

GREAT AFFECTATIONS: CAMP PARODY IN THE BRITISH LONG EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

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# GREAT AFFECTATIONS: CAMP PARODY IN THE BRITISH LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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My dissertation explains that, despite the nominal anachronism, camp has always inhabited literature of the long eighteenth century, namely those examples that were created from and, to some degree, for those experiencing the world from a socially or sexually marginal perspective. To interpret as camp is to not only account for the excesses of style that often infuriate and discompose aesthetic and generic categories of the time period, although it can provide an explanatory motive for noticeably disruptive and even flamboyant literary style. A camp reading can also bring together seemingly disparate texts under the umbrella of alterity. It provides an ideal and common language for discussing formal and generic literary styles alongside feminist, queer, and cultural interpretations. Camp in the eighteenth century is particularly well-positioned to make important contributions to ongoing discussions about the public sphere, the shifts in audience and reception among all media, and the influences of realism, especially relating to the bourgeois representations of affects and emotions.

To me, camp is a parodic project, which means that it must bear a symbiotic relationship to the normative text or value that it plays up. Its parody is reliant on those modes opposed as “other” to their marginalized selves; in my examples, the target ranges among the heteronormative family, the orderly body, the sexual object, temporal mastery, aesthetic ownership, sentimental empathy, and even the self. I discuss Walpole’s gothic obsession with the

deadly influences of time and family; Charke's marketing of her own shame as a reparative autobiographical project; Pope's peevish but excessive and starstruck affection for the womanly things he mocks; and the forms of gendered excess produced by the sentimental novel's hypocritical erasure of its own self-centered pretense of nature.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Cote was born in Korea and raised in rural Vermont. She earned an A.B. in English and Psychology and an M.A. in English from Boston College. She began doctoral studies at Cornell University in 2004 and received her second M.A. in English in 2007. She currently lives in Allegany County, New York, with her husband, son, and two cats, and she is a visiting lecturer of English composition at Alfred University.

This dissertation is dedicated to Steve and Jackson.

i carry your heart[s] with me.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch.....	v
Dedications.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Chapter 1: Setting Up Camp: Satirical Excess and Modernity.....	1
Chapter 2: Staged Fright: <i>The Castle of Otranto's</i> Gothic Excess.....	23
Chapter 3: In Passing: The Performance of Memoir in Charlotte Charke's <i>Narrative</i> .....	73
Chapter 4: Good Hair Day: Surface Pleasures in <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> .....	107
Chapter 5: Striking Camp: Sentimental Antisociality and Modernity.....	152

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Aubrey Beardsley, “The Morning Dream” (1896).....	143
Figure 2: Aubrey Beardsley, “The Baron’s Prayer” (1896) .....	145

## CHAPTER 1

### SETTING UP CAMP: SATIRICAL EXCESS AND MODERNITY

“No sooner have [the mollies] ended their Feasts and run through all the Ceremonies of Theaterical way of Gossiping, then they begin to enter upon their Beastly Obscenities, that no Man who is not sunk into a State of Devilism can think on without Blushing.”

Edward Ward

When Evelina Anville goes “*a-shopping*” in glam London with Mrs. Mirvan, she gets an eye-opening show at the milliner’s, one that nearly rivals the Garrick she took in the day before. Apparently unused to male mincing in her less cosmopolitan home environment, Evelina confesses, “What most diverted me was, that we were more frequently served by men than by women; and such men! so finical, so affected! they seemed to understand every part of a woman’s dress better than we do ourselves; and they recommended caps and ribbands with an air of so much importance, that I wished to ask them how long they had left off wearing them!” (Burney 73). Burney, of course, means to sketch a fop, the overtrussed woman-man that seemingly vexed nearly every opinionated writer in the long eighteenth century from Addison to Wollstonecraft. But even though this is not exactly a “gay”<sup>1</sup> slur, we are certainly meant, with Evelina, to register and remark upon these men’s showy difference. They are drolly and imaginatively feminized by a hypothetical drag, but the epicene subjectivity Evelina depicts exceeds any gender role she knows. Physical masculinity is reduced to persnickety affectation, a performance that is much too much to pass without notice.

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<sup>1</sup> In “Historicizing Patriarchy,” Michael McKeon claims that “[b]y the middle of the eighteenth century, an adult effeminate male was likely to be taken...as an exclusive sodomite or molly.” By 1778, then, at least according to this model, the milliners’ effeminacy is more closely related to Freudian inversion, not to the mode of effeminacy that denotes overzealously heterosexual – or omnisexual – libertines. George Haggerty does not argue that effeminacy and male homoeroticism were not *not* enjoined, but he wishes to attend to the ways effeminate men have consistently baffled the gender binary since gender as we know it came to be. See Haggerty, *Men in Love*, Chapter 2: “Gay Fops/Straight Fops.” The mid-to later-century sentimental man was extravagantly tearful and sensitive but also extravagantly charitable and virtuous, “masculine characteristics” that do not involve periwigs and powder.

Gender role play does not belong exclusively to eighteenth-century British literature, of course; every literary historical period claims its own queer stage of sexual transgression, so what makes eighteenth-century deviance remarkable? My investigation combines three central and established concepts (newly) extant within the long eighteenth century, themselves common foci in literary criticism: bourgeois capacities for publicity, the performative flexibility of a more democratic print culture, and the comparatively supple descriptions of self-consciousness and shame, the bastard child of the first two items. Although camp is a modern and postmodern concept, it overlaps with several traditional points of inquiry in eighteenth-century literary studies, and I argue that it is no more anachronistic than the valuable heuristics “queer” or “feminist” or “Marxist.” Such readings of unruly bodies in the literature, including and beyond the novel, have influenced our understanding of how genders and sexualities were performed and read. Camp is queer parody, camp is gender parody, camp is sexual parody, but because it involves all, it is not reducible to either. Camp produces queer performances about gender and sexuality, commenting on the strictures that publicity imposes on a non-normative subject. The significance of this juxtaposition in early modernity is the focus of my study.

Because camp is about a parodic energy that not everyone receives, its perspective is ideally situated to discuss, for instance, why characters such as the fop can be disruptive to the fabric of dominant culture but also passable and accepted. The twentieth century’s codification of sexualities, disabilities, and other alterities made it easier to punish such queer energies, but this does not preclude the existence of these energies in early modernity. A camp perspective, with its winking anachronism, is well able to identify and discuss the modern jokes, quirks, and oddnesses that escaped an established lexicon. Evelina is confused by the fashionable fops but cannot articulate why their perceived “finical” attitude is noticeable. She can identify their

difference but cannot articulate why that difference matters.

### ***Camping in Literary History***

Certainly, characters as dramatic and noticeable as Evelina's fop are legion in literary history; Renaissance cross-dressers such as the thieving Moll Cutpurse sought and earned notoriety and attention, but she was firmly without the boundaries of dominant culture. In contrast, the shop fop of Burney's novel is very much a part of the texture of cosmopolitan London, queering it from within, not from without, as Moll did. He is also a source of shame and embarrassment – here, the shame is the spectator's, Evelina's – but is also meant to engage the eighteenth-century reader's, which brings us back to the medium of the printed page, the stage of the literary performance, and reminds us to consider the place and purpose of the domestic novel within eighteenth-century bourgeois culture.

The three literary-historical issues that ground my analysis across the chapters and texts – the public sphere, the technology of audience, the modernization and disciplining of bourgeois affects – also drive modern camp. Critical commonalities such as “performance” and “excess” are also knitted into my argument, and while these generalities do inform my readings of literary texts in the ensuing chapters, because they are more capacious and slippery, I use these qualifiers within the above three categories as connecting devices. The performance of shame that Charlotte Charke, breeches actor, puts into the printed page is consistently marked by excess, certainly. However, her camp vision looks very different from Horace Walpole's excessive vision of the gothic, although, as a pseudo-historical relic, it is also a self-conscious performance. It is easier and more fruitful to discuss their different but still performance-based contributions to eighteenth-century literature *through* their respective relationships to a bourgeois readership, in the case of Walpole, or to the nascent and vulnerable concept of secular female autobiography,

regarding Charke. A self-conscious and deliberate relationship to performance, a social development of the long eighteenth century, facilitates but cannot satisfyingly define the texts' camp strategies.

It is no accident that the proliferation – the restoration – of public English theater correlates with my timeline of camp's history.<sup>2</sup> The rejuvenation of (legitimate) stage performance in the late seventeenth century directly affects our conceits of the public actor, publicity machines, and public access, especially in the case of actresses' bodies. When Kristina Straub observes that “[t]he professionalization of players in the eighteenth century provides a discourse that regularizes their specularization” (10), she is alluding to the alleged paradigm shift that altered British conceptions of their own visual public. The scopic relationship she analyzes is just as powerful offstage, as the audience's trained eyes start to not only focus on other people but feel credentialed enough to comment and critique those in purview. Even if we acknowledge that scholars have overstated the integrity<sup>3</sup> of the eighteenth-century public sphere – that it was never as idealistic and accessible a discursive space as Jürgen Habermas posited – it is much harder to sidestep the basic existence – emancipatory or censorious or both or neither – of “the public” and its regulatory effect on bodies. Self-stated media for and of “the public,” (male) readers of texts like *The Spectator*, which staged itself as periodical theater, were supposed to tacitly learn to calibrate their tastes to the polished prose style, to understand propriety and taste

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, in *Spectacular Politics* (1993), Paula Backscheider claims that the reign of Charles II was intertwined with the history of the theaters that he licensed. The open embrace of staged performance affected his political style, which certainly trickled down to the public's conception and reproduction of identity. “In a wonderfully symbolic gesture, Charles had a stage built in Westminster Abbey for his coronation. Every mention of the setting for his crowning uses that word: ‘stage.’...At this point, theater as a mode of power reaches its fullest potential” (18-19). I do not focus on actual politics so much as social politics in my research, but I value this point about the widespread and contagious dissemination of performance among rulers and subjects alike.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent corroboration of this opinion, see Barbara M. Benedict, “Recent Studies in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century” (2002). Of course, in his 1991 *MLN* review of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Neil Saccamano noted straightaway that the public sphere is already an unwittingly tenuous performative construction within Habermas's theory.

through the presented model of gentility, and to perform and perpetuate social shaming by incorporating and wielding onto others the behavioral lessons learned by desire and by rote. Social performances become duplicated, mimed, and standardized.

In addition to self-conscious conceptions of performance, camp is also aligned with notions of “excess.” In truth, extravagant and immoderate performances are especially important components of eighteenth-century literature, in camp and non-camp readings alike, and part of the excess is naturally due to inchoate experiments in genre. In contrast to the wild romances that cheap(er) printing could circulate, this was also, of course, a period when Augustan tastemakers and police-agents of gentility and letters were famously wary of impolitic excessiveness, of the “too much,” a counterweight to the *Spectator*’s imperative for acceptable performance as adumbrated above. Cultural anxiety about what to do with excess and the excessively aberrant was often cast in terms of gendered and sexed style – the style of letters or rhetoric or actual bodies – which allows us to invoke deconstructive approaches to the curious notion of “excess” itself. In her work on the formerly neglected women writers of the 1790s, Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, and Burney, Claudia Johnson highlights “their flaunted strain, incoherence, and excess” (19), stylistic attributes that disgusted or shamed “knowing” critical readers until fairly recently. She maintains that we should attend to the political significance of these female-authored novels or treatises, should explore why they were rejected for, say, allegedly hysterical shrillness, fantastical sexuality, or middlebrow buffoonery. The new Romantic zeitgeist endorsed a softer kind of masculinity, one that shifted the gender status quo, making it easier for women to mis-perform their “natures” or to seem excessively mannish or febrile: “Sentimental men...either relegate women to a disfiguring, hyperfeminized position of bad excess or leave them to take on a tattered ill-fitting mantle of rational masculinity that has become available to

them only because it has lost its wonted cultural prestige” (30). The women writers Johnson treats were eagerly involved in these oppositional politics, though the oppositional binaries were always shifting around beneath and because of them, and adeptly exploited, contested, or celebrated the ensuing discursive, alternatively gendered spaces. Such criticism begs the question, for instance, about what “too much” woman looks like, if womanhood is a compulsory performance.

To come back around to the opening gambit, then, Evelina’s fop is not only noteworthy to the history of camp because he is an excessive performer of gender, although this is a contributing factor. The fop’s ability to produce camp also hinges on his proudly public display and consequently his self-fashioned relationship to normative observers. Indeed, Thomas A. King, an influential scholar also interested in excavating camp from early modernity, foregrounds similar issues of performance in his interpretation of the fop: “Foppishness was not simply a problem of excessive display; it was rather one of *self-sufficiency*. Fops delighted in the spectacle of themselves, eliding within themselves the gaze and the eye” (King, *English* 229). King’s reading correctly notices that fops are more than the sum value of their attitudes or fashions; after all, we can find plenty of attitude and fashion – court drag – within salons of preening aristocrats. But those aristocrats solicited attention, required it in order to amplify the effect of their self-fashioning. Instead, fops are interesting because they recognize their own transgressive potential and play to that transgression in spite of their audience. Their deviance, especially when the performance is extended, was certainly powerful enough to affect an eighteenth-century spectator. One shocked social reporter who “signs himself ‘Philogynus,’ which means ‘Lover of Women’” (Norton), in an uncanny version of homosexual panic, marvels at the detailed mimesis of gender that mollies effectively produce:

It would be a very diverting Scene to behold them in their Clubs and Cabals mimick Nature so exquisitely; how they assume the Air, and affect the Title of *Madam*, or *Miss Betty* or *Molly*, &c. with a Chuck under the Chin, and, *Oh you bold Pullet, I'll break all your Eggs*, and then frisk and walk away to make Room for another, who thus accosts the affected Lady, with, *Where have you been you saucy Quean? If I catch you strouling and caterwauling I'll beat the Milk out of your Breast, I will so*, with a great many other Expressions of Buffoonery and ridiculous Affectation. (qtd. in Norton)

The observer's curious use of the conditional "would" is contradicted by the detailed dialogue. The mollies' semi-private performance is not camp to "Philogynus," who emphasizes his position as an outside observer, but he cannot help but register his astonishment at their eccentric "Affectation," a descriptor that arises three times in the paragraph. The mollies perform excessive representations of girlish behavior; the gossip and swish does femininity one better, and their corporeal allusions to lactation and ovulation belie any claim that having those parts is necessary to participate in the performance of gender. Therefore, the issue that seems to rankle Philogynus is their enclosed world, and their production of a real theater for a self-defined community. Fops camp for themselves, and this is incredible to a bourgeois audience eager to consume conspicuously but tastefully, according to the *sensus communis*. Philogynus's and Evelina's shock, which slides into embarrassed incredulity, documents their awkward receipt of their performances, even though the performance was not designed to please (them).

### ***Camp Theory***

If, as I have been arguing, camp has inhabited early modern literary history, how does historical camp differ from camp as we understand it today? Truthfully, it is nearly impossible to

glean a critical consensus on camp – and just as terribly predictable to joke about how defining camp is a great sin<sup>4</sup>. Is it exclusively queer, or can “straight” perceptions recognize or disseminate campiness? Is it a tawdry aesthetic? a strategic form of tricksterism? a sensibility of tackiness and tactlessness? a guilty affect? a dialectical politics? I define camp as the purposive and overwrought (mis)representation of bourgeois values, a conspicuous parody, born from a marginal space, of the things that “we” all know and love, an admittedly flexible conceptualization that also underscores the social politics of queerness and alterity. The qualified “we” is intentional, as it gestures toward and questions the constituency of the center, while also attending to production and reception. What is the camp producer’s relationship to the “we,” for instance? Does the camp audience inhabit, avoid, or feel rejected from the “we”? Although my project concentrates on the producer, on authorial intention, of course the issue of reception is important, since camp assumes and relies upon a kindred audience. The established popularity of texts like *Otranto* and the *Lock*, however, does not mean that all readers recognized the camp. I argue the contrary: these authors, while certainly writing for publication and fame, were experimenting with writing secrets in plain sight, thus writing to those who could receive the masked joke, as well as those who would never think to look for one.

To summarize once again, my camp reading blends the modalities of publicity, audience, and affects to help understand the value and imperative behind how and why certain early modern writers could turn the marginal and abject into very popular literature. Camp theory is divided about whether queerness, difference, gender, or sexuality are essential parts of the text. It

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<sup>4</sup> Camp’s (in)definition seems similar to that which dogs “queer,” a definitional evasion that is, in the end, rhetorical laziness, as Ellis Hanson points out: “Nearly all definitions of queer theory share this paradoxical tendency to eschew definition, even though they all say much the same thing and focus on much the same list of foundational texts. As these definitions implicitly reveal, queer theory is no more haunted by the impossibility of definition than any other theoretical term; rather, its political value, its conceptual coherence, its flexibility, and its novelty lie in its peculiar deployment of deconstructive methods, which have resulted in an extraordinarily wide-ranging

has become an inescapable cliché to begin any discussion of camp by inciting Susan Sontag's (in)famously breezy "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), though this rhetorical crutch might explain why some individuals believe camp is unable to sustain much critical inquiry, for the essay has been accused of de-politicizing and de-queering camp, flattening it into a postmodern – and straight – trend. Though I will address this critique later, Sontag's essay has helped to inspire work on the prehistory of camp, for it pointedly singles out certain seventeenth- and eighteenth-century phenomena. Gothic novels, not to mention "Chinoiserie, caricature, artificial ruins, and so forth" (56), and Walpole's own Strawberry Hill earn a mention. Within the same improvisational note, Sontag groups nature and history, cause and chance, placing time and space together in a way that seems haphazard and clever at once: "[P]eople of taste either patronized nature...or attempted to remake it...They also indefatigably patronized the past. Today's Camp taste effaces nature, or else contradicts it outright. And the relation of Camp taste to the past is extremely sentimental" (56-57). Here, the clipped juxtaposition renders these proclamations absurd, deflating the authority of Sontag's claims in a way that could be read as theoretically careless or rather camp.<sup>5</sup> If it does nothing else, Sontag's lengthy list of camp *things* from Tiffany lamps to *The Enquirer* to the amphibiousness of taste itself reminds us that camp is most productive as a nexus for the analysis of things.

And things matter to eighteenth-century culture, whether one envisions the explosion in commercial products and acquisitions or the other side of this "progress," the objects of human trafficking. So, indeed, what *about* conceptual things such as nature and history and sentimentality, vague but popular subgenre darlings of literary criticism, and concepts as fluid as

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applicability" ("Queer"). Since camp invokes queerness, it's natural that its politics or effects share a chiastic relationship with those of queer theory.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, according to her own formulation, itself cheekily noted, the rhetorical intention to be campy is doomed to produce "a very inferior piece of Camp" (54).

performance and excess. In a sense, her capacious notes foment an essential question to my project: what can camp as an interdisciplinary mode contribute to eighteenth-century studies? Camp is, at root, a unique style of parody, parody, of course, being another open-ended term but one uncontrovertibly essential to eighteenth-century literary history. But even eighteenth-century definitions of parody could be nebulous.

