him to approach the limitations and problems of libertine

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identity and sexuality with both drama and critical insight.

Rochester's inclusion of the satirical in libertine lyrics appears to manifest the larger social recognition and rejection of the radicalism inherent in libertine discourse. In her study of Restoration drama, Laura Brown finds that libertinism is "viewed as a threat and ultimately repudiated, even by the Restoration libertine himself."<sup>107</sup> The implicit cynicism and disillusionment of the Cavaliers reach a new height with Rochester. He exposes the questions of self-delusion, self-destruction, and alienation embedded in libertine selfhood. Rochester also shows that libertine rhetoric at its worst is empty and deluded posturing, as seen in "A Very Heroicall Epistle." At its best, it reveals the self-conscious and honest speaker bent on self-destruction in "To the Post Boy." For the Restoration libertine, there is no real sense of dominance or control: Bajazet himself cannot convince himself of his own power, nor the superiority that he projects to Ephelia; and the fictional "Rochester" who has the ability to outdo everybody exposes a grotesque body.

Rochester's satiric and ironic treatment of the rhetoric and values of libertinism discloses the inadequacy of libertinism's answers to the problem of mutability and contingency. The grotesque carnal self is a vivid illustration of human limitation and degradation. Rochester's portrayal of human inadequacy, instability, and discontentment contradicts the principles of rationality and control that underlie the epistemology of the new philosophy of science. In his



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political solution to the warring first state, Hobbes places great faith in the power of human reasoning. Rochester, however, rejects the philosopher's optimism to focus on the bestial self. His vision of a degraded human nature and reality registers the disturbing impact of materialistic determinism. It certainly suggests that an appetitive and unstable self can never be rational and secure.

In the late seventeenth century, there was an emerging intellectual trend toward more optimistic and positive formulations of human nature and the universe, including that of materialistic determinism. Locke replaced Hobbes's pessimistic perception of human nature with a harmonious original state of nature; scientists like Newton incorporated materialistic determinism as part of a rational and benign universe that demonstrated divine order. In her evaluation of seventeenth-century scientific, religious, historical, legal, and literary discourses, Barbara Shapiro records a shift from a frustrated search for absolute truth and certainty towards a more achievable goal of some degree of moral certitude.<sup>108</sup> Rochester's libertine lyrics plainly dramatize the difficulties, and not the successes, of acquiring that degree of assurance. They implicitly challenge the faith placed in human rationality and mastery by contemporaries such as Descartes and Hobbes. Rochester's chaotic world of animal passions and grotesque selves must finally be placed within the context of the end of the seventeenth-century epistemological and ontological crisis, and not the

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confident world view of Newtonian eighteenth century.

## Notes to Chapter Four

1. Pepys's *Diary*, 12 March 1668, qtd. in Roger Thompson's *Unfit for Modest Ears: A Study of Pornographic, Obscene and Bawdy Works Written or Published in England in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 12.
2. Stone, *Family*, 530; and Thompson, 16.
3. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.
4. *Rochester's Poetry*, 16. Later page citations will be parenthetically noted.
5. Marianne Thormählen, *Rochester: The Poems in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30. Subsequent references will appear in the main text.
6. In his discussion of individual poems, Farley-Hills remarks how Rochester mixes and changes conventions within a single poem. See 51, 61, 77, *et passim*.
7. See Thormählen's Chapter 2. She also misreads Farley-Hills's classification criteria: his definition of libertinism as spiritualized sexuality and his comments on how Rochester combines the different poetic conventions for special effect indicate that he is not segregating the "amour-désir" from the "amour-tendresse."
8. See Chapter 2 of Griffin's *Satires against Man: The Poems of Rochester* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973). Under the group "The Uses of Libertinism," he lists "A Ramble in Saint James's Park," "Satyr [Timon]," "Tunbridge Wells," "The Disabled Debauchee," "To the Post Boy," "A Very Heroicall Epistle in Answer to Ephelia," and "An Epistolary Essay." Hereafter references to Griffin's book are noted in parentheses.
9. *The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Charles Sedley*, ed. V[ivian]. de Sola Pinto, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1928), I: 40, line 2. All quotations of Sedley's writings are from this edition.
10. *The Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 43, lines 15 and 7. Subsequent citations from *Poems* are noted by line number.

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11. Wilders also notes "the aristocratic condescension of Rochester's tone" in the argument against the constant lovers. "Rochester and the Metaphysicals," *Spirit of Wit*, 52.