In the eighteenth century, when the valuing of wit and the predominance of satire brought parody to the forefront as a major literary mode, one might expect definitions of it to include the element of ridicule that we find even in today's dictionaries. Yet Samuel Johnson defined parody as 'a kind of writing, in which the words of an author or his thoughts are taken, and by a slight change adapted to some new purpose.' (Hutcheon 36)

The flighty description, is, in a way, reminiscent of all of the amorphous definition(s) of camp, but it intentionally leaves room for dynamically different objectives, inflections, and improvisations within the parodic impulse; after all, Fielding's *Shamela* and Pope's *Lock* may both usurp an original model, but only one, in my opinion, does so with camp style, some *new* new purpose indeed.

When Hugh Kenner claims that Pope "discovered Pop Art" (92) through his repeated imitations of bad poetry, which are then recycled and applied as contributions to the establishment of good poetry such as *The Dunciad*, he alludes to the destabilizing mischief that parodies generally celebrate by distilling, forcing, or otherwise manipulating difference from similarity. But Kenner resolves, if cheekily, that the eighteenth-century public was ultimately unprepared for the philosophical implications of parodic repetitions and "the relation of fear to fraud" (96):

The man who conceived [*Gulliver's Travels*] earned the undying gratitude of his countrymen for exposing, under an assumed name and in an assumed character, a scheme for flooding Ireland with counterfeit half-pence, and in his will he endowed a mental hospital. We cannot wonder that eventually the cult of sincerity had to be invented, to give us breathing space before Andy Warhol. (97)

In line with this reading of parody and transgression, I argue that camp parody is less fearful of its transgressive potential. Camp parody marched on throughout the eighteenth century, even exploiting the sanitizing efforts of the midcentury cult of sincerity, as my chapter on sensibility will maintain.

Once more, if camp is a critical, gestural, abjected form of parody, then why does this specific mode matter? I can think of no other critical term that will successfully and ethically and formally (through the rites of parody) imbricate the concepts I consider to be responsible for a paradigm shift in literary culture: the reproduction and representation of publicity, audience, and affects. According to some critics, to question the value of camp is a marker of privilege, a naïve curiosity that could only originate from within the status quo. For instance, Moe Meyer's formulation of Camp<sup>6</sup> is extremely protective of queer people, usually gays and lesbians, although alternative modes may be collected under the umbrella: "[Q]ueer identity must be more correctly aligned with various gender, rather than sexual, identities because it is no longer based, and does not have to be, upon material sexual practice....Queer identity is not just another in an

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<sup>6</sup> Meyer stresses the difference between true Camp and straight, derivative camp approximations through the marker of capitalization. Others call straight camp "Camp Lite." I prefer Pamela Robertson's more supple definition of the queerness in camp, not only because she is invested in putting women back into camp subjectivity. Her inclusive position acknowledges but assuages oppositional politics in a way that seems necessary within my own historical, pre-pre-Stonewall, exploration of camp: "'Queer' then functions for me as an explanatory term connoting a discourse or position at odds with the dominant symbolic order, the flexibility and mobility of which helps account for...feminist aesthetics and interpretations that are simultaneously non-gay and not stereotypically straight" (Robertson 10). To me, the richest or most secure forms of camp must invoke non-normative – queer – sexual and

inventory of available sexual identities” (3-4). To Meyer, camp-with-a-little-c is an inferior copy, since straight subjects already securely “own” the ideological objects being mocked, though I disagree with his tacit hint that straights do not need to re-constitute themselves, performatively, or that their selfhoods are secure, established, and automatically un-queer. Nonetheless, his definition provides a trenchant and valuable antidote to people who would label as camp anything that celebrates frivolity, a vague aesthetic put forth in Susan Sontag’s influential essay<sup>7</sup>.

Even as late as the 1970s, Bakhtin could still claim that parodic “methods for making fun of the straightforward word have as yet received little scholarly attention” (52), a statement that may seem incredible today. All parodies destabilize the original, from Judith Butler’s conception of queer parody that homosexuality enacts on heterosexuality to the travesty of a sonnet, Bakhtin’s own example: “A parody may represent and ridicule these distinctive features of the sonnet well or badly, profoundly or superficially. But in any case, what results is not a sonnet, but rather the *image of a sonnet*” (51). In these two famous permutations, the parody threatens the seriousness and the primogeniture of gender or genre, while qualifying the significance of the derivative. Is there a functional, meaningful difference between a sonnet and the image of a sonnet, and if it matters, what does that say about the observer? the artifact? the surrounding ideology? Camp as a form of parody formally vexes the epistemology of a status quo, a project that is somewhat integral to all parodic projects, true. However, ironically enough, “traditional” parody often dilutes its own transgressive potential with its performance of form and wit and style: its own mimetic *image*.

In other words, unlike many parodies, camp is disinterested in honoring or crediting the

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gender performances, but queerness need not only denotate “gay” or “lesbian,”<sup>6</sup> vexed categories in the early modern period, as it is.

<sup>7</sup> Sontag is criticized for “reducing” camp to an aesthetic praxis of connoisseurship – for turning camp into a mode of visual reading that puts most of the power in the hands of the presumably educated and always ironic receiver.

original it targets; intentional camp is painstaking about ensuring that the produced *image* is marked by difference, precisely because difference and exclusion fuels the camp impulse in the first place. In general, a parody of, say, a musical score or a painting is invested in getting the viewer to recognize the commonality between the original and the parodic homage. The parodic imitation is satisfied with being an imitation, so long as its humorous effect is successful. A successful parody deflates the aura of the original. After all, is the mirror image or the parodic representation qualitatively lesser than the thing it reflects? As it re-cites the original, it reduces the original's power. Sometimes it replaces the original's value, but, even and especially in those examples, it does not try to obliterate its position as the copy. Like the Bugs Bunny parody of Rossini to the dada-pop of Duchamp's urinal, the parodies embrace their citational status as they impishly overwrite the significance of the original. These parodies recognize that they cannot be formally conflated or combined with the original, as they are defined by excess or improvisation or irreverence, but they intend a viewer to recall the similarity between original and copy within her appreciation of the difference.

Camp also re-cites an original, but its parody is defined by the more aggressive goal of more formally laying waste to the authority of the original. As Butler has famously claimed, the lyrics to "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman" is a shining example of the heretical message that camp flaunts in plain sight: "Aretha sings, you make me feel *like* a natural woman, suggesting that this is a kind of metaphorical substitution, an act of imposture, a kind of sublime and momentary participation in an ontological illusion produced by the mundane operation of heterosexual drag" (27-28). Although the performance might seem straightforward and harmless, especially if a mainstream audience envisions a heteronormative address, Butler reminds us that the simile, the "like," opens the gap that camp can inhabit. Of course, when a drag queen or king,

or an arch performer of any sex, sings the lyric with the specific intention of foregrounding the message that gender is performance and drag, the campiness is especially evident because the simple incongruity between lyric and physical body augments the illogicality of the song through the difference that the produced image – the drag performer singing about natural gender – generates.<sup>8</sup> However, a camp effect can be resident even in Aretha's original, earnestly soulful rendition<sup>9</sup> if the camp receiver focuses upon the delusional promise that anxious heterosexuality plays out, tacitly and unintentionally, in its pledge to feel "like a natural." The aura and authority of "natural" gender or sex is punctured by the camp perception, which mocks by producing a text that centralizes its own radical message in order to defer the authority of the original.

There will always be observers who do not get the joke, and I certainly do not mean to claim that everyone, whether we speak of eighteenth-century or twenty-first century onlookers, recognizes the parody in the first place, let alone the tenor of the social commentary encoded in camp performance. Questions of reception invoke the issue of self-division; genres such as satire and parody ask an onlooker, observer, or receiver to consciously or subconsciously watch the self watching the parodic text. This fracturing is tantamount within successful receivers of camp as well as the producers of intentional camp who claim a psychic relationship, tenuous or imagined, at times, with kinfolk who share their sensibility. Perhaps the line falls between the established and the irreverent way of looking and seeing, perhaps between the naïve and the knowing hermeneutic: "[C]amp is a reading/viewing practice which, by definition, is not available to all readers; for there to be a genuinely camp spectator, there must be another

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<sup>8</sup> A related example of "straight" parody (not camp parody) could be seen in any number of middlebrow, mainstream, prime-time family comedies that occasionally use transvestism as a sight gag. When an assumedly straight, heteronormative, middle-class male who is invested in the security of his own masculinity and status performs Aretha's song to an incredulous audience (both diegetic and off-camera varieties), the parodic farce continually gestures towards the original, "real" body of a woman. The non-camp receiver has faith in the sanctity and truth of the female body, and the straight male in drag becomes a harmless reminder of the "logical" integrity of the original performance.

hypothetical spectator who views the object ‘normally’” (Robertson 17). In order, then, for a camp “event” to register as such, an individual has to believe that someone else, somewhere else, doesn’t know better. This perspective, while not wrong to me, gestures toward a perverse form of elitist connoisseurship, one that necessarily privileges wry ways of knowing, even one that, to Meyer, places credit and agency on the wrong side of the binary, leaving more room to destroy the unique contribution of the original production: “[T]he one-way dynamic of objectivism most often results in the erasure of gay and lesbian subjects through an antidialogic turn” (Meyer 9). However, the recognition or adoration of the allegedly “bad,” shameful, and excessive does not necessarily have to create division among camp gazers; it can also, as Eve Sedgwick notes, create community, letting reception, not just production, function as a banner for queer counterpublics: “What if, for instance, the resistant, oblique, tangential investments of attention and attraction that I am able to bring to this spectacle are actually uncannily responsive to the resistant, oblique, tangential investments of the person, or of some of the people, who created it? And what if, furthermore, others whom I don’t know or recognize it can see it from the same ‘perverse’ angle?” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 156).

To see something as campy is to register, at once, not only the difference between one’s own knowing gaze and someone else’s insipidity but also the difference inherently within: the tension between the central and the marginal, the “truly” sincere and the sincerely distant must always be (re)constructed in order for camp to make sense. Patricia Rozema’s 1999 adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, not a traditional queer text, cannot be camp only if I choose to watch it “in quotation marks,” effecting a distance between, say, the director’s fluffy vision and my own “sophisticated” one. In order for it to seem camp, I also have to understand its mainstream, stated, or “straight” objective and balance that against any suspicions I might have about what

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<sup>9</sup> Aretha’s latter-day performance of herself adds another veneer of camp difference.

the film is actually doing – my *perception* of what the film is actually doing. To me, this is the same difference, but the phenomenon explains the spectrum of camp (mis)readings or dissonant responses among viewers. “[C]amp also needs to be understood as the formation of a queer *affect*: of taking queer pleasure in perceiving if not causing category dissonance, whether in representations of heterosexual normality, the values that reiterate it, or the commodities that derive from it” (Cohan 18).

However, my analyses are generally circumscribed so to focus on production and the literary techniques used by each individual author to write himself or herself out of a marginalized position, circumstance, or affect; each textual creator, I maintain, is especially savvy about his or her audience. Every writer needs an audience in order to complete interpellation and to satisfy the conditions of a professional identity, a desire that was consummated by a more widespread eighteenth-century readership. If a central part of camp’s value is its ability to present components of a (queer) perspective<sup>10</sup> when full exposure is impossible, illegible, or dangerous (Dyer 114; Cohan 13), then the open-secret sign upon which the counterpublic is based can both expose and securely mask the “real” self (insofar as “real” is possible within a performance). After all, the writers of eighteenth-century camp inhabit the same media space as those who distribute and shape bourgeois values through genteel periodicals, and those outsiders are routinely solicited and shamed by the policing voices of *politesse*; part of tastemaking involves identifying and then mocking outsiders, the very groups that produce and recognize the difference resident in camp parody. Indeed, within his discussion of publics and counterpublics in relation to the *Spectator*, Michael Warner relates Mr.

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<sup>10</sup> Again, all parodies vocalize or gesture toward a subtext; camp parodies stylize the abject subtexts.

Spectator's shaming gaze<sup>11</sup>, a deliberate and strategic mocking of earnest correspondents and readers, to his periodical's cultural capital and status: "[A] dominated group aspires to re-create itself as a public and in doing so finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public. The *Spectator* goes so far as to represent the scene in order to clarify the norms that establish its own confidence" (Warner 112). Mr. Spectator publishes the letters of these others – the flamboyant, the foolish, the perverse – the group skewered within Warner's chapter is the "She-Romps" club – in order to buttress its own normativity, to discursively show how and why the marginalized groups cannot possibly hope to belong. What Mr. Spectator does not necessarily anticipate is the rapid reaction, performed through print media, of the exiled counterpublic. The camp producer is fully aware of the abject status, as defined by the norm, of the pleasures and preferences he or she opts to produce in order to translate the resentment to the counterpublic within the public.

However, the producer of the camp sign<sup>12</sup> need not be wholly in love or in hatred with the act, art, or affect he or she puts out for the world: "Camp requires of its deployer a simultaneous *identification* with and *disavowal* of the object of its contemplation" (Salvato 636). In *The Dream of My Brother*, Fredric Bogel recounts the strained relationship between Samuel Johnson and Richard Savage. Savage's unmerited hubris is gently mocked in Johnson's *Life*; indeed, Johnson offers a few rather campy comments about the proud minor poet: "[H]e [Savage] contented himself with the Applause of Men of Judgment; and was somewhat disposed to exclude all those from the Character of Men or Judgment, who did not applaud him" (qtd. in Bogel, *Dream* 13). Johnson's cheekiness, Bogel insists, is directly related to his curious

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<sup>11</sup> See also Kathryn Shevelov: "The condemnatory portrayals of women in the *Spectator* complement the models of virtue, providing cautionary examples intended to drive readers away from the behavior they represent" (Shevelov, *Women* 139-140).

identification with Savage's abjection; the slight camp effect is rendered, not only because Johnson himself can seem irresistibly camp in the twenty-first century<sup>13</sup>, but because the *production* is, in the end, a "loving mockery" (Salvato 636). It is not meanness nor pure approbation we read here but something liminal, an effect created because Johnson is "dividing and fracturing his own narrative posture, identifying himself with the figure he also criticizes, resisting rather than scorning and therefore repeating his subject's behavior" (Bogel, *Dream* 19). Johnson does not just trash Savage – which would only replicate Savage's trademark flaw – and this dual love for and purposive distancing from his easily reviled subject produces a tonal quality that is more than ironic and perhaps even more than satirical.

### ***Ideal Camp Sites***

The texts I analyze in the forthcoming chapters ideally perform my conceptualization of queer camp parody, and all are marked by, for one, an inventive formal or stylistic excess, and, for the other, an obsession, latent or direct, about thinking through alterity via the limitations and failures of gender. With the exception of a short reading in the final chapter, the selected genres do not include drama, which may seem surprising in a study on camp. Instead, I focus on theatricality and performance as they are manifested within more readerly forms, texts that intrude upon the reader's metaphorical or literal home. Most of the texts, with the exception of *The Rape of the Lock*, date around the mid-eighteenth century, a period when scholars agree that elements or values – such as but not limited to domestic details, projected psychologies, interpersonal familiarities, class manipulations and acquisitions – of realism affected the style of

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<sup>12</sup> Though, like many others, I recognize the knowing, purposive camp producer, Susan Sontag insists that true camp is "always naïve. Camp which knows itself to be Camp ('camping') is usually less satisfying" (58).

<sup>13</sup> This reception resonates with a much-cited quotation from Andrew Ross's essay "Uses of Camp": "The camp effect, then, is created not simply by a change in the mode of cultural production, but rather when the products...of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste" (139).

most mainstream, book-length English prose. The *Lock*'s temporal earliness seems less accidental to my plan, as it is the only poem treated at length, and it is, of course, a mock epic, so its formal realism is less of a direct issue, although the language of its lines on "things" relates to modern and modernizing affections and affinities to the commercial and the desired.

To begin, they are all marked by novelty and inventiveness within their respective genres; their imprimatur as "first" of an order correlates to their contributions to the early modern development of camp strategies. The project begins with the first gothic novel and the first secular female autobiography: two texts that celebrate their newness and exploit the pleasures of deceit, that is, fiction. The next is not the very first modern English mock-epic or mock-heroic, as that designation would likely go to Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, but it is the first extended English poem on the vulgar, not regal or religious, concept of celebrity, and certainly the most celebrated mock epic. My final chapter, a coda of sorts, analyzes the affective significance of the sentimental novel, a new eighteenth-century genre, testing what Sontag calls "camp sensibility" within the actual first wave of sentimental literary culture.

Although the "first" designation is striking, the texts I have chosen are also deliberate, whimsical, and outspoken about the developing concept of gender, questioning its value while playing up, humorously, the grave truth: it is a man's world. Interestingly, these texts mock gender without necessarily presenting a new thesis about a better option: Mary Wollstonecraft, these authors are not. Instead, the selected authors boldly scrutinize the ironies of gender performances and make camp out of the chaos, often displaying their own wounds and resentments in the artistic process. Every single one of the chosen texts feature stylized techniques of excess and performance, certainly, but more importantly they contribute to a parodic reinterpretation and conceptualization of publicity, privacy, reception, and attachment.

Finally, all resist clear generic categorization, remaining inconclusive about what they actually *are*, a critical challenge that also accords with the elements of camp performance.

The first chapter discusses perhaps the most “obvious” example of historical camp: the gothic. The legacy of Elvira or the cast of *Dark Shadows* – the glowering looks, bad accents, and worse costumes that accompany vague intimations about death and eternal life – probably define camp for a general audience. As the textual great-great-grandfather of such a style, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* more shrewdly skewers the naturalized fairy tale progression of true love and family while deploying a critique of the regime of historicity. As parody, it also, as Sontag puts it, “patronizes”<sup>14</sup> the model, never completely eliding the familiar, familial template it parodies. *Otranto*’s bizarre style openly borrows from older texts but also critiques their value, thus challenging and conceding to the haunting, inescapable presence of established works. If “[c]amp, as parody, has an ability to expose what the powers-that-be would like to keep neatly hidden and out of sight” (Kleinhans 199), then *Otranto* iterates the messiness of the family romance as well as the limits of realistic fiction.

The second chapter explores the camp value of public self-exposure through *A Narrative of the Life of Charlotte Charke*. In this strange response to Colley Cibber’s memoir, the shamed actress transforms her familial wounds into a pastiche of an autobiography, making her erotic life and her stage life into an object of spectacle, and the timing and the tone of her publication is not only an interesting early example of the marketing of shame but also exemplifies the more melancholic dimensions of camp display. I chose to include this text in lieu of her father’s not only because of its stronger contributions to the history of queer sexuality but also because of its more desperate cultivation of audience. While Cibber’s memoir has no equal for overwrought

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<sup>14</sup> I am also interested in the “fatherly” or patriarchal dimension of patronization/patronage, as was, I and others claim, Walpole himself.

extravagance and bombast, his hypermasculine bragging and confidence is less interesting and less camp than his daughter's method of emotional posing. Charke's life, as she tells us, has been consumed with passing – as a good wife and mother, as a legitimate and talented actress, as a beloved daughter, and, of course, as a man – and her perspective on the pleasures and failures at passing informs a unique self-parody.

The third chapter examines the alterity inherent to the seemingly light mock epic *The Rape of the Lock*. The poem, which satirizes female violation through genderqueer sylphs and nymphs, is, in a sense, a thematic relative and anticipator of *Otranto*. Not only a pioneering form of literary drag, the *Lock* is about the modern influence of celebrity and charisma, and I examine the projected desire, which comes to life, poetically, in a non-normative form of eroticism, that Pope, the crippled Catholic, applies to his figurative star, Arabella Fermor *cum* Belinda. To compensate for her power, the heroine is turned into a *thing* in a poem rife with so many other pretty things. Pope's anxious marginality organizes his camp vantage, a position exemplified by the poem's well-dressed discourse, a disguise that only partially conceals a sincere appreciation for all of those things, human and inanimate, that ultimately define us.

Finally, the last chapter investigates the concurrent antisocial impulse that affected the midcentury cult of sensibility. In twenty-first century culture, sentimental texts are often pinned on the camp or kitsch continuum because the accompanying representation of depth, emotion, or sincerity is too *too* to take. However, was sensibility and sentimentality truly earnest in the eighteenth century, even when the genre was not yet an automatic joke? By largely focusing on aberrant representations of female friendships, taking into account the androgyny that engendered sentimental protagonists, I locate the origins of latter-day performances of (feminine) camp viciousness within hypocritically sanguine models of eighteenth-century social virtue.

What are effective representations of feelings – of love, pride, hope – and what qualities render them overwrought, unbelievable, *camp*? Strong women behaving badly, chewing that scenery and smashing those goblets, provide soap opera-worthy performances even in the early modern sentimental canon. But their melodramatic, vicious interactions are just as unreal and surreal as the models of temperance staged by their virtuous foils.

In summary, I believe that the defined purviews of the camp modality not only permeated the eighteenth century but can provide a fresh and more composite understanding of parodic value and significance within unwieldy, initial, *queer* texts such as the ones I have selected. From the margins, camp produces a stylish but substantial reaction to the imperialism of the normal.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STAGED FRIGHT: *THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO*'S GOTHIC EXCESS

“[O]ne only wants passions to feel Gothic.”  
Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting*<sup>15</sup>

In one of his letters to George Montagu, a fellow bon vivant, Horace Walpole confesses with characteristic fussiness his predilection for socializing with a more youthful set, a pleasure that requires a polite understanding about the uselessness of (his) ancient history. Well aware of his relatively mature age of fifty-two, he glibly discloses, “I am ashamed to say I am of so young and fashionable a society; but as they are people I live with, I choose to be idle rather than morose.... My plan is to pass away calmly; cheerfully if I can; sometimes to amuse myself with the rising generation, but to take care not to fatigue them, nor weary them with old stories, which will not interest them, as their adventures do not interest me” (Walpole, Letter to Montagu B 305). This somewhat insignificant social letter says nothing brand new about the tastes of age versus youth, but it tells the truth about the schisms that time ensures. Age and beauty make charming bedfellows only if their incongruity is plainly acknowledged and accommodated. To avoid unnatural and just plain unpleasant interactions, one cannot pose as the other.

But what if the unnatural and the unpleasant is the very thing desired? *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) was a contemporary novel awkwardly posing as an ancient relic, at least in the first edition. It is celebrated as the first gothic novel and a complex parody of temporality, generically and generationally. As old and new-style romance, the characters are sparsely drawn, at least compared to the realist style of the later eighteenth century, but the perverse sense of humor the narrative takes with its dramatis personae seems uncannily modern. In contrast to the

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Porter 56.

turn of the century romances by Madame de Lafayette or Eliza Haywood, *Otranto*'s characters are not asked to display profound exemplarity.<sup>16</sup> Aesthetically and stylistically, it irreverently smashes together rules and styles from different periods, tendentiously and cleverly breaking the aforementioned letter's polite joke about minding the generational gap. But within its invention of a hybrid style, it queers the present through the past as a pithy (im)morality play on incongruousness that mocks and celebrates the ill fit that "weary...old stories" make within the contemporary. The story centers on a psychically doomed family, rooted by the patriarchal diva Manfred, self-styled prince of Otranto. Shackled to his side is his wife, Hippolita, a predictable version of the patient Griselda; a short-lived shadow of a son, Conrad; a self-righteous daughter, Matilda, and her foil, the minxish Isabella, the designated sex object for Conrad and then Manfred; a handful of sassy servants and proud noblemen; and one Friar Jerome with his illegitimate-legitimate son, Theodore, the impulsive but rather unimpressive hero. *Otranto* brandishes its surreal fictionality and is certainly not, with apologies to Sontag, "dead serious" about its "melodramatic absurdities" (Sontag 58). But perhaps, instead, it explores the seriousness of other sorts of failure(s), rigorously hyperbolizing the poorly hidden secrets of the social.<sup>17</sup>

Proclaimed in one of the tonally slippery prefaces as but "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" (*Otranto* 9), *Otranto* is a theatrical pastiche of the old and the new, taking the best, or, perhaps, the worst, from medieval gothic and contemporary conventions and making them play together. But unlike the typical romance that it pretends to

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Ahern's understanding of the early modern romance hinges on its frequent extremes of emotion: "The romance mode is characterized both stylistically and thematically by an aesthetic of excess. In amatory narratives, characters subscribe to an ethos of erotic heroism that compels them to display their capacity to experience intense feelings. . .to prove they possess the refined psychophysiological sensibility that marks them as superior beings" (13).

<sup>17</sup> In saying this, I do not wish to add myself to the list of critics who think *Otranto* is qualitatively bad or somehow undeveloped according to the grand telos of realism.

mirror, Walpole is not particularly interested in the “idealizing of heroism and purity,” excepting an ironic idolatry (Frye 306). It tries to scare its audience, then, by presenting its ghostly phenomena as well as an honest perspective on what passes for normative heroism and masculinity in romance. Walpole’s close friend Thomas Gray confirms its high level of variability: “I have received *The Castle of Otranto*, and return you my thanks for it. It engages our attention here, makes some of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed o’ nights” (Gray 137). Although he seems to genuinely credit the novel’s ability to inspire true horror, his response also underscores the book’s shiftiness, as it causes fear and terror and pleasure, though we cannot be sure which sections inspired which emotions in the Gray household.

As discussed in the introduction, I define camp as a queer form of parody that uses social or sexual marginality as an incisive and insightful weapon to critique the normative conditions and definitions that produce the social and sexual margins from which camp authors produce. As a product of early modernity, my eighteenth-century evidence also invokes the period fundamentals regarding conditions of publicity and privacy, publication, and self-conduct. Camp wryly transforms abjection into affectionate affectation, as it parodies the hierarchies and tastes of those allegedly but not always reliably other.<sup>18</sup> *Otranto* is a complicated and weird text. Thinking of the novel as early camp makes coherent and manageable a discussion of the literary topics of intention, style, and plot, effectually synthesizing disparate but valuable theories on the gothic and the queer. After evaluating the uncanny links between the camp and gothic sensibilities, I will discuss the novel’s playful and parodic appropriations of time, tradition, and family, using its unmistakable and multivalent nostalgia to explain the novel’s strategic

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<sup>18</sup> Jill Campbell has remarked, “In examining Walpole’s treatments of sexuality, I take seriously his own ways of explaining sexuality’s elusiveness, its resistance to categorization” (239). Walpole’s fascination with wordplay, description, and, especially, the ways in which discourse fails to capture sexual drama is particularly germane to my concept of the camp perspective.

performativity. To summarize, Walpole's novel is highly campy not only because its cheeky narration, so difficult for centuries of literary critics to corral, makes even casual readers laugh and take "a kind of delight in the outrageous" (Piggford 283). Instead, *Otranto* is camp because, unlike most parody, it takes advantage of a perspective of alterity to wickedly, implausibly, but affectionately expose the artificiality of everyday life.<sup>19</sup>

*Otranto*'s was invented to fill a creative void, and the draft was produced without much preparation or premeditation if we believe Walpole's narrative of the narrative's birth: its own monster origin story. The author is staged as a mere medium in a story that tells itself; it becomes its own lovable and irrepressible product and *thing*: "The work grew on my hands, and I grew fond of it...I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drunk my tea, about six o'clock, till half an hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary, that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence, but left Matilda and Isabella talking, in the middle of a paragraph" (Walpole, Letter to Cole 88). Despite of or because of its hasty composition, even Walpole did not seem to wish *Otranto* to truly scare its readers so much as perversely pleasure: "You will laugh at my earnestness, but if I have amused you by retracing with any fidelity the manners of ancient days, I am content" (Walpole to Cole 88). Indeed, in his prefatory poem to Lady Mary Coke, Walpole (over)praises his patron's rarefied sensibility for the first two stanzas, asking and reflexively answering if Matilda's sad fate will "fail / To draw the tear adown thy cheek." But the last stanza hints that readerly pleasure, not tears, is the true *modus operandi*: "my dauntless sail / I dare expand to fancy's gale, / For sure thy smiles are fame" (15). This tossed-off poem echoes the

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<sup>19</sup> In "Warhol's Camp," Matthew Tinkcom insists camp "involves reversing glamour, from being a form of concealed labour, to becoming a spectacle of its own conditions of production" (351). Thus, camp shows its construction, its naughty bits, its grotesqueries with affection, unlike, for instance, Swift's dressing room poetry, which unveils in order to horrify, not delight.

above letter; both casually remind us that there is comedy to be found within the bloody tragedy.

Yet Walpole is coy about the target or motive for his parody: “[I]t is but partially an imitation of ancient romances: being rather intended for an attempt to blend the marvelous of old story with the natural of modern novels. This was in great measure the plan of a work, which, to say the truth, was begun without any plan at all” (Walpole, Letter to Warton 377). Though the plan is vague, Walpole is clearly invested in screwing with time. An older genre is not only being imitated but intentionally mixed with the new realist or “natural” style, as he explains in the preface to the second edition, written after the found manuscript foil was over: “Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been damned up, by a strict adherence to common life” (Walpole, *Otranto* 9). Old romances are filled with exciting “improbability,” he claims, but “[n]ature has cramped imagination,” meaning that contemporary versions are too dull, too plausible. *Otranto*, we gather, was invented to smash together the deliciously improbable and the socially real.

And so his invention combines the surreal and the real, the ghostly and the all-too-familiar familial. In my opinion, Walpole’s temporal genre-bending is as much a parody on the tyrannical timelessness of social normativity as it is about the strictures of literary form. He dryly notes that his characters “think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions” (10). This apologia works to explain any excessive or mannered affectations; after all, he inquires, how would *you* behave if a massive helmet crushed your kin in plain sight? But *Otranto* is also skeptical about the differences in taste, style, and behavior that time promises to impose. In Walpole’s short treatise *Thoughts on Comedy*, he remarks, “Alchemy was the pursuit in vogue in the age of Ben Jonson; but, being a temporary folly, satire on it is no longer a lesson” (Walpole, “Thoughts”) a gesture to the importance of

critical timeliness. Commentary that comes too late – or that is read too late – is functionally impotent, démodé, vestigial. But nothing makes a more eternally timely target than the guiles of romance, the inherent masquerade that is normative desire. If *Otranto* parodies history and the way its “truth” is written, its camp effect is distilled from its incredible treatment of the family romance, an attitude that is not simply farcical or mean-spirited but betrays a nuanced affect, affection, and affectedness for the social and temporal scripts that it mocks.

### ***Gothic Novelties***

How and why can the gothic, the sensational literary cousin of the philosophy of sublimity, seem so irresistibly queer and camp? The fun of reading tales of terror in solitude, late at night, is paired by the fun of brooding on topics such as the vastness of nature and the (im)permanence of death in the daylight. In the twenty-first century, gothic texts are snapped up by teenagers who lose themselves in today’s emo(tional) incarnation of moods and glowers, monsters and shades, and, of course, illicit love affairs across houses or species. The genre deals in the dialectic of opposites: shadowy light, contained caverns, the proximity of the supernatural unknown and the physical distance of the hero, high drama sketched in vague prose. Its most popular examples are not necessarily known for their subtlety or objective quality because they do not have to be. Instead, the gothic, both then and now, capsulizes giant existential problems or phenomena, rendering them portable and palatable. Devices that are now groaning clichés were once novel, of course. By romanticizing realism, Walpole encourages his readers to identify with the characters’ plight, a goal defined in the second preface, accomplishing this by filling his frightful scenes with a vague, imprecise, racing energy. When Walpole quickly places the beautiful Isabella in the bowels of the castle, trapped in a darkness that seems endless but is literally finite, running from a known villain, the lecherous Manfred, as well as a supernatural

force – of evil? ironic good? – he is intentionally and cleverly providing his readers with enough clues to inspire the desired sensation without so many details that they are unable to connect with the drama. “Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Manfred, and far from tranquil on knowing she was in reach of somebody, she knew not whom, who for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts, all these thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions” (28-29). A reader can approximate the experience of Isabella’s near-swoon because the danger is still inchoate and unknowable. We are given only the impression of panic, carried by breathless phrasing. Realist identification is actually facilitated by the romantic haze.

The gestural and atmospheric style has become a central characteristic of the modern gothic, and the way the story is written accentuates its content. Several critics have suggested that the twisted eeriness of gothicism is not accidentally correlated with queerness’s constitutive torsion. The history of queer desire has often been discussed in terms of shadows, invisibility, and apparitions;<sup>20</sup> the inherent invisibility of sexuality challenges the empirical dictum that seeing is knowing. George Haggerty, for one, has maintained that Walpole’s gothic inventions exemplify the post-Augustan “shift of sensibility,” a period more interested in “the products of the dark abyss” allegedly ignored in the literature of decades prior: “Walpole’s imagery of constrictive form...suggests his desire to offer ‘a new perception of things,’ an ontological as well as an epistemological shift” (Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction* 5). Thus, the pursuits of queer, gothic, and “queer gothic” studies participate in a hermeneutics of suspicion, haunting and unburying passages on abjection and secrecy, contamination and contagion, “perverse” desires

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Terry Castle’s *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Elizabeth Wahl’s *Invisible Relations*, and Valerie Traub’s *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*.

and plunging obsessions, mad families with knowing children, persecutions ending in literal burials or closeting. Indeed, most have noticed that gothic texts are never simply about blood and monsters but instead betray what those blood and monsters say – both straightforwardly and tortuously – about the secret and not-so-secret self. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for one, has highlighted the gothic’s delectable ability to allegorize and catechize sex in language that is simultaneously all-too-direct and opaque. In bold gothics like *The Monk* (1796) and in cagier ones like *The Old Manor House* (1793) alike, the sexuality treated is, to varying degrees, technically “unspeakable” (Sedgwick, *Between* 94) but, of course, thrillingly discernible: “[I]ts allure . . . lies in its promise of initiatory shortcuts to the secret truths of adulthood. The secrets of sexuality are represented by practices (most explicitly, incest and rape) that run counter to the official version” (90). The sexual secrets have always been open secrets, disavowed “primal scenes, not the secretive private memory of an individual but the primal reality of the culture at large” (Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* 9). The gothic does not describe the unimaginable but vividly discloses what was always already known, chronicling “unspeakable” desires and acts but alleviating the alleged horror of recognition with the palliative but false promise that the unfolding scenes, with all their lurid attraction, depict an unreal fiction.<sup>21</sup>

I am not claiming that Walpole intended to – or did – produce a “bad” novel. I am, however, claiming that if today the gothic form is generally haunted by a looming sense of ridiculousness, that is because it always has from the start. The novel’s stylistic inconsistency, the highs and lows that make *Otranto* seem ridiculous, absurd, tragically ludicrous, and

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<sup>21</sup> Expanding and reiterating Sedgwick, Judith Halberstam confirms the gothic’s discursivity, a psychic gossip that discloses much more than meets the eye: “[L]anguage performs the operations of the uncanny so that the unspeakable is buried alive within the speakable, one story lies buried in another, one history produces and buries others” (35).

ludicrously tragic,<sup>22</sup> lets it pass, at the surface, as a nonsensical story, but its incongruity is a self-conscious, novel device. Questions about the gothic's (overwrought) quality have, in part, encouraged a small but solid number of literary critics to formally link the eighteenth-century literary gothic with camp.<sup>23</sup> Camp and gothic novels are both categorized by their constitutive relationship to abjection. Camp is often unfairly reviled for its seeming distance from politics and profundity, its trademark excesses seen as a form of affect-for-affectedness's sake or even minstrelsy. In a similar way, the gothic has frequently been criticized for its mannerist fancies, for venturing potentially effective correctives to surrounding mores but ultimately failing to be stably and legibly radical by the end. In her essay on Horace Walpole and the traces of incest in his work, for instance, Marcie Frank insightfully recognizes that "'camp' may be the best term for understanding Walpole's family romances (434)." Max Fincher devotes an entire essay to reading the campiness in *The Monk*, asserting that "camp can be defined as being about the misinterpretation of the signifiers of gender" (para. 4). Much of Claudia L. Johnson's monograph *Equivocal Beings* is concerned with excess and transgressive gender crossings in gothic writings or gothic-inspired writings by Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, and Burney, though only in her introduction does Catherine R. Stimpson explicitly apply the word "camp" to Johnson's findings.<sup>24</sup> And in his study on the inherent messiness of the gothic genre, James Watt gestures towards the allure of camping up the early gothic: "Given this obsession with charming novelty, it is tempting to position Walpole as a pioneer in the field of 'camp' taste, defined by Susan Sontag as 'the love of the exaggerated, the 'off', ... things being-what-they-are-not', in a manner

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<sup>22</sup> Camp's summary definition as the "tragically ludicrous, the ludicrously tragic" was famously voiced by John Waters in the 1997 *Simpsons* episode, "Homer's Phobia."