12. Some readers, such as Wilders (53) and Thormählen (61-63), comment on the speaker's obsessive sexuality. They would go so far as to say that the poem is devoid of any epicurean delight in sensuality. But the reference to the "kind night" does suggest succor--and from the tone consistent throughout the poem--a sexual one.

13. See Thorpe's editorial notes, *The Poems of Sir George Etherege* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 103. All quotations of Etherege's poems are taken from this edition.

14. Thormählen, 19. On Rochester's models, Ronsard's and Thomas Stanley's translations of *Anakrontea*, see Walker, 246-47.

15. Despite the shocking reference to homosexuality as the model of sexual bliss, Rochester stops short of developing this subversive idea. The imagined amour is not consummated, and it is not part of the present reality. Rochester distances himself from the homoerotic in this poem when he places it squarely on the symbolic level in the last stanza, where the speaker pursues heterosexual intercourse. Sodomy was a crime in Restoration England and "still profoundly taboo" (Thompson, 124), even if evidence indicates that the wits engaged in it.

16. See Barbara Everett's essay, "The Sense of Nothing," on the impact and function of "cunt" in the last line (*Spirit of Wit*, 26). Thormählen also comments on the "calculated effect" of the last line, where Rochester "comes close to murdering" the Anacreontic convention in this poem (19).

17. Bredvold, *Milieu of John Dryden*, 50, 52. Also see Richard Foster Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A Study of the Rise of the Scientific Movement in Seventeenth-Century England*, 1961, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 185, 223, *et passim*.

18. Cf. Farley-Hills, who sees the poem as a "picture of human love as something snatched out of a momentary freedom from emptiness," and hence love is "an heroic defiance of an indifferent universe" (*Rochester's Poetry*, 84-85). I find it hard to accept Farley-Hills's description of an exalted love in a poem that reduces love to a fleeting minute. The speaker's fallacious reasoning suggests that he is dodging the need to pledge his devotion and love to an

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insistent mistress. According to Thormählen, the lyric is "less concerned with epistemology than with averting recrimination" (69).

19. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson, 1968 (London: Penguin Classics, 1988), 97. Also see Farley-Hills, *Rochester's Poetry*, 85.

20. Thormählen discerns that the determinism of the last stanza negates the epicurean dictum of *carpe diem* (70). Nevertheless, the libertine's passion for intense living is present in the poem. Rochester is aware of that paradox, and he explores such problems of libertine materialism in his poetry.

21. The "lucky minute" in "As *Chloris* full of harmless thought" and "the happy minute" in "Fair *Cloris* in a Piggsty lay" both refer to orgasm.

22. Anne Richter notices the "denial of the continuum of life, and the consequences of that denial for human relationships." "John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 53 (1967): 60. Others have commented that solipsism threatens pleasure and sexual union: see Griffin's "Rochester and the 'Holiday Writers,'" *Rochester and Court Poetry*, Vieth and Griffin (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1988), 47; and Sarah Wintle's "Libertinism and Sexual Politics," *Spirit of Wit*, 153-54.

23. *Collected Works*, ed. Hayward, 288.

24. The three poems portray the libertine's emphasis on sexuality, albeit from the perspective of "love." As I have mentioned earlier, the reference to emotional bonding does not mean constancy. Nevertheless, these poems are essentially love verses, so I am excluding them from my analysis.

25. Parry, *Seventeenth Century*, 110. See Walker (263) on the specific lines of Waller's poem that Rochester parodies.

26. See Nicholas Jose's book, *Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature 1660-71* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), especially Chapter 1. Also Paul J. Korshin, "Queuing and Waiting: The Apocalypse in England, 1660-1750," *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions*, ed. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 251.

27. For example, see Wintle on Rochester's portrayal of "sexually formidable women" (155-59).

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28. The argument is of course fallacious. The "rain" does not always terminate the passions and love of *both* parties, and as the heavens analogy shows, thunderstorms do recur in the same area.

29. Righter, 63; and Thormählen, 61. Thormählen remarks that "the poem shatters the framework of pastoral convention" (61). Peter Porter also recognizes that the poem "[assaults] the pastoral eclogue with the shock tactics of irony and surprise endings. "The Professional Amateur," *Spirit of Wit*, 66.