<sup>23</sup> Of course, many more scholars have discussed camp and the gothic fictions and films of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of course, George Haggerty's *Queer Gothic* extensively and helpfully explores the hypertheatricality and excessiveness of the gothic mode but without actually including the "institution" of camp in his discussion.

which sustains a double interpretation” (21). Watt seems to consider camp a throwaway category, a scholastic decoy, and he finishes his remarks by citing Timothy Mowl’s notoriously sexualized biography of Walpole, letting this testify to the ultimate banality of camp within gothic scholarship. The two forms are both unwieldy; both refuse stable definitions and neither can lay claim to anything like a generic homogeneity. Thus, when Maggie Kilgour describes the idiosyncrasies that plague the gothic, it is easy to apply the description, with few amendments, to the camp mode:

The gothic seems a puzzling contradiction, denounced and now celebrated for its radical imaginative lawlessness, feared for its encouragement of readers to expect more from life than is realistic, and also for its inculcation of social obedience and passivity. Revolutionary or reactionary? An incoherent mess or a self-conscious critique of repressive concepts of coherence and order? . . . Transgressive and lawless or conformist and meekly law-abiding? Psychologically deep in its representation of characters or motives, or totally superficial in its interest in mere appearances and coverings? (10).

As with camp, the gothic that follows and includes Walpole’s novel incorporates both civil obedience and radical dissention, using a slippery formal style that advertises its own artificiality, theatricality, and distance to avoid committing to either.

Camp humor has been called a tendentious pose,<sup>25</sup> meaning that, similar to straight parody, its exaggerated *form* makes an essential contribution to its quasi-satirical function.

*Otranto* is unafraid to posture, especially since it is published with a false story. Its entire

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<sup>24</sup> In summarizing Johnson’s theory, Stimpson writes, “[Burney’s] response was to escalate melodrama, to create deliriously abject heroines – to the point of camp” (x).

<sup>25</sup> Of course, posing and posturing alludes to the alleged – but hardly definitive – French origin of the term “camp”: *se camper*.

narrative volleys (false) pretensions towards history or novelty, inserts bracketed stage directions during scenes, and takes general advantage of the initial readerly destabilization caused by the incongruous abundance of dramatic or melodramatic scenes or the tonal undercutting of tragedy. Reminding us, as does Walpole, that the gothic mode has never necessarily taken its doom, gloom, and terror entirely seriously, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik contend that “the comic turn in Gothic is not an aberration or a corruption of a ‘serious’ genre but rather a key aspect of Gothic’s essential hybridity. In the comic turn what we see is an exploitation of the stylized theatricality of the Gothic device, which is always teetering on the edge of self-parody” (12). *Otranto* certainly uses this mode to target and inhabit the unwanted, the socially dead, and the abject. Indeed, it celebrates abjection – or what Ross calls “history’s waste” – and the untimely bodies that accumulate in *Otranto*, dead and supernatural alike, are synecdoches of the vestigial, or symbols of the unwanted byproducts of the performative family. When Deb Margolin claims, in respect to parody, that “whatever I make fun of, I always become,” and that “parody is the direct result of an attempt to make room for oneself within an airtight, closed, or exclusive social, cultural, or theatrical construct” (247-248), she speaks to the distinction that boundaries delineate and to the constitutive production of affects like exclusion and desperation. If parody, taken generally, often upends the strategic incorporation that blurs the line between producer and target, it makes sense that camp parody is especially keen on developing a performative relationship with its Other.

To say that death is abjection is to toss off an insipid psychoanalytic comment; however, the gothic *does* improvise on the limits of (im)mortality. Trash-camp pioneer John Waters happily admits that “thinking about violence seems to relax [him] and give [him] comfort” (24). Representational violence makes a scene and disrupts the normal, a goal at which Waters’s camp

catalogue excels, but also a lowest common denominator of all gothic texts, including and especially Walpole's. To both Walpole and Waters, it is not enough to kill; plain death is boring. But death for show, not glory, or a death that bothers and irritates and creeps, not serves or sacrifices, makes good text. Waters's nearly ekphrastic description of a perfect thrill ride is meant to disgust those who do not or will not share his disregard for bourgeois propriety and taste: "The wheel was about ten feet off the ground and it would go around and you'd be terrified when you'd be at the top upside down. After the wheel turned for a while, it would start getting lower to the ground until you were at last crushed to death on the final spin. My drawings always had terrified riders on one half of the wheel and bloody pulps on the other half" (Waters 25). This delightfully twisted scene is not necessarily any more fearsome than the average gothic excerpt, preferring high detail over atmospheric blandishments, but it also asks us to think about what life is worth and to whom, a rhetorical question about abjection that, as we will see, resonates with *Otranto's* infamous opening scene and the murderous helmet.

### ***Temporal Drag***

The first and second prefaces set up Walpole's concern about the ghosts of history, and his temporal hobbyhorse, the re-modeling of a genre that is infused with the new but generated from the old, is responsible for his novel's incongruous style. Before I examine the prefaces and their function, a quick survey of queer theories about time will help me explain why Walpole's parody of history readily connects to his concurrent parody of the normative family. I hope this section adumbrates how Walpole's gothic understanding of time – here marked as historical and generational – is camp, despite or perhaps because of the obvious anachronism, an untimely prolepsis. When Carla Freccero remarks, "perhaps we might wish to bring back some of gender's Old World otherness into our theoretical discussions of sexual identity and subjectivity" (49), she

notices the recuperative power of alienation within (queer) subjectivities that are always already depicted as “other.” Thus, to corrupt Leslie Hartley, perhaps the past is not such a wholly different country. At the very least, the unknowability of its difference facilitates its presence in the present, catalyzing, because of its separability, a new repertory of the so-called normal. Freccero’s working definition of queerness pays homage to difference and dialectical production, and my bastardization of her quotation provides a nice summary of my discussion here: “Queer [camp]...works to undo the binary between straight and gay, operating uncannily between but also elsewhere. Queer [camp]...mark[s] out the space and time of difference” (brackets mine). Where Dinshaw and others have cited the importance of finding currency in old history, inventing connections with old bodies and times, critics like Freccero and Love prefer to linger in the divisive – and equally fictive – fissure between presence and the prior. And neither approach to time is inessential to the logic of *Otranto*.

The gothic romance was invented not only to blend elements from the old and the new forms, but my thesis claims that *Otranto* was also meant to distract, disrupt, and disparage the literary and social normal, ideal for a genre tasked with relaying the sublimity of horror. This chapter opened with an anecdote about the noticeable differences that age can make even within a lifetime, let alone centuries. Not long afterward, in a cheery tone not unlike the one Waters adopts when he talks about violent, bloody fantasies, Walpole admits there is something strangely pleasing about dead, old things.

Visions, you know, have always been my pasture; and so far from growing old enough to quarrel with their emptiness, I almost think there is no wisdom comparable to that of exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams. Old castles, old pictures, old histories, and the babble of old people make one live

back into centuries that cannot disappoint one. One holds fast and surely to what is past. The dead have exhausted their power of deceiving – one can trust Catherine of Medicis now. (Walpole, Letter to Montagu A 192)

The “feverish” dreamscape of his gothic feels so lovely and refreshing because it is easily manipulated to fit within his escapist desires; things of the past cannot talk back, not even dead queens. This letter confesses his affection for the security of a gothicized history. In that imagined space, it is not only impossible for past events and dead people to wound afresh, but also one cannot currently disappoint those who live in the present.

So, *Otranto* betrays Walpole’s conflicted fondness for reformulating the past; more properly, then, Walpole does not recuperate the past *in toto* but borrows and recycles the parts available to his taste and his cultural memory. Both of the *Otranto*’s prefaces parody – and thus depend upon – the “preface genre” used in allegedly found narratives or edited collections like *Roxana* or *Clarissa*. They manage to disclose in wry form the symbiotic relationships between paratext and fiction, writer and character, established template and rebellion. Ultimately, the prefaces adumbrate a seriocomic nostalgia for the way things were, and this section explains how the prefaces, with their bittersweet yet adoring resentment for the rules and roles of the past, combined with a measure of self-consciousness about their own artifice, make *bonne entrées* to *Otranto*’s camp sensibility.

The first preface introduces a “lost” but fortuitously “found” text, labeling *Otranto* as metonymy, a part from a larger, medieval whole. Here, the gothic is designed as a blank slate capacious enough for improvisational reinventions of historical and corporeal truths, especially if objects –like the story-as-false medieval relic – and “fragments carry an implicit invitation to be restored to the totality from which they came” (Olalquiaga 221). The playfully serious prefaces

work to encourage a detached, ironic, and comically acute relationship between a reader and the ensuing narrative; true wit is partially (re)dressed as the gleeful judgment of culture, in both the eighteenth-century and current definitions. So before the gothic story even starts, Walpole has schematized, among other themes, the sameness of historical differences as well as the different gradients that lie within the same model of taste.

*Otranto* does not, I would clarify, simply point out differences but asks us to consider why temporality matters. Indeed, when David Richter discusses the centrality of the gothic's pained mourning for those so-called halcyon days of order, he helpfully notes the glaring separation between form and function in respect to its nostalgic attitude: "[T]his apparent nostalgia for the feudal appears on the level of 'reflection'; on the level of 'figuration' the novels are about something very different" (*Progress* 80). To him, authorial intention is painstakingly clarified within didactic or wordy morals – or eulogized in a preface – yet a "political unconscious" seeps through to neutralize an overextended philosophical impasse or dilemma. In my opinion, Richter's thesis can be plausibly rerouted to explain the disconnect between the improvisational prose and styling – "the figure" – and the melancholic themes – "the reflection" within *Otranto*. The narration does not necessarily mourn the march of temporality, nor does it seriously posit a dreamily utopian marriage between the medieval and the modern, exploiting instead the humorous incongruity that arises when one gives too much credit to the established teleology that bridges past and present.

Since the secret is out for readers today, it is virtually impossible to ignore the coyness in the first preface as it tries to effect its ruse. This "editor-translator," one William Marshal, Gent., acts as intermediary between the medieval "Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto" and the eighteenth-century readerly taste, taking advantage of his authoritative capacity to dissertate on

the narrative's idiosyncratic style. Assuming an apologetic stance, the editorial narration acknowledges the disparity between the posited author's medieval, barbaric superstition and the more enlightened reader of 1764. There is an immediate slippage, however, in Marshal's judgment. *The Castle of Otranto*, he implicitly points out, is not a gullible but a savvy tale, a remarkable and somewhat daring diagnosis; Muralto's production is only guilty of mimesis, of fidelity to its contextual ideology. "Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them" (6). Duplicity is already ripe, for the evasive "he" in question can easily apply to Muralto, Marshal, or, seeing through the first edition's anonymity, Walpole himself.

Marshal's litany of complimentary descriptors is a campy sort of utterance, a nervy statement that exploits its own exaggeration and parodies its own standards, an encomium that can be taken as straight praise by some readers or as affected jest by others. Is the preface a lie or truthful, albeit a truth that applies to a more hidden level of the narrative? Does the writer – "Marshal," but really Walpole, of course – know for sure? As Fabio Cleto attests, describing one important characteristic of intentional camp, this humor and tension exists because the theatrically imagined (here, textual) world is interpretively ambiguous, and the succeeding cognitive dissonance is part of the fun: "[D]eliberate camp is produced by a self-consciousness in the camp(ing) subject, extending the theatrical constitutive principle of that very subject to the other...The deliberately camping subject fashions itself through *self*-parody, setting up a pantomime stage in which s/he is fully, and centrally, as at once actor and spectator, part of it" (25). Walpole cannot resist dropping clues through this first preface, barely masking his own tastes, opinions, and worldviews. Marshal dryly notes, for instance, "I cannot but believe that

the groundwork of the story is founded on truth. The scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle. The author seems frequently, *without design*, to describe particular parts” (8, my emphasis); here Walpole clearly alludes to the real inspiration provided by Strawberry Hill, while superficially denying the reference with a wink.<sup>26</sup> Truth and fiction are muddled, then, as are past and present, even and especially because the text insists on pretending that the two opposites are discrete. The past, an invention in the sense of Strawberry Hill, a real place that is imaginatively reconstituted and redressed in another context, is a scapegoat or motive. It gives imagination a stage, a space to work out frustrations – and to encode praises – about dominant cultural tastes and mores. The prefaces, then, with their coy doubleness, prepare us to recognize the self-consciousness and reflexivity in *Otranto*, its predilection for making light of what are, deep down, Walpole’s secret subjects. This medieval story, Marshal hints, is not an allegory but a potential point of chiasmus; it is not a tale of horrors removed by time and space but something that merits a more intimate application: “If a catastrophe, at all resembling that which he describes, is believed to have given rise to this work, it will contribute to interest the reader, and will make *The Castle of Otranto* a still more moving story” (8). Although the condensed moral, “*that the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third or fourth generation*” (7), seems, like today’s fortune cookies and horoscopes, disappointingly placid, the message can transcend the Otranto family melodrama. Perhaps it better applies to the story’s – and the preface’s – melancholic nostalgia for the styles and social standards of the “fathers” that have, over time, restricted generations of more modern subjectivities.

Thus, the first preface – rife with observations that purposively fail to accurately describe the forthcoming story or with comments that wittingly note the inherent failures in its writing –

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, most critics agree that Strawberry Hill is the clear architectural model. The Oxford edition footnotes this detail; see page 117.

ultimately exposes Walpole's recognition of his aggrieved yet fond dependence on literary and societal maxims. His nostalgia for past relics is always endless, and therefore not a story about history but one about its present immediacy, because the past is performatively reinvented and reinscribed with each new iteration, as each generation reckons with the "sins" of the preceding.

The second preface, which appeared in 1765, confirms *Otranto's* eighteenth-century origins. Upon shedding the editor's disguise, Walpole<sup>27</sup> discusses two issues: the benefit of inserting techniques like humorous incongruity into the romance genre, and his own somewhat discomfited reliance on both history and novelty. With a purposefully overweening deference, he apologizes to his patrons for the earlier dissemblance, clarifying that his literary experiment was but "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern... The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds" (9). Thus, although *Otranto* is not authentically medieval, Walpole prepares his reader to embrace the medievalism always already within his modern tale, an aesthetic strain wholly concordant with his definition of novelty: "[T]he second preface does not reject the trappings of 'ancient romance' but argues for their incorporation into a more modern and realistic kind of story usually, and wrongly, thought to require their exclusion" (Bogel, *Literature* 110). This preface verifies E. J. Clery's observation that "[*Otranto*] has more to do with new theories about the social origins of medieval literature than with actual imitation of them" ("Genesis" 25); it is more invested in the stylistic statement than in mimetic accuracy. The novel's hybridity is presented as a new sort of performance in letters, but its newness is inescapably reliant on well-established literary styles.

A self-conscious joviality is arguably as present in this preface as much as it is in the first, despite its core seriousness about English literary forms. Walpole's revived defense of the comical servants, for instance, protests with a directness that summons a reader's skeptical

snicker, “My rule was nature” (10); thus, not only are characters like Bianca or Jaquez designed as realistic mirrors of the servant *esprit*, but their inanity, “almost tending to excite smiles” has an aesthetic, formal function: “In my humble opinion, the contrast between the sublime of the one [the class of princes and heroes], and the *naïveté* of the other [the domestics], sets the pathetic of the former in a stronger light” (10). Emotional and situational incongruities are pressed into the service of exacerbating gothic terror; just as mentioned in the first preface, the base is used in order to increase the sublimity of its other. But even if Walpole is merely giving an apologia for a simple truth – or what passes as truth among learned and wealthy aristocrats, at least – it is irresistible to see the wit simmering underneath his judgment. According to his rather camp observation, higher-ups feel deeply, although this opinion was getting democratized by the roughly contemporary cult of sensibility, and menials also *might*, but that is immaterial, so long as their hypothetical feelings do not disrupt the set ambience. “However grave, important, or even melancholy, the sensations of princes and heroes may be, they do not stamp the same affections on their domestics: at least the latter do not, or should not be made to express their passions in the same dignified tone” (10). If servants acted like barons and barons acted like servants, the story would, per Walpole’s logic, be naught but enervated and dull.<sup>28</sup> In the end, the *play* is the thing.

Walpole spends much of the remaining space contrasting his literary philosophy with his representation of Voltaire’s, reveling in banter about word choice and tone, the little details that effervesce from the page or stage. Spouting sarcastic barbs about France’s cultural supremacy, he quotes and translates an alexandrine by Corneille, one Voltaire has praised and thus preferred

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<sup>27</sup> In the second edition, the telltale initials H. W. sign the bottom of the new dedicatory sonnet to Lady Mary Coke.

<sup>28</sup> Of course, a novel where a servant acts like – or transcends – her supposed social better, and her better displays the supposed inferior barbarism of the lower classes, is *Pamela*, about which *The Castle of Otranto* could, through

to Shakespearean work, in order to note not only its flatness but the banality of its endorser. Walpole's real contention, however, centers on the right to enforce law and order. The preface encodes his deep resentment about the imperative to pay homage to authority, and he makes his point by performing a quasi-close reading of Voltaire's equivocations in literary criticism. Thus, Voltaire claims that a "mixture of buffoonery and solemnity is intolerable" (11) in the English Shakespeare, but he is not so vexed as to prohibit genre-bending in his own comedic work: "[I]l ne faut donner l'exclusion à aucun genre: *et si l'on me demandoit, quel genre est le meilleur, je repondrois, celui qui est le mieux traité*" (12)<sup>29</sup>. The Gallic speaker makes rules – for others – that are immediately abrogated for himself, a hypocrisy quickly and sardonically noted by Walpole: "Surely if a comedy may be *toute serieuse*, tragedy may now and then, soberly, be indulged in a smile. Who shall proscribe it?" (12).

What the two writers share, then, is a certain pride in their respective talent for improvisation and innovation, and Walpole considers Voltaire a nemesis, perhaps, because they share too similar an objective. *Otranto* has a historical precedent; it traces its lineage to the humorous incongruities found in Shakespeare, the attributes Voltaire loves to hate in English prose but cannot help love in his own work. But even Walpole's acknowledgement of his literary-historical debt to works and writers past seems a little resistant, even priggish: "I might have pleaded, that having created a new species of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it: but I should be more proud of having imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a distance, so masterly a pattern, than to enjoy the entire merit of invention, unless I could have marked my work with genius as well as with originality" (14).

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its twisted domestic or familial system, be considered an abbreviated, perverse, pointedly less boring, and parodic commentary.

After all, according to Walpole, Shakespeare's boon is his modern ability to capture social naturalism: "That great master of nature, Shakespeare, was the model I copied" (10-11); so, paradoxically, a historical force contributes to Walpole's new perspective on romance. What Walpole recognizes, then, is the stubborn citationality within his vaunted novelty; Voltaire's hypocritically wavering stance on the necessity of keeping tragedy and comedy opposed bears an uncanny similarity to Walpole's hypocritically wavering stance on the place of history in his (re)creation. The prerogative to improvise is correlated with generative – and generic – power, a theme certainly encoded in the novel's plot: "Manfred, to put it crudely, attempts to impose a mythic past (and thus an artificial present) on history, while Walpole dissolves an initially mythic perspective into a fictional" (Bogel, *Literature* 111).

Criticism of the story's peculiar style is slyly obviated by a digression on language and nation, one that takes mild advantage of xenophobic tastes and national clichés in order to twist the view. The introduction is certainly remarkable for its criticism of the English language's dreary restrictions. The problem, Marshal insists, is not the juicy narrative but the aesthetic shortcomings of English, a language – and ethos – that manages to be both restrictively prim and vulgar: "It is difficult in English *to relate* without falling too low or rising too high; a fault obviously occasioned by the little care taken to speak pure language in common conversation" (7). This remark, which tellingly alludes to *peri bathous* and *peri hypsous*, not only gives lip service to the tacit rules and standards for good writing but furtively foreshadows the centrality of intimacy and *relations* in the forthcoming story, perhaps. Of course, Marshal praises the "charms of the Italian, both for variety and harmony" (7), while deliberately staving any attempts to copy those linguistic virtues within his own prose style. Indeed, the false editor's preface

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<sup>29</sup> Quite apropos, Walpole cannot resist a knowing dig at Voltaire's own transparent application of the "anonymous editor" to defend and present his work: "[W]ho doubts that the editor and author were the same person? Or where is

fittingly drips with disingenuousness, or at least knowing evasiveness, praising a stylistic quality that is unmistakably absent or sparing in *Otranto*: “[Muralto’s] style is as elegant as his conduct of the passions is masterly” (7). It highlights a sense of literary control and directness that, upon closer examination, is not precisely manifest in the actual tale: “Allow the possibility of the facts, and all the actors comport themselves as persons would do in their situation. There is no bombast, no similies, flowers, digressions, or unnecessary descriptions. Every thing tends directly to the catastrophe” (6).

Maggie Kilgour, like many, chooses to underscore the dialectic between social action and gothic reaction, claiming that “[t]he gothic is symptomatic of a nostalgia for the past which idealises the medieval world as one of organic wholeness... This retrospective view of the past serves to contrast it with a modern bourgeois society, made up of atomistic possessive individuals, who have no essential relation to each other” (11). Kilgour finds an embedded resentment for the contemporary social scene implicit in the gothic mode, which proffers a dystopic and ludicrous version of its misanthropic perspective of modernity precisely so readers are sure to register the horror. The past, not to mention the exotic nations called upon to host the wickedness, provides a convenient location for cathexis, another Other space ideal for the projection of secret and not-so-secret fantasies. Thus, to be more precise, in perhaps all early gothic novels but especially in *Otranto*, we register not a forthright rehearsal of the good old days, as if such objectivity were even possible, but a performative reinvention and retooling of a hypothetical past. This historical re-creation, of course, simultaneously inflects the eighteenth-century present; in the prefaces, Walpole’s nostalgia for the past is also nostalgia for the present. This dissonance, however, need not be either as problematic or overly tidy as Kilgour suggests: “The very name ‘gothic novel’ which was ultimately given to the form he created is an

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the editor, who has so happily possessed himself of his author’s style and brilliant ease of argument?” (12).

oxymoron that reflects its desire to identify conflicting impulses: both towards newness, novelty, originality, and towards a return to nature and revival of the past. Walpole's text offers a myth of reconciliation of past and present, which suggests the past can be revived in a way that will be empowering and liberating for the present" (17-18).

*Otranto* is palimpsestic, waxing dramatic on the ways the past can quite literally bleed into the present. Certainly, a preoccupation with timeliness and temporal proximity recurs throughout the novel. Manfred is all too nervous about impending deadlines and always vexed by rude interruptions from the past, whether in the form of bellwethers like Theodore, the living proof of the original bloodline, material things like the anthropomorphic helmet, an old accessory that bears new spite, or fabled prophecies that bring fresh chills to a generational sin. Indeed, the novel opens with much ironic ado about infertility and futurity. Trying to literally live through Conrad, "a homely youth" to all who know him, Manfred pushes hard to outsource his son – via the convenient institution of marriage – so to secure the bloodline. As a temper to his zeal, Hippolita "did sometimes venture to represent the danger of marrying their only son so early, considering his great youth, and greater infirmities" (17), politely disclosing that Conrad's procreative unsuitability is quite visibly inscribed on his body, that not all subjects are naturally useful to the project of futurity. *Otranto's* ludicrous actions are catalyzed by Manfred's impossible flight from a borrowed pastness, or a history queered by its perverse drive to take and make its own time: "They [Manfred's "tenants and subjects"] attributed this hasty wedding to the prince's dread of seeing accomplished an ancient prophecy, which was said to have pronounced, *That the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it*" (17). The origin of this vague divination is untraceable; like gossip, "it was said," and that is all, yet the ghostly passivity of the utterance

creates its formidable authority. The omen's syntax is curious, and it complicates any stable identification of who is "real" and who is just "present"; if Manfred is merely a tenant, then it begs the question of why the real owner's phantasmatic size – assumedly symbolized by the gigantic casque and armor, signifiers for the house's gross disorder – should affect the vendetta.

The most interestingly queer aspect of *Otranto*, then, is not its author – or not *only* its author – but its perspective on time, a theme that will reintroduce itself in later chapters. The narrative traffics in the past, but it belies its own romanticization by the story's palpable grievance about the constriction – literary, sexual – of temporal linearity. The examination and destruction of temporality has been a minefield for queer theorists of late, producing work that questions the relentless drive – one that always compromises or negates the living – towards an always unknowable future, revisions normative progress narratives, and considers the affective and political resonance borne when particular subjects feel – and are compelled to feel – that their time is out of joint with the telos.<sup>30</sup> And certainly, *Otranto* exploits the difference between the past and the present, a theme in many other gothic novels, but its semi-bitter approach to pastness and presence is made especially prominent within and between the two prefaces and nicely crystallizes its camp attitude. Heather Love's observation that "[n]egative or ambivalent identifications with the past can serve to disrupt the present" (45) readily pertains to *Otranto*'s a-temporality – its place without or beyond recognizable time – and can account for its jadedness or bitterness about the storied past, an irritation that manifests itself into Walpole's present work. Catherine Kodat makes the seductive claim that "camp's 'truth content' resides precisely in its queer capacity to turn nostalgia against historicism" (1016), yet she closes her thought with a less exciting, though still true, observation about camp's parasitic, "critical and complicit," relationship to the social politics it parodies. I would like to expand on what it means – not to

mention what it looks like – to read camp, and *Otranto*, through such a confrontationally nostalgic tonality, or a nostalgia that just loves to speak its name. In *Otranto*, this is partially demonstrated by its stringent and often ludicrous materialization of affect and temporality, or its love of turning desire and longing into things, rendering discursive institutions like temporal and generational progress into queer props and postures.

Manfred's hapless attempts to stop time's progress are, in a way, mirrored by Walpole's (deliberate) failure to respect historicity. Bakhtin has shown that the castles which dominate so many gothic novels – he mentions *Otranto* specifically – are quintessential chronotopes, structures, here rendered discursive, that combine time and space, for “[t]he castle is saturated through and through with a time that is historical in the narrow sense,” while “the traces of centuries and generations are arranged in it in visible form...legends and traditions animate every corner...through their constant reminders of past events” (Bakhtin 245-246). This results in a “museum-like character,” a pastiche of timeliness that can be entered, softening temporal alterity through the intimacy of the physical relic. This time-space hybridity, so meaningful to queer studies and particularly to the camp sensibility, is certainly present in *Otranto*, although I would claim that unlike a detailed historical romance like *La Princesse de Clèves* or a historical gothic like *The Recess*, Walpole's novel never effects a plausibly medieval sensibility, nor is it interested in seeming *legitimately* old, despite its prominent use of castles and armor.<sup>31</sup> Instead, it shows that pastness is always a projected “structure” no more graspable or comprehensible than lived presence, and the source of nostalgic pleasures too rich to let alone. As evidenced in the opening anecdote of this essay, Walpole is charmingly persnickety about the perceived misfit between age and so-called modern youth, a recognition awareness that seems to manifest what

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, the roundtable discussion: “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” *GLQ* 13.2-3 (2007): 177-195.

Kate Thomas has called the “queer sense of being out of sync” (330). Furthermore, Elizabeth Freeman, among the first to develop Judith Butler’s and Eve Sedgwick’s initial thoughts about queer time, has invented the term “temporal drag” to describe “a kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave. . . ‘anachronisms’ behind” (“Packing” 729), thus arresting the hasty claim that it is always beneficial to be “post” or “beyond” a certain movement, phase, or position. Individuals who incorporate and inhabit time queerly find utility in so-called failures, recuperating certain affects that might be *démodé* or *outré*, and fostering ideologies that challenge the normative teleology of progress that keeps (queer) subjects corralled in a strict line towards “progress” and the new new thing. To treat “prior time [as] genuinely elsewhere” (735) is to disrupt the hegemony of the (false) “knowability” that pastness can effect, facilitating a sense of othering that leaves history ripe for performative reinvention.

In her monograph on queerness’ retrogressive valence, Heather Love writes that camp, “with its tender concern for outmoded elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas, is a backward art” (7), and, as we have seen, much of *Otranto*’s humor derives from its stylized mimicry of a dying genre for which it retains much fondness. Carolyn Dinshaw has written, with apt poetry, about the desire to “touch across time,” to locate affinities among other spaces, in spite of or perhaps because of the impossibility of success (21). To focus on “partial connections, queer relations between incommensurate lives and phenomena” (35) is to bring the dead back to life, but always only imperfectly; camp’s objective is the exuberant performance of this queer feeling of lack, an act with relentless

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<sup>31</sup> Recall that teasing moment in the first preface, a transparent clue to those in the know, that links the castle to the rather modern, if nostalgically oriented, Strawberry Hill: “The scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle.”

interpellative power.<sup>32</sup> *Otranto*'s politics of loss is partly veiled by its flashier ridiculousness, but this manic depressive combination makes for a prime camp site. Indeed, loss and absence form the lynchpins of *Otranto*'s tragic ludicrousness, supplying the novel's curious hauntings and fueling its satire. The demons that plague the castle are, for the most part, metonymies of Manfred's impotence and failure, mobile figures that illustrate the patriarch's lost line. The text melancholically and histrionically conveys the inevitable disappointment that arises when a subject cathects with what cannot or will not be wholly his or hers – with tradition or history, with a certain body or identity – and mocks its own melodrama. The remarkably rushed finale ticks through a litany of disappointments, and no one gets a truly happy ending. The major tragedies – the deaths of wives, the disenfranchisements of kin, murders and false wills – that partially explain, in terms of cause and supernatural effect, the mysteries of the preceding story are retold with a peremptory brusqueness. For instance, when Jerome says, "I shall not dwell on what is needless. The daughter of which Victoria was delivered, was at her maturity bestowed in marriage on me. Victoria died; and the secret remained locked in my breast. Theodore's narrative has told the rest" (115), his distilled explanation sketches a traditional, even expected betrothal and marriage scene. That this secret marriage and subsequent usurpation, a rather banal circumstance in the realm of romance fiction, partially catalyzed the supernatural machinery gestures toward not only the indelibility of lineage, a conservative philosophy that suited Walpole's own heritage, but also underscores the ludicrousness of everyday life. If one secret marriage and one overzealously ambitious man can destroy a castle and raise the dead, then no one is really safe from destruction.

Camp, perhaps, could be classified as a chronotope in its own right because it makes

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<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon of attraction has been discussed by Eve Sedgwick: "Unlike kitsch-attribution, then, camp-recognition...says *what if*: What if the right audience for this were exactly *me*? . . . And what if, furthermore, others

desire, love, and affection, affects dominated by time,<sup>33</sup> palpable and thus spatial. Andrew Ross is notorious for claiming that objects or poses can only seem campy when (a)temporality or anachronism is involved, or when an ineffectual but nonetheless meaningful relic or symbol from the past (comically) invades a now-jaded present: “The camp meaning of Norma Desmond’s *grande damerie* is generated, then, by incongruously juxtaposing the technological environment of the present with the traumatic passing of silent film...It is the historical incongruity of this displacement which creates the world of irony that camp exploits.” (138). According to Ross’ formulation, camp, much like *Otranto* itself, concerns the untimely reappearance of the dead and its latent – sometimes unwittingly so – humor and tragedy. Some have pointed out that Ross’ theory is carelessly overinvested in time lags, as certainly not all camp incorporates the passé but is often, instead, synchronic with its contemporary targets.<sup>34</sup> Drag, for example, need not necessarily perform antiquated versions of gender, although certainly it can;<sup>35</sup> it does, however, imitate the gender performances that have been typified over time. Judith Butler’s Freudian account of melancholic gender claims that heterosexuals must unconsciously grieve the fundamental prohibition that defines their identity, a constitutive sadness played out in drag performances. A drag queen inscribes on the body an alterity that cannot be “straightly” expressed (Butler, *Psychic* 146) making camp by exploiting the seeming incongruity between a physically male body and a hyperfeminine costume and flaunting prohibited signifiers of gender. In sum, perhaps we should correct Ross’s definition by insisting that camp is constitutively reliant on modes preconceived as “other,” temporality being the most crucial among several

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whom I don’t know or recognize can see it from the same ‘perverse’ angle?” (*Epistemology* 156).

<sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse* famously includes several fragments on how temporality alternately wreaks havoc upon and utterly enhances the networked sensations of love, jealousy, fear, and the like.

<sup>34</sup> See Salvato: “[Ross] ignores the possibility that a camp practitioner might (as, indeed, many have done) contemplate the ‘products’ of the *present*, rather than those ‘of a much earlier mode of production’” (636).

<sup>35</sup> I mean for this to resonate with Judith Butler’s work on the “melancholic drag queen,” a commonality I explore further below. See *The Psychic Life of Power*, 143-150.

possible positions of otherness.

### ***Queer Rebellion***

I have been arguing that *Otranto*'s inconsistent melodrama uses its literary medium to fondly parody the authority of the ancient, mocking, for instance, history's dreamy faith in primogeniture, effectively displaying its extant anxiety about social and sexual ideology through stylistic distortion and excess. This is why *Otranto* is, at its core, a rather melancholic novel well-disguised – camped up – as an unserious romance. Although Walpole insisted that he wished to modernize romance precisely so his characters could better reflect the psychology and narrative style of his period, much of the novel gives the lie to this purported goal of mimetic naturalness. Instead, as I have shown, Walpole takes advantage of history's fiction – silenced by time, history is what the present chooses to make of it – to remind readers that the “sins” of the past inhabit the present. Generational vengeance fantasias are hardly new, hardly exclusive to the gothic or camp, of course. Hello, Hamlet; indeed, in the second preface, Walpole makes sure to compliment Shakespeare.

But I have been claiming that there is something remarkable – and camp – in the way *Otranto* improvises on history and modernity, and part of its camp is shaped by authorial alterity. Walpole was born into a powerful family and took advantage of that power, but he was hardly a consistent political scion and did not choose to marry and produce an heir. For latter-day critics, Walpole has proven a favorite subject for historians of sexuality, for good and for ill. Exuberantly celebrating the great uncloseting of Walpole performed by some literary historians and critics, Raymond Bentman asserts that the gothic is a sublimation of its author's sexuality. As with Leonardo and the memory of his childhood, *Otranto* allegorizes “the somewhat fumbling but enormously creative techniques that grew out of Walpole's attempt to respond to

his persecution” (285). But even though Bentman’s reparative project seems too uncritically eager – “Walpole really was a remarkable man...seen through the prism of his despised sexual orientation, he becomes a man of genuine courage” (285) – it rightly attends to creative authorship, or the queer author-function behind *Otranto*.

Obviously, I find value in using social and sexual categories *avant la lettre*, but I do not want to breezily classify Walpole as a homosexual or hastily label his novel, chock-full as it is with sexually frustrated men, as a flaming vehicle of interpellation.<sup>36</sup> It is more interesting to remark upon his cultivation – blessed as he is with enormous economic freedom and cultural capital – of a non-garden variety type of social marginality, linking this with the dissemination and publication of the queer style it fosters. While introducing his biography of Walpole, subtitled “The Great Outsider” to eliminate any confusion about its agenda, Timothy Mowl insists Walpole was a gay man who could not properly come out, so he coded his desperation into his legacy: “He was delighted by his own identity and concerned, like a public relations expert, to communicate it to us down the years, but in a form carefully censored to conceal any overtly homosexual implications” (7). Mowl has been deservedly maligned for his gossipy speculation, and I am aware that, to some, I could seem guilty of performing the same sleights of hand with history.<sup>37</sup> But even though I insist that camp is produced by certain “others” with a talent for dramatizing their perspective, *Otranto* is not a *roman à clef* that translates Walpole’s mad lust for other men. Instead, I am simply pointing out that the novel’s campily idiosyncratic

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<sup>36</sup> See Haggerty, “Queering Horace Walpole,” for a recent discussion of the problems and perils of (homo)sexualizing Walpole and the trouble with reading too much (gay) sex into early modern texts.

<sup>37</sup> In “Queering Horace Walpole,” Haggerty calls this the “kind of queering [he] would prefer to avoid”: “Of course, it would be easy to embrace Walpole as a gay brother and to interpret details of his life in terms of twenty-first-century gay culture (or a misunderstanding of that culture, as Mowl’s book reveals). But I would rather look at what is there and consider it in its own terms. Walpole is far too interesting a figure for us to caricature him as a twentieth-century homosexual” (544). I would agree, but I would also note that camp is also far too interesting and complex a mode to summarily dismiss. I do not read *Otranto* in order to neatly package it as a simile for twentieth-century homosexual strategies – as in, ‘My, this eighteenth-century text is as or like a twentieth-century gay text.’

esprit is handily positioned by Walpole's queer authority.<sup>38</sup> His liminality positions him to recognize the boons and blemishes of the established order of things, and so *Otranto* improvises on the residue of normativity, turning apparitions and specters into a metonym for the wispieness of positivism, social, sexual, and systemic.

Not all ghost stories are camp by dint of whimsy and overwrought prose, and few early gothic writers were writing with the same intention that produces camp. Clara Reeve responded with *The Old English Baron* in 1778, a didactic correction to Walpole's gothic. Reeve considers his incongruous style disappointingly flawed, declaring in her novel's preface: "When your expectation is wound up to the highest pitch, these circumstances take it down with a witness, destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter" (3). Critics like Kate Ferguson Ellis have defended Reeve's novel, hypothesizing that less independent women writers might not want to waste their ink by pandering to history's often wastefully cruel paradigm: "Walpole could flout the conventions of sentimental realism, introducing supernatural retributions and undermining happy endings, because he had the resources to be his own patron and publisher" (60). True, Reeve's more staid gothic fiction punishes the bad and rewards the good – with "old age...peace, honour, and happiness" (Reeve 135) and children, and Walpole could not hide his acrimony for her less progressive re-vision: "It...directly attacks the visionary part...the work is a professed imitation of mine, only stripped of the marvelous...the most insipid dull nothing you ever saw" (Letter to Cole 110).