30. Thormählen detects Strephon's "imperfect dedication to the principle of inconstancy when naively announcing his gratification that the new girl is "Ever pleas'd with only me" (61). Rochester shows the contradictory pulls of inconstancy and fidelity in other poems too, such as "Song" ("Give me leave to raile at you"), "A Song" ("Absent from thee I languish still"), and "Love and Life: A Song." See Wilders, 52; Righter, 68; and K. E. Robinson. "Rochester's Dilemma," *John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester: Critical Essays*, ed. David M. Vieth (New York: Garland, 1988), 78.

31. See Wintle on the ambiguity inherent in the images of female sexuality that suggest both activity and passivity (157-61).

32. Thormählen argues that the speaker "does not wish to live with her 'inclination'" (65). The argument may be a "device to cover up the shame of a cuckold" in its "lip-service" to women's sexual freedom (66). Cf. Wintle's reading of the speaker's psychological impulses: the mistress's promiscuity is the reason that he leaves her, and his speech is "a kind of philosophico-libertine cover-up" for "the poet's jealousy and consequent aggression" (160). There is in fact no concrete evidence of the speaker's jealousy in the poem; nevertheless, it is obvious that his departure means that he no longer finds delight in the said charms of this mistress.

33. Griffin comments that wine is a psychological surrogate for women, clearly evident in the poem, "To a Lady, in A Letter" (127-28).

34. Fabricant observes that in Rochester's writings "intercourse is ... rarely executed in fact." "The Imperfect Enjoyment," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 73.3 (1974): 340. Thormählen argues that there is only one description of "sexual satisfaction" and that is in "Song" ("As *Chloris* full of harmless thought") (22-23). Other critics, such as Robinson, also conclude that there is "little sensual consolation" in Rochester's poems (79).

35. For example, Weber, 91.

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36. *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, ed. Montague Summers, 5 vols. (London: Fortune Press, 1927), vol. 5, p. 109, II.i.
37. On the poem's parodic echoes of the heroic stanzas of Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651) and Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (1666), see Griffin, 48-51; and Thormählen, 13-14.
38. Cf. Farley-Hills' different reading. According to him, the comparison of the "heroic and the erotic" results in a "deliberate ambiguity" in the value of each (*Rochester's Poetry*, 116)--a paradox that "demonstrates the relativity of our judgments and the impossibility of seeing experience singly or seeing it whole" (117). In fact, both libertinism and military warfare are diminished in the poem. Ronald Paulson accurately discerns the correspondence between "soldiering and debauchery," where both indicate an "ugly reality." "Rochester: The Body Politic and the Body Private," *The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, ed. Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1978), 108.
39. Also noted by Thormählen on p.15.
40. Cf. Griffin's reading: he believes that the position of advisor "will be adopted *faute de mieux*," and he argues that "all human virtue is *faute de mieux*" in the poem (53). Although the poem undermines the wisdom and experience of the speaker, the statesman, and the admiral, it stops short of producing such an extended argument on the nature of human virtue as Griffin contends.
41. Title of Yale Ms., the copy text for the poem. See Vieth's edition of Rochester's poems, 205.
42. Everett, 20. But I disagree with her reading of the speaker's immediate conditions: there is no evidence whatsoever of "the miseries of present love" (20).
43. Fabricant, 342.
44. Several critics also note that the libertine is presented in both affirmative and derogatory terms: Griffin, 47-54; and Vieth, *Complete Poems*, xli. Cf. Thormählen who reads it only in terms of a satirical depiction (15).
45. Griffin stresses that the libertine's "clear-sightedness" distinguishes him from the politician and the retired admiral (53).

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46. Selden, "Rochester and Shadwell," *Spirit of Wit*, 190.
47. Wilcoxon, "Pornography, Obscenity, and Rochester's 'The Imperfect Enjoyment,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15.3 (1975): 388. Rochester, Etherege, Behn, and Wycherley are among those who have used this theme. On this convention, see Wilcoxon, 387-88; Fabricant, 347; and Thompson, 122.
48. See, for example, Thormählen on the "mixture of braggadocio and literal truth" (358).
49. Righter, 53.
50. Hobbes, 217; Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture." *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 143.
51. For example, Horner in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and Dorimant in Etherege's *Man of Mode*. Many critics emphasize this aspect of the rake figure. See, for example, Virginia Ogden Birdsall who includes the role of "player" in her delineation of the Restoration rake-hero. *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970), 10-16.
52. Righter, 54; Vieth, Introduction, *Complete Poems*, xxiii; and Hayward, xxxiii-iv.
53. See Righter, 54; Pinto, *Rochester, Portrait of Restoration Poet* (London: John Lane, 1935), 104-10.
54. Burnet, 54.
55. Jacob Huysmans depicts the young earl placing a laurel wreath upon a monkey's head. The monkey in the portrait represents a "Miniature of Man" ("A Letter from Artemiza," line 143) and of the Poet. Paulson observes that Rochester carefully presents himself as the satirist, mocking the vanity and pretensions of poets and mankind in general (60).
56. Qtd. in Hayward, xxv. Also see Righter, 54; Pinto, 88.
57. Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis," 140.



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58. John Harold Wilson, *The Court Wits of the Restoration: An Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 216.
59. St. Évremond describes how Rochester's cuckolding of an old miser led to the latter's hanging. The earl, however, managed to obtain the king's pardon. Qtd. in Hayward, xxxvi. On Rochester's disguises, see Righter, 53-54.
60. Wilson, 28, 40-42.
61. Vieth. Introduction, *Complete Poems*, xxiii. Benfield-Baker talks about the "public male behavior" of such groups on p. 47.
62. Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 100.
63. Hill, 301.
64. John Miller discusses Charles II's inconsistency in "The Late Stuart Monarchy," *The Restored Monarchy, 1660-1688*, ed. J. R. Jones (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 37-39.
65. Thompson, 11.
66. Jones, "Main Trends in Restoration England," *Restored Monarchy*, 20.
67. Turner believes that "libertinism rebelliousness. . . flourishes in areas of ambiguity and doubtful authority, along the uncertain boundary of two value-systems--ethical propriety and aristocratic license" ("Properties of Libertinism," 81).
68. Barker-Benfield, 45, 238; and Elias, 67.
69. Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis," 143.
70. Sackville, "Another Letter from Lord Buckhurst to Mr. Etherege," in *The Poems of Sir George Etherege*, p. 40, lines 5-10.
71. Dryden, "Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence" (1677), *Dryden's Dramatic Poesy and Other Essays* (London: J. M. Dent; New York: E. P., Dutton, n.p.d.), 117; and Mulgrave, *An Essay on Poetry*, in *Minor English Poets, 1660-1780*, ed. David P. French, 10 vols. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 2: 48.
72. Elias, 263.

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73. Wilson, 77. The only exception is a late play of Buckingham, *The Restoration*, a revision of Fletcher's *The Philaster*. See Wilson, 170.
74. Burnet, 53.
75. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 95.
76. Paulson, 105.
77. Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 57, 61.
78. See Hill, 304-5.
79. Elias discerns that "the idealization of an imagined rural existence, just because it was a fantasy, was quite compatible with [the courtiers'] contempt for the rural nobility and the peasant, and with a certain revulsion from rural life as it really was" (238).
80. In his essay "Wanton Expressions," David Totter mentions the Cavaliers' use of profanity and the 1650 law "for the better preventing of profane Swearing and Cursing" (*Spirit of Wit*, 115). Macpherson refers to the 1666 Bill against Atheism and Profaneness in his introduction to *Leviathan* (21).
81. Elias addresses the class significance of etiquette in chapter 5.
82. *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, 3rd ed., 1698 (New York: AMS Press, 1974), 143.
83. On the Whig alliance of the wits, see Hill, 301; and Vieth, *Complete Poems*, xxxi.
84. Richmond, *Puritans and Libertines: Anglo-French Literary Relations in the Reformation* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1981), 355.
85. Wilson, 63.
86. Thormählen, 295.