Where Reeve ultimately stays within the fairy tale line, Walpole queers its direction. A

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<sup>38</sup> I have heard critics say that the Bravo network's mission statement involves translating a gay sensibility for the masses, thus providing a venue for airing the commercial and glittery, if watered-down and de-politicized, "greatest hits" of the queer imaginary. At the risk of sounding trite, it could be said that Walpole's gothicism translates his queer perception and perspective for the voracious and mass novel reading public, a demographic that is often, as Jane Austen has cheekily shown, an innocent and feminine or feminized group that is unsure what to do with the translated tropes it receives.

prose romance practically requires the presence of competitive sexual drama, and it is not accidental that *Otranto* becomes most animated when depicting the strained relationship between Matilda and Isabella. In a novel where any pretensions to interiority are pointedly avoided, the comparative detail of the women's rivalry seems especially noteworthy. This contention over the object of Theodore's desire is, of course, resolved at the end, although no one really wins. Our young man – a true-born aristocrat who does *not* get a happy ending – receives much ado about nothing, and his vestal prize does not turn out to be his desired Matilda but, by default, the ever-exchangeable Isabella. Theirs is a union curiously filled with discussion, not passion: “[I]t was not till after frequent discourses with Isabella, of his dear Matilda, that he was persuaded he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom he could forever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul” (115). Thus, even though the story arc is ostensibly centered on Manfred's charade, it also proffers a remark on futurity, or the burden of proving and protecting legitimacy and heritage, a tacitly sexual project that seems to leave Theodore cold, if those bleak last lines bear reliable witness. And so the nubile women of the household indulge in rather bitchy fights to win a man who does not necessarily want to be won – nor do they necessarily *want* him, carnally or conventionally, as more than a gift or prize – flipping the sexual trafficking along gender lines. The young trio parodies the entire ruse of romantic courtship, and instead of gauntlets and sabers, the two would-be suitors throw cold looks and snide airs, enlivening this story about nothing – the ethereal “not-things” of ghosts, superstitions, and ancestry – with an extended scene about the juicy disorder catalyzed by the conventions that govern normative sexuality.

Life is nothing if you're not obsessed, to quote Waters again, and Walpole's letters show that he was sincerely proud if initially anxious about his all-consuming project, but it is not too

presumptuous to assume that he expected – even welcomed – notoriety. In *Shock Value* (1981), Waters explains that, even as a youth, he wanted to create experiences that would trouble the mainstream and took great pleasure in fantasies of distressing unsuspecting bourgeois tastes: “I’d pretend I owned a movie theater and book the most notorious films, redesigning their ad campaigns in a much more sensational manner and imagining the outrage it would cause in the religious community” (Waters 34). His alterity inspired his art, a central component of camp parody. Walpole, an eccentric, for sure, was probably less extreme than Waters, yet if *Otranto* was not written solely to *offend*, it was written to *defend* his sensibilities, a well-timed distraction from the tedium of the real world: the political arena into which he was born. “‘Tis satisfaction enough to me to be delivered from politics, which you know I have long detested. When I was tranquil enough to write Castles of Otranto [sic], in the midst of grave nonsense and foolish councils of war, I am not likely to disturb myself with the divisions of the Court, where I am not connected with a soul” (Walpole, Letter to Montagu, 154). But offend it did, to some degree; Walpole’s frenemies were not great admirers of the textual plot or style. A few months after the publication, Williams frets about Walpole’s wayward attentions: “How do you think he has employed that leisure which his political frenzy has allowed of? In writing a novel...that no boarding-school Miss of thirteen could get half through without yawning....He says it was a dream, and I fancy one when he had some feverish disposition in him” (Williams 177). The novel’s “badness,” then, is traceable to the author’s rebellious intentions: *Otranto* is a distraction, a hobby horse ‘mistress’,<sup>39</sup> a project in complete and deliberate opposition to the masculine art of war. The surreal gothic framework lets Walpole hide in plain sight his parody of the draconian rules of the family romance.

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<sup>39</sup> In a 24 December 1764 letter to Montagu, Walpole jokingly humanizes, sexualizes, and genders his newly-born novel. He sends his friend a care package, listing among the enclosures “*The Castle of Otranto*, which lost its

## *The Living Dead*

Gothic manipulates phenomenology; *Otranto*'s narrative is canny about perception and distortion at the level of the text. Camp consistently turns "nothing" into a stylized something, and the gothic is well-known for using ethereality – imagined nothings – to develop its eeriness. Susan Stewart insists that nostalgia "is a sadness without an object" (23), but *Otranto* debunks this by cleverly materializing its lack, using the plenitude of surfaces, the face value of things, to redress anxiety. In a sense, the novel itself is in drag, aggressively posing as a straight romance, carrying through the charade laid out within the masquerading prefaces. In her description of *Otranto*'s deliberate superficiality and its manipulation of material scale and scope, Cynthia Wall's choice of a theatrical metaphor, then, seems especially alluring: "[The story overview] looks like the cast of characters in a conventional romance and the pattern for a gothic future. But, as it turns out, those are only their costumes" (*Prose* 119). But unlike didactic tales where invisible virtue reigns, in *Otranto* what you see is what you get, which offers an irreverent corrective to the philosophy that surfaces must lack utility or function. Indeed, as Wall notes, "looking for a 'deeper meaning' might be the wrong way to go about it [reading *Otranto*]: the surfaces themselves clamor for attention" (115). And, indeed, this knowing interplay between legible, visible style and the ineffable identity supposedly lurking beneath is unmistakably the stuff of camp. The sheer volume of *things* obviates the richness that such extra – and excessive – description is supposed to supply; luxurious detail – or what would be luxurious detail in an ordinary romance – turns into deadpan blankness.

The cavalcade, for one, makes an infamous interruption; its overlong and unnecessary recitation of details shows what happens when "thingness" takes over.

In a few minutes the cavalcade arrived. First came two harbingers with wands.

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maidenhead today" (145).

Next a herald, followed by two pages and two trumpets. Then an hundred foot-guards. These were attended by as many horse. After them fifty footmen, clothed in scarlet and black, the colours of the knight. Then a led horse. . . . Two more pages. The knight's confessor telling his beads. Fifty more footmen clad as before. . . . The 'squires of the two knights, carrying their shields and devices. The knight's own 'squire. (64-65)

And so on. The ludicrous retinue anticipates a Monty Python sketch. If a “detail of movement is a skewing of narrative time, a manipulation of the reader's access to knowledge,” a “digression [that] stands in tension with narrative closure” (Stewart 30), then this interminable description purposively underscores the artificiality of fictional time, a theme I have already explored. The progress puns on the other sort of progress, as it retards the plot-driven progression that fiction is supposed to coddle. But then, the text revels in theatrical distortion, inserting several asides within particular scenes to play with the difference between lexicality and visuality: “Conrad died yester-morning. [The knights discovered signs of surprise.]” (68). Novelistic text and demonstrative performance do not easily coexist – we read about the signs of surprise *or* we “see” them in the play script or even in the play proper – but *Otranto*'s embrace of dramaturgy only exacerbates its tendency to cross boundaries – generic, temporal – and accessorizes its already visual gothicism. The text coyly invokes the clichéd lament over ineffability and the fallibility of discourse that cannot “paint” the truth: “Words cannot paint the astonishment of Isabella” (24); “[w]ords cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation” (28); “[t]he passions that ensued must be conceived; they cannot be painted” (57). As we saw earlier, the narrative's sketchy description of frightening situations and the horrific allows a modern reader to approximate a sensibility without letting too many details, despite Walpole's claim about

realistic fidelity, get in the reader's way. Perhaps Steven Cohan's theory on the camp style of Judy Garland bears unexpected relevance to *Otranto's* literary method. Garland's classic torchy songs crystallize the "dialectical position of...engagement with and distance from the number," which is "a performance style that theatricalizes transparency and then naturalizes the theatricality" (26). Walpole's classic genre also thematizes disparity, inviting a nostalgic embrace while mocking the maudlin terms that accompany its impossible temporal jumps, or, as we see above, mocking literary conventions while ironically reiterating the same blunders.

The frequent (dis)appearance of family members and unknown shades and anthropomorphized statues certainly hints that uncanny figures of otherness constitute the underlying threat to social peace. In the story itself, Manfred's domicile *looks* normal, for at least a good page or two, but the novel quickly betrays its embedded dysfunctionality. Isabella's affective complaints seem realistic in one scene but then utterly – and seemingly unintentionally – ludicrous in the next, but the incongruous juxtaposition still transmits meaning.<sup>40</sup> Peremptory imperatives are punctured by the surreal; *things* speak more loudly than words: "It is done, replied Manfred: Frederic accepts Matilda's hand, and is content to waive his claim, unless I have no male issue. – As he spoke those words three drops of blood fell from the nose of Alfonso's statue" (97). The distracting and unserious bloody nose wrecks any pretensions toward narrative tension, but the underlying vexation stubbornly remains: a lingering obsession over the amalgamation of types and the deployment of power, After all, the statue allegedly bleeds because "the blood of Alfonso will never mix with that of Manfred!" (97). As evinced by the curious but sincerely wistful ending, *Otranto* does bear an aura of a moral, even though the text paradoxically overwrites its own propaganda with mocking details like drippy statues and bored

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<sup>40</sup> This accords, perhaps with less emphasis on the elegance, with Christopher Isherwood's claim that "high" camp "express[es] what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance."

ghosts.

Affects and emotions, not to mention relationships and people, are replaced or displaced by things. The infamous casque feathers frequently appear to swish in chorus, unforgettably foppish details that adorn what would ordinarily be a serious moment in a normal romance, enhancing the *super* in supernatural.

Jerome endeavoured to check the impetuosity of the youth; and ere Manfred could reply, the trampling of horses was heard, and a brazen trumpet, which hung without the gate of the castle, was suddenly sounded. At the same instant the sable plumes on the enchanted helmet, which still remained at the other end of the court, were tempestuously agitated, and nodded thrice, as if bowed by some invisible wearer. (58-59)

Indeed, when Conrad is smashed to death, the text dishes about the literal accessory to the crime but breezes over the crime itself: “He [Manfred] beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers” (19). Instead of fetishizing the body of the pale, effeminate boy, the narrative focuses its gaze on a *thing*, rendering it more animated than, arguably, many of the actual characters.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the body of the child is transformed into “a mountain of sable plumes” (18), a spectacle far more decorous than a forgettable son “of no promising disposition” (17). The helmet and feathers, aside from providing meaningless detail *de trop*, could plausibly form a pun about masculinity; the gigantic set obliterates Conrad’s problematically less potent and presumably less formidable and “proportionable” “helmet.” But the excessive scale does not merely dwarf Conrad, it

replaces him as subject of the sentence, the scene, and the family. While such roughly contemporary characters of extreme sensibility like Harley or Dr. Primrose objectify human relations so as to demonstrate their affective connoisseurship, Manfred parodies this reification by making it literal; instead of making much ado about the son, Manfred cathects with the vulgar – but rather fabulous – material presence of the helmet. “His [Manfred’s] silence lasted longer than even grief could occasion...and [he] seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it” (19). As an outlandishly large symbol standing in for – or maybe just on – the family, the helmet is perversely synecdochical of Conrad’s inanimate position in the household, obliterating the “partial fondness” Manfred once had for his son, making it hard to remember that, at one time, Conrad “was the darling of his father” (17).

Other death scenes are not more lovingly treated. The moment of death itself is not given much attention. Instead, anticipating soap opera sentimentality, the preamble and the staging are given more attention and time to commence hand-wringing and swooning. Walpole astutely reminds us that, in the modern world, the rituals and appearances of pomp and circumstance are often more important than either life or death, and the prose capably makes fun of this ironic truth. The distraught mother is given her due, of course. She was left “scarce more alive than her daughter” (110) and hysterical at her bedside: “Oh! My child! My child! Said Hippolita in a flood of tears, can I not withhold thee a moment?” (112). Even the guilty father “dashed himself on the ground, and cursed the day he was born” (110). And despite pages of wailing and thrashing, Matilda dies, mid-sentence. The clipped narrative announcement? “She expired” (112). The scene quickly moves onto the next point of action and intrigue. Unlike later

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<sup>41</sup> Cynthia Wall has also noticed the striking preponderance of feathers throughout, aptly calling them “less inherently dignified objects. . .overwhelming special effects” (*Prose* 118) that pointedly deflate the conventions of

sentimental novels and earlier romances, where the Little Nells and King Arthurs are given profound, posthumous commemorations by their beloveds for their characteristic virtues, in *Otranto*, after the death is over, there is no more show. What is the point of pretending it matters, the text inquires, after the one-to-be-mourned is no longer alive to bear witness to the mourning?

Instead of being mawkish about these leavings, then, *Otranto* shows that death and dying is not only the stuff of spooky legend but an essential to (familial) power. As pretender to the Otranto estate, Manfred inhabits by default the domestic nexus, but even he is continually marginalized by circumstance and character, pushed outside against his will. Though born with a disposition “naturally humane” (33), or so the narrative initially insists, this beneficence has been overwhelmed by “exquisite villainy” (38) and avarice. The only extant man left in his line, Manfred is, from start to bloody finish, incessantly anxious about his masculine right to perform his power. For instance, when Jerome informs him that Isabella refuses to present herself, Manfred, “colouring” with shame, brusquely reminds his audience, “I want no monitor” (48). Sulking at Isabella’s unsubtle rebuke, Manfred curses Theodore’s vexing interruption to his lustful design, giving Jerome opportunity to marvel: “The cause! interrupted Jerome: was a *young* man the cause? This is not to be borne! cried Manfred. Am I to be bearded in my own palace by an insolent monk?” (49). Worried about being rendered unexceptional by Theodore’s physical youth, attractiveness, and superior cunning, the prince lashes out, attempting to re-cover his lie by dramatizing his authority, choosing a tellingly physical descriptor – bearded – to make his defiant darkness even more visible. Caryl Flinn’s suggestion about camp’s morbidity, taken more generally, can explain the narrative’s readiness to upturn Manfred’s dilemma: “In mocking the outmoded, body camp can give the appearance of acknowledging, even playing with death”

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horror.

(451).<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Manfred, we find by the end, is quite literally outmoded by the story's machinery; he does not belong to the Otranto line but remains stubbornly resistant to this natural bloodline truth. The ranting, raving caricature of masculinity – incidentally insecure about his virility – braves the odds, ruthlessly trying to beat the system to scabble towards the apex of a system that has already let him down by dint of his failure to produce a viable heir; his line is outmoded by its lack. And so history, manifested in tropes like domestic lineage and eroded castles, is perhaps the true main character of *Otranto*, for, as intimated in the prefaces, it orders the juxtaposition of gothicism and humor. The infamously murderous giant helmet, for instance, makes a ridiculous impression, but it is not mere machinery. Instead, we learn, “the miraculous helmet was exactly like that on the figure in black marble of Alfonso the Good, one of their former princes” (20); this casque is not performing a random act of crushing but fulfilling a historical vendetta. Indeed, most of the novel's creepiness is derived from the appearance and disappearance of ancestors or pretenders. Potentially frightening scenes are often immediately neutralized by writing that embraces incongruity and superficiality, a style that gives a reader a veil of horror solely in order to dissolve its effect. When we meet one of the few true ghosts in the novel, a characteristically un-detailed shape that seems to step out – or, rather, placidly float out of a painting, the scene pointedly references the famous encounter between Hamlet and his father. But instead of the tense poetry found in the latter play, we read of a mute, bored, and molasses-slow shade that only has the power to irritate, not terrify, Manfred

    saw [the portrait of his grandfather] quit its pannel, and descend on the floor with  
    a grave and melancholy air. Do I dream? cried Manfred returning, or are the  
    devils themselves in league against me? Speak, infernal spectre! Or, if thou art

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<sup>42</sup> Of course, Flinn does not discount the possibility that camp cannibalizes women most of all; such predation is the subject of her essay. To her, camp turns the *female* body into waste or heightens an ongoing cultural or ideological

my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendant, who too dearly pays for – Ere he could finish the sentence the vision sighed again, and made a sign to Manfred to follow him. Lead on! cried Manfred; I will follow thee to the gulph of perdition. The spectre marched sedately, but dejected, to the end of the gallery... (26)

Manfred's hyperbolic language, characteristic of his brusque and saturnine disposition, is humorously tempered by the ghost's indifference. Manfred becomes the unwitting specter, the insubstantial wisp or shadow or cipher.

A paranoiac about temporal slippage regarding the production of heirs, Manfred obsessively pursues a securer seat of Otranto, needing a new heir to replace Conrad and thus to remain in charge. Women are interchangeable to his perverse plan: "Hippolita is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness: my fate depends on having sons, – and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes" (25). Male anxiety about female nulliparity is, of course, hardly new. But even if Manfred's obsessive wish for an heir who can erase his original sin is understandable, his short and manic speech, liberally peppered with statements of duration and time, starts to make the normative recipe for security and prosperity seem a little ridiculous: a timeline that demands sons, a *modus operandi* that hastily substitutes and exchanges women in order to supplement an ideological futurity that one can never own, have, or know.<sup>43</sup> To substitute the aging wife, he looks to Isabella, and Walpole amplifies the telos of that strange desire, a semi-incestuous awkwardness that is, in less

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wasting.

<sup>43</sup> Refer to Lee Edelman, especially *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, for an exhaustive, psychoanalytic analysis of what queerness can and must do to disrupt the hegemonic rallying towards the project(ion) of futurity, a mission that always compromises, colonizes, or destroys many (abjected) subjects inhabiting the moment. As an alternative that speaks very differently about the same general topic, Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* critiques the heterosexual timeline that punishes those who do not obey the track of marriages, babies, and the like with reduced citizenship at the psychic, political, and juridical levels.

outlandish forms, perhaps, part of the machine that keeps aristocratic families running. Isabella tries to publicly clarify a proper and disinterested relationship with Manfred, which causes a fleeting blush: “[S]he shall always respect [Hippolita and Manfred] as *parents*: she prays for uninterrupted union and felicity between you: [Manfred’s colour changed]” (48). When Jerome refuses to deliver Isabella to Manfred, he eagerly re-accepts his parental role, even using that position to facilitate his lustful desire: “She is where orphans and virgins are safest from the snares and wiles of this world; and nothing but a parent’s authority shall take her thence,” the monk says. “I am her parent, cried Manfred, and demand her” (49).