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87. Both Love and Marotti stress the social factor of manuscript writing and transmission. Marotti, for example, observes that social bonding is fundamental in the exchange of obscene verses (*Manuscript*, 76). Love carefully details "the social uses of the scribally published text"--the title of Chapter 5.
88. Wilson, 87. On the distribution of the wits' writings, see Wilson, 20, 110-11; and Thompson, 119.
89. Thompson, 12. On the Licensing Act of 1662, see Love, 187. L'Estrange's comment is from *Poems on Affairs of State from the Time of Oliver Cromwell to the Abdication of K. James Second, Written by the Greatest Wits of the Age*, 4 vols. (London, 1716), I: xxxvii, qtd. in Thompson, 119.
90. Paulson, 106, 105.
91. Griffin has a section entitled "The Uses of Libertinism," and it includes a discussion on how Rochester satirizes libertinism (21-78). Whether "An Epistolary Epistle" is an attack on Mulgrave is still contested. Nevertheless, most critics accept Vieth's argument that it is. For a summary of the arguments of both sides, see Walker, 293-4; and Thormählen, 340-44.
92. Farley-Hills, 128.
93. See Walker, 293-94; Vieth, *Attribution in Restoration Poetry: A Study of Rochester's "Poems" of 1680* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963). 104-36; Farley-Hills, 123, 127-31; and Thormählen, 338-43.
94. In one biography, *A Character of John Sheffield Late Duke of Buckinghamshire* (London, 1729), its author, "AN," wrote: "The liberties which he had allow'd himself in relation to ladies, are too well known, to be omitted" (20-21); qtd. in Thormählen, 344).
95. Elsewhere, Rochester also evokes the grotesque in relation to the pen. In "Satyr. [Timon]," the speaker rhymes for the sake of his "pintle"; another poem, "On Mistress Willis," presents menstrual blood as ink and the sanitary towel as paper for the speaker's bawdy pen.
96. Cf. Thormählen's comments on how "Allusion to Horace" contradicts M. G.'s principles and egotism (338).
97. Cf. Griffin, who argues that the poem reveals ambivalence and inconsistent irony (56ff.).

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98. Griffin, 77; and Farley-Hills, 125.
99. Farley-Hills, 125.
100. Farley-Hills sees an "element of blasphemy" because "it was well known that comets were sent by God as a warning to mankind" (126).
101. Charles II's "major failings as a sovereign," J. R. Jones points out. "were indolence and inconsistency" (11).
102. See Thormählen, 346-47.
103. See Wilson, 118.
104. Thormählen notes that the description reveals "unveiled cynicism" (344). The title also alludes to Ovid's *Heroides* (Walker, 296).
105. Doody comments on Rochester's "dismantling" of the lyric form in chapter 3, "Generic Self-Consciousness: From Closed to Open Forms" (57-83).
106. Hill, 329.
107. Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 42.
108. See Shapiro's *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

## **Seventeenth-Century Libertine Lyrics as a Transitional Mode**

The development, mutation, and end of the libertine lyric mode takes place within the historical framework of the seventeenth century, an age of political, social, and intellectual upheaval. Anna K. Nardo notes that "radical historical change intensifies the conflict always present between residual, dominant, and emergent ideologies into an open struggle." She lists four characteristic responses to such change: the "fragmentation or dispersal of the self in madness," the "preservation of identity either through obedience--defending a threatened ideology, or through rebellion--subverting authority with a self grounded in a rival ideology," or the construction of a ludic self.<sup>1</sup> In varying degrees, seventeenth-century libertine lyrics actually demonstrate the entire range of responses catalogued by Nardo. At its best, the libertine is the playful or ludic self who adapts to different situations, finding opportunities for pleasure and self-aggrandizement in each scenario. The libertine self also manifests the anti-authoritarian reaction, as its identity is based upon the subversion of courtly practices and society's moral system. Yet the courtly origins and basis of libertinism also turn the libertine "I" into an identity founded upon the defense of a once dominant ideology during the Civil War

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and Interregnum. As shown in the chapter on Cavalier lyrics, libertine lyrics that were interpreted as anti-courtly ironically became evocative of that political reign for exiled Cavaliers later on. Another response that Nardo cites, the fragmentation of self, surfaces in Rochester's poetry. The inconstant libertine self is alienated from his past and future, from his society, and even his own body. As we have seen, Rochester replaces the characteristic libertine versatility and rebelliousness with perverse wilfulness and self-destructive recklessness. These four different responses underscore the elastic nature of the libertine self; they also indicate the transformations in libertine lyrics throughout the seventeenth century. Even as the libertine mode is prompted by the desire to "solve" questions raised in a period of historical change, its own generic instability betrays that it is itself a product of a transitional age.

Ideologically, the libertine poems are not consistent. They may expose the ideological contradictions of Platonic love, but they themselves are full of inconsistencies. As I have already suggested, libertine poetics both maintains *and* subverts the ideology and practices of the court. It also embraces and rejects aristocratic and market ideology and ideals at separate turns. Despite the atheistic character of libertine thought, seventeenth-century libertine lyrics manifest a sharp awareness of religious values even in their vehement rejection of social norms. Cavalier poems inscribe value-laden terms like "shame" and "sin" in their defense of sexual freedom; Cavalier and Restoration lyrics that

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depict a sexual Golden Age deliberately evoke biblical conceptions of Eden and prelapsarian human nature. Underwood detects the redemptive thrust of the naturalistic argument for the recovery of natural instincts and urges, which in fact manifests "an ironic awareness of some Christian authority"; and Turner perceives that the Restoration court wits' sacrilegious behavior demonstrates the "powerful covert influence of religious intensity."<sup>2</sup> To a certain extent, the moralistic and religious elements in libertine lyrics can be traced to the fundamentally puritan character of seventeenth-century English sexuality.<sup>3</sup> But these characteristics also reveal the poets' fundamental ambivalence towards libertine sexuality, the same reservation that they show regarding the libertine's radical individualism. In the end, the contradictions in the lyrics--the idealism behind the apparent cynicism, the anti-authoritarian defiance belied by the implicit validation of society's moral system, the odd combination of aristocratic and mercantile values, the focus on sexuality without sexual fulfilment, and the complex contrariness of the libertine self--mark the generic instability of the libertine mode.

As we have seen in Chapter One, libertine lyrics propose an imaginary solution to certain historical dilemmas that the Platonic love convention cannot deliver. Throughout the seventeenth century, however, the poets increasingly reveal that libertinism is losing its capacity to resolve the period's questions of self, nature, and society. What is presented as an answer by an earlier writer is

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later exposed as another predicament by a later poet. Donne emphasizes the libertine's personal will over and above nature's law of change, but Suckling dramatizes the tension between individual will and nature's dictates. By the Restoration period, Rochester confounds the libertine principle of freedom by emphasizing the deterministic character of nature. The sexuality that Donne exalts as liberating and empowering in his libertine lyrics betrays a compulsive desperation in the poems of Suckling, Lovelace, and Rochester; and the vulnerability implied in the libertine rhetoric of Donne's lyrics finds physical manifestation in the sexually impotent Restoration libertine. Nature, once Edenic in the earlier libertine lyrics, is degrading and limiting after the Civil War. The notion of a sexual paradise now serves as a painful contrast to disappointing reality. Rochester portrays the libertine's predatory instincts as mindless compulsion and part of anarchic and deterministic nature. The two images of nature can be partly attributed to the contrast between Elizabethan and early Stuart naturalism and materialistic determinism of Restoration scientific and philosophic discourses. But it is also significant that this altered conception of nature corresponds to the historical time frame of pre- and post-Civil War England. Poems written around and after the war manifest a deep sense of loss and disillusionment not present in earlier libertine lyrics.<sup>4</sup> The degraded picture of libertinism signals the beginning of the end for the libertine mode.



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Alastair Fowler recognizes two types of generic change: one prompted by a change in the genre's popularity and another by altered relations to neighboring genres.<sup>5</sup> In the case of libertine lyrics, both processes are applicable. When love lyrics lost their prominence in the literary scene of eighteenth-century England, the popularity of libertine lyrics, like anti-Petrarchanism, was similarly short-lived. It was partly because the libertine lyric attained its significance only in conjunction with the preeminence of the Platonic love convention. Once the Platonic love values that libertine lyrics questioned were no longer dominant, the libertine mode could not prevail in its original form. At the same time the late seventeenth-century society became increasingly intolerant of libertinism. The emerging new moral code--which some scholars designate as "middle-class"--called for the moral reform of libertines, as well as theaters which glamorized rakes. Not only does the changing character of libertine poetics illustrate the inadequacy of libertinism to solve the questions raised by libertine lyrics, but it also intimates that libertinism could no longer satisfy readers and poets even on the rhetorical level of court entertainment. The second type of generic change that Fowler mentions can be seen in the changing form of Restoration lyrics. Rochester's experimental forms which combine lyric and non-lyric modes break down old generic distinctions. The satiric elements and increased length of the libertine poems also register the shift in Restoration literary trend from short amorous

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lyrics to satire and long poetic forms.<sup>6</sup> In the end, however, libertine poetics did not adapt to the new ideological and cultural demands of eighteenth-century England. Print culture challenged the prestige and popularity of manuscript poetry, and the novel became the new literary form of compelling social validity.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes to Conclusion

1. Nardo, 46-47.
2. Underwood, 35; and Turner, "Properties of Libertinism," 79.
3. Noted by some scholars; for example, Thompson on Restoration descriptions of sexuality (213); and Donnelly on Caroline eroticism (129).
4. Vivienne Northwood distinguishes the two conceptions of nature and discusses the change in libertinism before and after the Civil War. She observes that "a certain basic optimism and satisfaction with man's state" gives way to the post-war focus on "man's precise limitations" and a "jaded, world-weary tone." "The Seventeenth Century Libertine in France and England: A Study in Contrasts," M.A. thesis (McGill University, 1961), 137.
5. Fowler, 11.
6. See Doody, 61.
7. Love, 290.