When Manfred frets and schemes instead of mourning his frail son, he brusquely rejects the remaining female members of his family, rudely stating a tacit cultural truth: “Begone, I do not want a daughter. . . . clapp[ing] the door against the terrified Matilda” (23). Manfred’s antagonism is deplorable, well-formed villainy for a gothic romance, but the traditional, obedient, optimistic, and feminine kindnesses provided by his wife and daughter ultimately do them no good. Both remain loyal to Manfred, manufacturing his goodness: “When she [Matilda] had a little recovered the shock of so bitter a reception, she wiped away her tears, to prevent the additional stab that the knowledge of it would give to Hippolita, who questioned her in the most anxious terms on the health of Manfred, and how he bore his loss. Matilda assured her he was well, and supported his misfortune with manly fortitude” (23). Matilda tells her mother that her father’s coldness is part of his masculinity; that this excuse passes as acceptable, even noble, is part of Walpole’s joke. “Bear me to him instantly; he is dearer to me even than my children,” Hippolita wails (23). But she is not rewarded for her intimate spousal devotion because this affection has a fruitless end.

Even the most likely candidate for the hero is not fully heroic, in the traditionally

gendered sense. While ensconced in the bowels of the castle, Theodore acts like a proverbial if inscrutable Prince Charming, but we soon see that his behavior masks an unsettlingly impotent core. As we have seen, *Otranto*'s parodic gaze embraces many things, including the idea that women – or womanish young men – are transformed into history's waste, integral subtexts of Ann Radcliffe's and Mary Wollstonecraft's gothic variations.<sup>44</sup> Aside from young Conrad's murder, the narrative's very literal excision of the uselessly girlish, many of *Otranto*'s droller – and its dead serious – moments circle around female bodies. One central misunderstanding deals with confusion over reading the body of the princess Matilda. Immediately after hearing Manfred sentence Theodore to death, "Matilda fainted... Bianca shrieked, and cried, Help! help! the princess is dead!... When [Manfred] learned the meaning, he treated it as a womanish panic" (55). News of the servant's hasty diagnosis spreads throughout the castle like an eighteenth-century game of telephone, discursively transforming Matilda's body into her mother Hippolita's. But the scene, designed to solicit a snicker, tacitly asks if there is a measurable difference – to Manfred or to a reader – between the two women, or if they are just bodied "functions," cliché placeholders plugged into a peculiar romance?<sup>45</sup>

Matilda and Isabella run into Theodore during their respective mad dashes through the bowels of the castle, and so, quite naturally for a novel, each soon becomes cagily jealous about the other's intentions. Here, the narrative begins to finesse their relations with an unusual level of introspection and detail, capturing their impatient vexation with telling litotes: "If they parted with small cordiality, they did but meet with greater impatience as soon as the sun was risen. Their minds were in a situation that excluded sleep, and each recollected a thousand questions

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<sup>44</sup> Claudia Johnson's work in *Equivocal Beings* concentrates on these women writers' talent for sharply upending and skewering such romantic conventions.

<sup>45</sup> Caryl Flinn is interested in whether camp preys or scavenges on abjected female bodies; abjection and womanhood are, in her formulation, very closely correlated in the public sphere.

which she wished she had put to the other overnight” (86). Each questions the other with snippy passive-aggression at a clip that might not shame classic camp combatants like Margo and Eve: “You plead his cause very pathetically, said Isabella, considering he is so much a stranger to you!” “What mean you? said Matilda. Nothing, said Isabella” (88).

As for the object of the catfight, this hero is not quite as soft and vulnerable as some of Ann Radcliffe’s men,<sup>46</sup> but he remains a feminized romantic lead. Theodore indulges in fashionable moments of melancholy and sentimentality, indulging in showily introspective moments that would make Harley and Werther proud, those notorious characters from the roughly contemporary genre of “sensibility lit”: “[H]e sought the gloomiest shades, as best suited to the pleasing melancholy that reigned in his mind” (75). Indeed, Theodore’s modernly sentimental man looks forward to Yorick’s sexual mishaps and misunderstandings, and perhaps not without soliciting a similar irony. His idiosyncrasies are liberally sprinkled throughout the novel; although he is given the hackneyed lost and found parentage story, the ultimate proof of a hero in many novels, he never seems to be in control of his ostensible purpose – sexual agent and rightful patriarch – in the story’s template, resulting in a humorous obliviousness that the narrative sneakily highlights. For instance, after interrupting himself from the solitary interlude cited above, he feels compelled to venture into the deep spaces, the “secret recesses,” of the unmistakably allusive cave tunnels. However, “he had not penetrated far” before getting interrupted by Isabella, who performs by rote a histrionic show of modesty. But, in the end, this exploratory adventure takes a wrong turn. Theodore passively and obediently vows to stash Isabella in the “most private cavity of these rocks” (76), while remaining exiled at the mouth of the entrance. He only gets the opportunity to demonstrate manly bravado – “with his sword

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<sup>46</sup> A thorough reading of effeminate heroes in the gothic novels of Radcliffe and Wollstonecraft can be found in Claudia Johnson’s *Equivocal Beings*.

drawn,” naturally – when Isabella’s father makes an unexpected appearance at the cavern mouth. In this incestuous melee<sup>47</sup>, Theodore shows his mettle, nearly killing Frederic in a battle over his own daughter: “The valour that had so long been smothered in his breast, broke forth at once” (77). Thus, as soon as Theodore is given the opportunity to prove himself, romance hero style, his compulsory performance of chivalry degenerates, furthering the novel’s exposé of the family romance’s charade. “I fear no man’s displeasure, said Theodore, when a woman in distress puts herself under my protection” (54); this statement is only ironically apocryphal, for he fails to ultimately protect his mistress and never wholly transcends the punishment of “the sins of the father.”

Truly, Matilda herself unravels Theodore’s virility, for in a strange scene between mother and daughter, Hippolita, still touting her trademark “delicacy of...conscience,” threatens to make a dash to a nunnery in order to escape Manfred’s divorce plot. But Matilda cites the priority of maternal influence, a plaint that not only derides patriarchal rule but also implicitly blocks the compulsory logic of the normative romantic love developing between her and Theodore. “Ah! my mother, replied Matilda, stay and save me from myself. A frown from thee can do more than all my father’s severity. I have given away my heart, and you alone can make me recall it” (93). Contrary to most children in most romance plots, Matilda wants to live through and by her mother, thus recoiling from futurity, especially as her mother longs to be physically absent, eager to relinquish an already stagnant and ostensibly barren sexuality. But a filial fantasy of quiet retirement with her mother – “Let me...shut myself from the world forever” – is ultimately dashed by Hippolita herself, who refuses to let Matilda forebear her duty to Manfred and other men: “Thy fate depends on thy father...I have ill bestowed my tenderness, if it has taught thee to

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<sup>47</sup> Of course, the incestuous tone is quite mild, especially compared to *The Mysterious Mother*, *The Heptameron*, and the Arthurian legend. But I don’t think the triangulation is accidental.

revere aught beyond him” (93). This scene parodies teenage melodrama – the daughter does not plead with her mother to unite with her paramour but instead begs for the opposite – and provides another example of queer asynchrony, where the performance of normativity purposefully remains out of joint, unbelievable, queer.

### ***The Order of Style: Conclusion***

*Otranto* is, as I have claimed, a camp novel that hyperbolically materializes various forms of nothingness – the psychic, the absent, the haunted – in order to disturb normative categories of genre and gender and family. It makes bittersweet and earnest commentary on the idea that social institutions like love, family, and identity are never quite what they seem, either in a (reconstituted) medieval setting in or in the (eighteenth-century) contemporary world. It shows the common perversity between the reified and mystical concepts of “then” and “now,” tacitly challenging the idea that the past is unknowably distant by using gothicism – the ultimate style of temporal dilettantism – to camp up the touristic pleasure that comes with romanticizing pastness. One prefers one’s own theatrical version of history, a quixotism evidenced at the very end. Indeed, when Jerome finally delivers his hasty summary of Theodore’s legitimacy, he offers to furnish Manfred with Victoria’s written memoirs, the papers “she bound...about [Theodore’s] arm” (84), in order to verify his oral testimony: “Yet, my lord, I have an authentic writing.” But Manfred interrupts, insisting, “It needs not...the horrors of these days, the vision we have but now seen, all corroborate thy evidence beyond a thousand parchments” (114). The archive of written text is an unnecessary supplement; its “authentic” inscription is too banal, literal, and even unromantic when compared to the supernatural experience it essentially catalyzes. Formally, it inhabits the romance both to pay homage and to chip away at its authority; its distinctive style, which sometimes reads as a lack, reminds us that the unreal

reactions, responses, or behaviors of those living in the past are actually the frighteningly real and material truths of the present. In a tendentiously rational world, mere surfaces can make remarkable agents of disruption.

Elizabeth Napier has claimed that the gothic novel has always already been anxious, insecure, and “fragile”; it “does not entirely trust itself as a genre,” which “account[s] for the frequent moments of self-satire” (67). True, this account partially, if slightly unsatisfyingly, explains Walpole’s evasiveness about the law of the father; *Otranto* is, by design, a petulant text, sometimes obeisant, sometimes rebellious. Napier, at times, hints that the novel is a childish fantasy: “*The Castle of Otranto*... becomes the ultimate kind of escape: liberated by visions, Walpole yet insists that he is tying it down by rules” (77). She and James Watt claim that the tone, which I consider strategically camp, is derived from the author’s psychosocial status as an outsider of sorts; its frivolity and puerility is a sublimation of its author’s character: “[T]he olympian tone... can be at least in part be attributed to his self-conscious alienation from ‘the world,’ and to his continual efforts to find a role which would compensate him for the political career that he rejected (Watt 37). Unwilling to credit Walpole with a certain canniness about his ludicrous creation, she enumerates the frequent moments when Walpole discredits himself or contradicts a maxim made in one or the other preface. But despite arriving at the party armed with this litany of Walpolian idiosyncrasies, she is seemingly unable to come to a conclusion about his strategy, bewildered about the point of such an elaborate performance:

[Walpole] connects extravagance to imaginative freedom and to the boundary line, which he loves to straddle, between the comic and the tragic... Walpole, in essence, creates an aesthetic atmosphere that empowers him, as its designer, to cast ridicule on an audience that does not possess the discrimination (or cynicism)

to look askance at the work....The *Castle of Otranto* is, in its exaggerated, frenzied atmosphere of medievalism, romance, and the supernatural, Walpole's triumphant assertion of his own privileged immunity from censure, evidence of the tenuous connectedness he had with the 'real' world that was a source in life of his despair, his cynicism, and his solace. (Napier 98-99)

But Napier's comments, uncannily enough, summarize camp's queer momentum, the meaning behind its "exaggerated, frenzied" madness.<sup>48</sup> Stifled abjection reappears, transformed; "his despair, his cynicism" infects the sly tale with interpellative power. Standing on the outside, peering in at Walpole's affected sensibility, Napier sees that something is rotten in the state of *Otranto* but otherwise misses the camp hail.

Somewhat shamed by timeworn orders, *Otranto* is Walpole's response to the normative, a camp production that manages to darkly display abjection and shame with color and quirk. *Otranto* forms an affective point of chiasmus between subject and spectator, muddling the discrete difference between the two identities or positions. This imaginary chiasmic space swirls nostalgia and acrimony, style and wit in order to produce a "passing narrative" that inhabits the passage – and passing – of time and genre. But untimely appearances, like the one described in the opening gambit of this chapter, have always interested Walpole. About ten years before *Otranto*, Walpole coined the word "serendipity":

I once read a silly fairy tale called *The Three Princes of Serendip*: as their highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accident and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of: for instance, one of them discovered that a mule blind of the right eye had travelled the same road lately,

because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right – now do you understand *serendipity*? One of the most remarkable instances of this *accidental sagacity* (for you must observe that *no* discovery of a thing you *are* looking for comes under this description) was of my Lord Shaftsbury, who happening to dine at Lord Chancellor Clarendon’s, found out the marriage of the Duke of York and Mrs Hyde, by the respect with which her mother treated her at table. (Letter to Mann 408)

His explanation is circuitous, and his example hardly clarifies the meaning. But this evasion is purposive, for serendipity is hardly denotative; discursive precision would only produce irony. Serendipity’s “accidental sagacity” alludes to luck and whimsy but also to the timely synthesis of untimely events. True to his form, Walpole concludes his faux-dissertation on the serendipitous with a bit of gossip. His witty anecdote manages to capture a drawing room example of the opportune co-incident of time and space, text and subtext. The untimely, then, need not be moored to the tragic, gothic, and deathly but can be, without wholly excluding the latter adjectives, wickedly comic, theatrical, and queerly informative about the truth of the normal; in short, quite camp, indeed.

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<sup>48</sup> To this end, Cleto writes, “With a typical camp inversion, those who are ‘normally’ excluded become the subjects and objects of a cult, of a different variety of *religion*...whereas those who are otherwise dominant are, for once, excluded” (31).

## CHAPTER 3

### IN PASSING: THE PERFORMANCE OF MEMOIR IN CHARLOTTE CHARKE'S *NARRATIVE*

The performer Charlotte Charke chooses to open her book with a self-addressed letter. Included only after the success of *A Narrative of the Life of Charlotte Charke* (1755) was well-established in serial form, the missive, directed from "THE AUTHOR TO HERSELF," inhabits the "Flattery...from which Dedications frequently flow," dramatically transubstantiating stagecraft into epistolarity by publicizing her personal life, and affecting shame and humility about her notoriously strained and non-normative relationships, filial and romantic. Gamely poking fun at her reputation, she recounts her own "exquisite Taste in Building" a number of "magnificent airy Castles, for which [she] daily drew out Plans without Foundation" (5). Her narrative, Charke tells herself, promises to complete an act of self-recognition, forming an instructive text that shall "ripen our Acquaintance into a perfect Knowledge of each other, that may establish a lasting and social Friendship between us" (6). Both the subject and object of the letter, "Charlotte Charke" constructs her own character. Mimicking the spying scenes made popular in myriad Restoration and early eighteenth century pieces, she stages a *textual* overhearing, for hers is neither a truly private nor a vocal utterance. Instead, her hybrid letter-speech both anticipates and ignores its audience. Its winsomeness resonates with the diary entry, the ultimate feminine genre, but it also evokes the dedicatory oration, a generally masculine discipline. Charke's letter, in other words, anticipates its future performance as read text. Its confessional voice looks forward to our overhearing, or, more properly, our over-reading, introducing a book-length public performance of private shame.

Pellucid or placid, the *Narrative* isn't. Charke satirizes the disingenuous puff pieces that preface commercial successes like *Pamela*, but that opening gambit with its cannily public

rehearsal of private embarrassment remains exceedingly vulnerable, even awkward, although abjection's raiment alleviates the gravity of her hammy plea: "If, by your Approbation, the World may be perswaded into a tolerable Opinion of my Labours, I shall, for the Novelty-sake, venture for once to call you, FRIEND; a Name, I own, I never *as yet have known you by*" (6). The letter's wink demonstrates Charke's awareness of her audience. Indeed, the specter of an audience gives the textual soliloquy its moment, for despite its façade of privacy, the soliloquy – like the secret – is nothing if not (over)heard. Her showmanship is as well-developed as her intentions are oblique; she is playing to a curious audience and making every line count. Her character makes shame a spectacle, as she accepts her notoriety and wallows in a social disapproval that she anticipates and celebrates. She makes herself into a thing to be pitied even as she pities herself, bathing in an abjection she knows she should but does not quite banish. "[I]f Oddity can plead any Right to Surprize and Astonishment, I may positively claim a Title to be shewn among the Wonders of Ages past, and those to come. Nor will I, to escape a Laugh, even at my own Expence, deprive my Readers of that pleasing Satisfaction, or conceal any Error, which I now rather sigh to reflect on" (8). Instead of parodying something other than herself and Other to herself, Charke parodies herself, albeit a body Othered by social norms and othered by time, seeing as it is framed as her past, youthful self. The public airing of dirty laundry is hardly alien to eighteenth-century literary culture, but this chapter claims that the *Narrative* is autobiography-as-camp because it is a text obsessed with effective and affective passing, exemplified through Charke's literal cross dressing, of course, but also her queer but still needful relationship to normativity, a story cagily filtered through her manipulative and theatrical rhetoric of shame.

As memoir, the *Narrative* (re)produces Charke's "real" persona. I claim it is not only a

creative and twisted fictionalization but also a self-conscious parody of the ideal, normal, private woman, and the opening letter exemplifies the general technique and tone of the ensuing dramatic confessions. It is also, I argue, just one of myriad forms of “passing” extant in the *Narrative*. Although cross-dressing is Charke’s most notorious signature, the discursive style employed in the *Narrative*, from its formal rhetorical technique to its restaging of her family drama, is part of a larger passing strategy. The introductory letter exemplifies her “narrative transvestism”<sup>49</sup> through its stilted and dramatic performance of alterity. As an extremely performative text, it produces a version of the writer and the reader as it goes, an insecure projection that anticipates its own failure. It showcases Charke’s talent for what I call the “near pass,” or when the performative act to re-create or to pass as something or someone else also incorporates a glaringly obvious failure at the selfsame attempt.

After the discursive overture, the autobiography begins, in earnest, with the standard apologies, making excuses, in advance, for “the Product of a Female Pen” (7). The gendered trope of bashfulness takes a strange turn, as Charke’s humility turns into a fantasia of objectification, a literal mortification. If her book is judged a failure, she sighs, it will become wastepaper with the rest of the unfashionable pulp, and her sexual allusion to the company – “a choice Tart” – these conditions will force her to keep, not to mention in what sticky function, cannot be accidental: “I must consequently resign it to its deserved Punishment; instead of being honour’d with the last Row of a Library, undergo the Indignancy of preserving the Syrup of many a choice Tart.” But instead of leaving the image at rest, she continues to degrade the

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<sup>49</sup> The term is Madeleine Kahn’s. Her study, aptly called *Narrative Transvestism*, is concerned with male authors who write as women. She argues that these male writers are gender tourists, slumming it, in a sense, and employing a “provisional writing self, a stance from which the author can play with the instability that might otherwise immobilize him” (12). Although her objective and her gender theory are different from mine, Kahn’s framing of transvestite literary voices relates to my argument, metaphorically. Charke is not writing as a man but writing as a woman who is continually trying to pass, to be something or someone else, and her narrative style, I argue, is shaped by a life *en passant*.

embarrassed papers. “[W]hen purchas’d, even the hasty Child will soon give an Instance of its Contempt of my Muse, by committing to the Flames, or perhaps cast it to the Ground, to be trampled to Death by some Thread-bare Poet” (7). Like her introductory letter, the maudlin line parodies another publishing cliché, the pages being tattered synecdoches of their tattered author. David Hume, two decades later, would decry the relative failure of *A Treatise of Human Nature* with a similar analogy: “It fell *dead-born from the press*, without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots” (“My” xxxiv). But if Hume rebounds with masculine assurance, “being naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temper,” Charke remains, more or less, “cast...to the Ground.” Because, as I will show, the *Narrative* is not only an improvisation about gender authority, played straight, but a fantasia about those related forms of passing.