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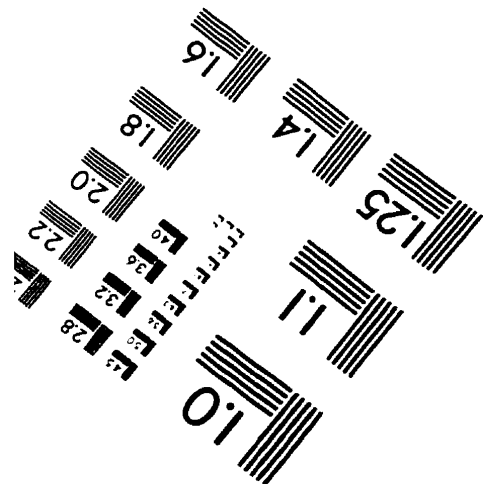
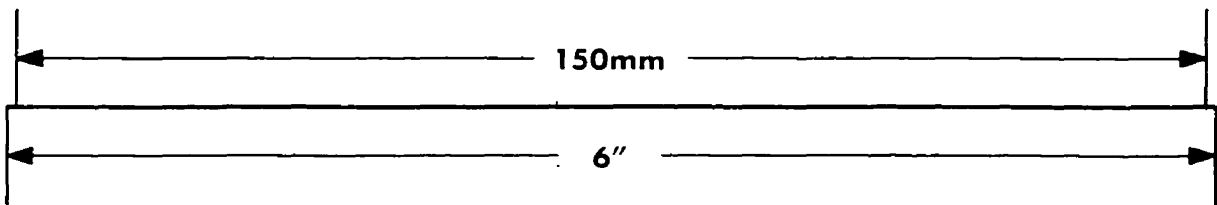
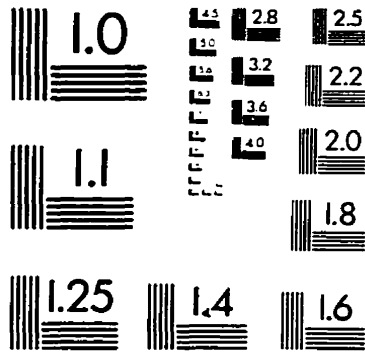
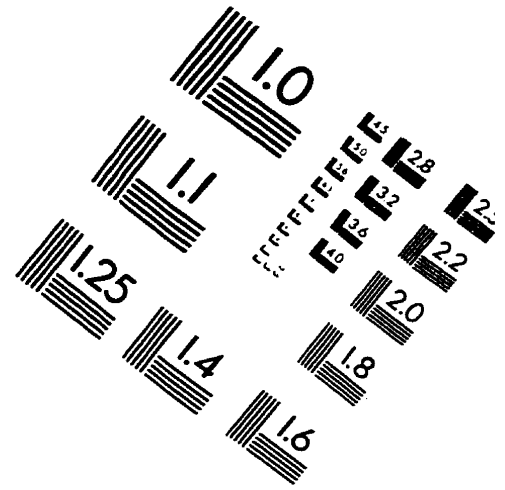
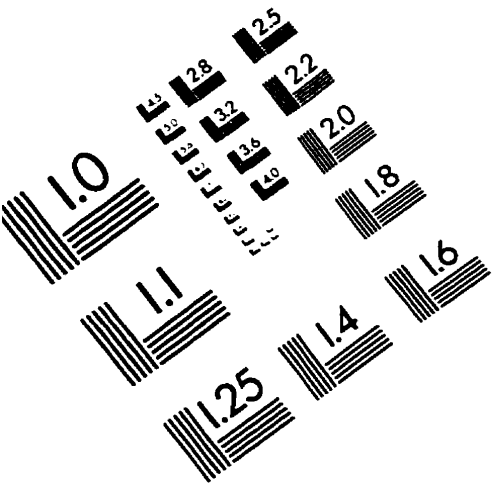
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