In summary, genre and gender inform each other throughout the autobiography. Charke herself repeatedly passes as a typical woman, daughter, and mother – or, more properly, she tries to pass *as trying to pass* as such, anticipating and utilizing the awkwardness and instability of the pretense. This complicates the disarming but transparent “you like me! you really like me!” sort of utterance, where a well-applied veneer of abashment makes a plush vehicle for self-love: “’Tis true, I was happy in a Genius for the Stage; but I have, since my riper Years, found that the Success I met with was rather owing to indulgent Audiences, that good-naturedly encouraged a young Creature, who, they thought, might one Day come to something” (29-30). Her affective and affected standpoint makes her descriptive valuations laughably and lovably predictable and overdone. The *Narrative* tries to pretend that it is a normative memoir about a normal woman, but it overwrites the script and fails, exuberantly. The texture of behaviors, styles, and attitudes that effervesce from the interstices of its generic boundaries produces its failures and its camp.

### *The Dramaturgy of Autobiography*

The last born in Colley Cibber's brood, Charlotte Charke was an accident, "not only an unexpected, but an unwelcome Guest" (9), or so she surmises. She was seventeen when she made her official acting debut, a small role "in the Character of *Mademoiselle*, in *The Provok'd Wife*" (29), although her youth was full of impromptu theatrics, a point she proudly highlights. The drama of her writing style is unsurprising, considering her parentage, and, truthfully, theater's impact on eighteenth-century British literary culture – indeed, on British culture, generally – has been well documented.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, it is useful to think more carefully about the theatricality that organizes Charke's autobiographical impulse, or its performative mode of privacy. Instead of a textual apotheosis or a boastful catalog of accomplishments, the fodder of most autobiographies, she serves a menu of debasement, although, of course, its brand of shame is politically and socially purposive.

Undoubtedly, the *Narrative* numbers among the first published secular female autobiographies, but it finds a kindred precursor in Margaret Cavendish's short sketch, *The True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life* (1656). An afterword to her longer biography of her husband, the Duke of Newcastle, in it Cavendish presents an apologia for her notorious lifestyle. Acknowledging her predilection for making outré fashion statements, for instance, she explains, "I took great delight in attiring, fine dressing, and fashions, especially such fashions as I did invent myself, not taking that pleasure in such fashions as was invented by others. Also, I did dislike any should follow my fashions, for I always took delight in a singularity, even in accoutrements of habits" (312). In many ways, Cavendish's self-exposure is as bold as Charke's, but the former memoirist is more invested in her own character development, in fleshing out a

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<sup>50</sup> A very small sample of the extant scholarship includes: Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*; Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form*; David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*; Lisa Freeman, *Character's Theater*.

readerly life story. Charke's prose technique, on the other hand, is gestural, if not quite writerly; its abrupt bounding from vignette to vignette and surface to surface asks us readers to patch together a script for ourselves, and even then, the point and meaning of the *Narrative* remains unsettled.<sup>51</sup> For instance, in the same paragraph that alludes to her sad status as an "impertinent Intruder" to the family, she quickly praises her parents' love, thanking Colley specifically for "omit[ing] nothing that could improve any natural Talents Heaven had been pleas'd to endow [her] with" (9). Then, to obviate any accusations of unladylike hubris, she insists that she does not have a "vain Self-conceit, of knowing more, or thinking better, than any other of my Sister Females," rounding out the section with a quick nod upstairs towards "the Power Divine" (9). Within a few lines, then, she hints at her feelings of familial abjection, insists upon her parents' unconditional love, especially her patron-father's, insists upon a kindred solidarity with the other women of the world, before breathlessly thanking God and Jesus for everything.<sup>52</sup>

To write an autobiography is to authorize a form of transference between the self and the page, and Charke interweaves bizarre but passably lyric moments with florid gossip dish. Celebrity autobiographies were and are strange because they pretend to disclose secret information that was already somewhat public; without an established notoriety, no one would be interested in the pretense of exposure. The *Narrative* displays an awareness of this paradox, assuming that readers fully know her backstory while protesting that no one could ever grasp the entire truth, including herself, as stated in the opening letter. To assuage this impossible gap, the

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<sup>51</sup> Barbara Johnson has clarified the encrypting capaciousness of the writerly mode, and her discussion of the "conservatism" of the writerly can, in my mind, apply to the *Narrative*'s textual technique. "Lies, secrets, silences, and deflections of all sorts are routes taken by voices or messages not granted full legitimacy in order not to be altogether lost... writerliness is defined as attention to the trace of otherness in language, as attention to the way in which there is always more than one message..." (31). Indeed, the *Narrative*'s strangeness seems partly due to the idea that Charke herself does not really care to pin down the final meaning or aim of her autobiographical project. See "Is Writerliness Conservative?" in *A World of Difference*.

<sup>52</sup> This paragraph outline is strikingly similar to the contemporary autobiographies of aged Hollywood divas, leading men, and even B-list or D-list TV stars, is it not?

prose overextends itself by running the gamut between showy comedy and pathetic melodrama. Charke's stylistic exteriority, or her willful attention to surfaces, works to negate the generic self-exposure produced by autobiography. She describes tales "with silly metaphors and mock-heroic diction" (Glover, "Charlotte" 90), it is true, and Brian Glover aptly points out that physical descriptors and props – like a silver hat that is more lovingly described, perhaps, than the child that the hat, as part of a protective gender costume, is supposed to be protecting – are given a noticeably large amount of textual space. Charke cannot, in other words, turn "it" off.<sup>53</sup> "We begin to suspect that while Charke may have 'real' desires and motivation (such as might explain her cross-dressing), she has no intention of sharing them with us; she's much more interested in creating funny scenes" (103). Her rough brand of comedy sublimates her social and familial shame, transforming controversy into an outrageous but more disarming pastiche. If "Charke speaks in some grotesque way for her sex, creating a comic version of justification by weakness" (Spacks 82), this is less an accidental liability than an attuned performance. Lisa Freeman's general overview of the modus operandi of eighteenth-century theater is readily applicable to Charke's stagey text: "[W]hen we turn to eighteenth-century drama we find a medium obsessed not with the tensions between interiority and exteriority but with the conflicting meaning of surfaces in themselves. On the stage there was no public/private split; there was only public space and public displays" (27). The inherent publicity of the print medium dangles the specter of privacy over a reader's eyes, loading the gaps and the figural ellipses, and Charke is savvy enough to pepper a few piquant ambiguities through her *Narrative*. For instance, in the midst of one of her many money troubles, she begins a short "pillow talk" session with Mrs. Brown, and this partly-innocent, partly-coy moment nicely illustrates her marketing savoir-

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<sup>53</sup> I allude to *It*, Joseph Roach's recent monograph on the allure of celebrity from the eighteenth century to the present day.

faire: “I consulted on my Pillow what was best to be done, and communicated my Thoughts to my Friend” (120). This publication of intimacy renders privacy a gambit, a theatrical show.

Eighteenth-century autobiographies were often as digressive as their fictional contemporaries, interweaving excerpts of letters or lists, or narrating their thought processes “to the moment,” before switching to a more distant position, habits that seem random compared to the more reliably self-centered and linear examples (ghost)written today.<sup>54</sup> The *Narrative*’s lack of focused, deep introspection is unexceptional for its time. Legitimately exceptional is its strange form; I maintain that its manic assemblage mimics the eighteenth-century dramatic taste, playing to a distracted crowd, pausing and freezing and repeating tropes for maximum clarity and effect. Charke treats print like a permutation of the stage, another public setting for rehearsing an inchoate identity, and her production seems not a little bit camp because of its unsubtle flaunting of marginality and its wickedly-minded parodying of generic conventions. More than other contemporaneous memoirists, perhaps, Charke cares less about enlarging herself into a formidable lead character and more interested in interpellating kindred spirits who might recognize herself in them. What makes her work resonant with camp, then, is not its sense of humor or its “failed seriousness” – the former is hardly exceptional in the *Narrative*, and the latter simply misdiagnoses Charke’s shrewdness. Her genuine desire to level with a kindred audience, coupled with her self-aware abjection, produces an arch and novel discursive attitude that is certainly not self-effacing, a characteristic of most preceding female-authored visionary memoirs, but also not self-satisfied, a crude but fair classification for the roughly contemporaneous life writings by Hume, as we have seen, but also Rousseau, Franklin, and especially Cibber.

Evaluating the stage role Charke played during her career, Kathryn Shevelow points out that “different models of tragic heroines demanded that Charlotte master the highly stylized tragic acting techniques of the eighteenth century. Tragedy, to a greater extent than comedy, was dominated by a body of theory that governed rather strictly the expression of character and emotion” (Shevelow, *Charlotte* 130). Charke’s technique, stilted by our standards, relied on big gestures and sweeping movements, necessary strategies to seize attention from a wandering or listless audience. Actors in Charke’s – and Cibber’s – mode performed a repertory of set gestures that demonstrated their mastery of a “sequence of passions, accented by moments in which the actors held a climactic tableau indefinitely” (Roach, *Player* 69). Theater historians have pointed out that this acting method was rapidly phased out during the last half of the eighteenth century in favor of a more natural, mimetic delivery, and Charke, surveying her past from the vantage of withered health and experience, likely recognizes her lack of currency. Charke repairs her shame through wrought displays of her own body, discursively miming the acting method in vogue during the Restoration and early eighteenth century. She camouflages her social aberrances with dramatic reactions to the original offence; the affectation supplants the originating affect. For instance, when she is employed as a gentleman’s domestic, an offstage breeches role, she does not linger on the abnormality of the transvestite impulse or the details of her scheme. Instead, she emotes at great length on the cruelty of the world:

Friendship began to cool! Shame encompassed me! that where I had the smallest  
Hope of Redress remaining, I had not Courage sufficient to make an Attack. In  
short, Life became a Burden to me, and I began to think it no Sin not only to  
WISH, but even DESIRE to die. When Poverty throws us beyond the Reach of Pity,

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<sup>54</sup> For example, Benjamin Franklin begins Part Three of his *Autobiography* as such: “I am not about to write at home, August 1788. but cannot have the help expected from my Papers, many of them being lost in the War: I have

I can compare our Beings to nothing so adaptly, as the comfortless Array of  
tattered Garments in a frosty Morning. (72)

It is a vamp at misery, a dramatic low that sets off the preceding and forthcoming highs: the sort of staged affect that sets off “[her] projecting brain [that] was forced again to set itself to work” (70).

While the *Narrative*'s style is directly influenced by theatrical form, generally speaking, it also specifically responds to her father's notorious autobiography *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740). In spite of, or because of, her bristly relationship with Cibber, she invites us to compare the two throughout her *Narrative*, invoking and subverting his authority with each installment, and a queer father-daughter connection successfully emerges when the two texts are read in tandem. His text is more straightforwardly bombastic and narcissistic than hers, even when it feigns modesty, and it clearly set an alluring paradigm for digression and invention. It has camp moments, certainly, although it takes its own project far too seriously for me to believe that this effect was wholly intentional. Instead, the *Apology* is an early example of public relations, using the narrative “I” to effectively and affectively make the story more intimate. Writing on the prototypes for the novel form, J. Paul Hunter finds the *Apology* a benchmark for the eighteenth-century “willingness to go public with the fruits of subjectivity” (330), showing that Cibber “was willing to put himself on the line, literally – that he would, in print, record himself as he understood himself to be: no holds barred, no secrets willfully kept, no perceived flaws unmentioned” (331).

In *Sexual Suspects*, Kristina Straub has produced a deft appraisal of the disingenuousness encoded in the Cibberian discourse; he flaunts his status as the “butt” of court jokes, transforming shame into art. Much like Charke, then, Cibber is never offstage: “When Cibber

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however found the following...OBSERVATIONS on my Reading History in Library, May 9. 1731” (161).

makes a spectacle of himself, as he frequently does, he wears a self-consciousness that becomes an integral part of the show. The actor, Cibber shows us, is not a helpless object but a professional exhibitionist who watches even as he displays himself” (Straub 40). Self-conscious showiness, Brian Glover notes, happens to clash with the newly canonized eighteenth-century ideals about omniscient observation and positivism” (Glover, “Nobility” 527-528), a claim charging that contemporary readers would have started to notice and even take umbrage at the *Apology*’s style. True, Cibber’s relationship to debasement is quite a pose, masked by a disarming philosophy about his perceived flaws. Ironically, the fop extraordinaire, well known for his surfaces – his fussily ornate fashions – insists that his character *is* his role, that insides nullifies outsides: “I will not go out of my Character, by straining to be wiser than I *can* be, or by being more affectedly pensive than I *need* be; whatever I am, Men of Sense will know me to be, put on what Disguise I will; I can no more put off my Follies, than my Skin” (15). This defense maintains that characteristics like humility or intelligence would be, to him, like so many artificial and affected poses, taints to his holistic “Character.” On the other side, his extant “Follies” are integral components of his selfhood. Cibber’s playfulness deliberately muddles ontology and epistemology, authenticity and affectation, a common dilemma plaguing eighteenth-century actors.<sup>55</sup>

Literally capitalizing on her father’s notoriety, Charke’s *Narrative* publicizes a queer homage to familial loss, celebrating and mocking a literal patriarchal order and parodying the naturalness of love and compulsory devotion. Her father is given frequent walk-on parts in her

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<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, James Boswell, “On the Profession of a Player.” In this optimistic if cagey theory about the stage, Boswell concludes – sort of – that the role and the role-player are one, body and soul, that “a good player is indeed in a certain sense the character that he represents, during the time of his performance” (14). Because the actor’s body is also the character’s body, a consequential anatomical fact, the two cannot be cleaved, yet Boswell’s position is quickly revised to apply to just a “certain sense” or to a “mysterious” “certain degree”: “[T]he art of a player is not dissimulation, but a mysterious power of being to a certain degree the character which he represents” (33).

memoir, and she never wastes a cameo; her finger-pointing anticipates pop psychology's blame game. "Misfortunes are ever the mortifying Parents of each other, so mine were teeming" (60), she dishes in a handy segue. Transforming him from mortifier, perhaps, into the mortified, she indulges in some convenient gossip, supposedly begun by "a poor, beggarly Fellow, who had been sometimes Supernumerary in *Drury-Lane* Theatre, and Part-writer," disguising the fictive origins of the already suspicious story. In the rumor, Charke ambushes her father's carriage, holding him at gunpoint. "Upbraiding him for his Cruelty in abandoning me to those Distresses he knew I underwent, when he had it so amply in his Power to relieve me: That since he would not use that Power, I would force him to a Compliance, and was directly going to discharge upon him; but his Tears prevented me" (60). She allows her father nominal power in the forms of financial capital and paternal love, so that she can take it away by means of her phallic gun and, on the level of the narrative, by her inherently shaming storytelling. Playing on the sight gag of the foppish poet laureate in his fine coach, effeminately crying for a presumably cross-dressed daughter, the story mocks while pretending innocence, an affective posture played up as she performs utter shame at the rumor's effects. Maddened not for herself but for Cibber, she insists, Charke curses "the impudent, ridiculous Picture the Scoundrel had drawn of my Father, in this supposed horrid Scene. The Recital threw me into such an agonizing Rage, I did not recover it for a Month" (60).

In a sense, this scene, like the entire autobiography, mirrors the *Narrative's* opening letter as Charke is, despite the addition of characters, still writing to herself, publishing a fantasia that blends her feelings of shame and stubborn pride. Another creative instance of filial rescue, just in case the first proved insufficient, reifies her objective: "[T]he wicked Forger of this Story positively declared, that I was selling some Flounders one Day, and, seeing my Father, stept

most audaciously up to him, and slapt one of the largest I had full in his Face” (74). A travesty, perhaps, of a gauntlet duel, she sullies her father with a stinking weapon, an elite argument turned into a parodic and humiliating grotesquerie. And, again, she affects an abjected, wide-eyed state of overprotective disbelief. “Who, that has common Senses, could be so credulous . . . that, if it had been true, if I had escaped my Father’s Rage, the Mob would not, with strictest Justice, have prevented my surviving such an unparallel’d Villainy one Moment?” (74). This time, she recovers Cibber’s pride, granting him an army of defenders, and claims a desire to be put into her place, reinvesting his body with the semblance of masculine anger and puissance.

Here, Cibber is a synecdoche for the supplemental nature of her autobiographical production, delineating the vulnerable, parergonal relationship between writer and public text – or, in this instance, between daughter and celebrity dad. In other words, the *Narrative* completes her, which gestures towards the fact that she needs the process of writing and publicizing its text to “be herself” in public, an uncomfortable truth. She conceptualizes her father in a similar way, in that she wants to showcase a complete wholeness and independence, but Cibber’s spectral presence and regular inclusions to her story remind her that he is hardly “an inessential extra added to something complete in itself” but literally, as her parent, and symbolically essential. Thus, Charke’s heroic textual rescue belies her self-consciousness about her contingent and dependent subjectivity. Charlotte Charke is not the *Narrative*, but she is not *not* her *Narrative*, and the paradox of acting becomes a paradox of writing. In sum, her theatrically-inflected text improvises on generic form and emotional decorum, unafraid to publicly expose private sentiments but without the aggressive self-sufficiency so common to early modern autobiographies. Instead, she plays for a constructed, kindred imaginary public, a parodic permutation of the strategy deployed by Addison, Steele, Johnson, or Haywood in their

respective periodicals. Coaxing love with self-deprecation, aligning her perspective with public opinion, her “sad clown” perspective, playfully insouciant but genuinely other, fuels her misfit campiness, a queer recipe for success: “[T]hose that like to laugh I know will encourage me; and, I am certain, there is none in the World MORE FIT THAN MYSELF TO BE LAUGH’D AT” (46).

Kathryn Bond Stockton has called for a history of “dark camp,” or a subcategory of camp that embraces its shameful core, although I, following the logic of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and others, have been showing that a camp attitude has always both embraced and flaunted its own systemic fractures, wounds, and resentments. The *Narrative*’s deconstructed sense of time represents its subject as she looks through the glass, darkly, not assuming much about the future, nor retaining any allegiance to a timely past, and ultimately providing a sincerely ludicrous, discursive theater that makes rejection, rebellion, and resistance more tangible and accessible.<sup>56</sup> Instead of following the established literary standards of the surrounding imagined community, then, her bricolage of form *and* affect plays off the striking effect when disordered private musings and anxieties are publicized without paying allegiance to the normative. Charke’s self-aware and high-drama performance of desperation is vampy, ironic if we begin with the traditional definition of the vamp is a sexually voracious succubus; or, at least, a vamp plays a bad girl who wears her storied voracity in a sensational and excessive way. Charke’s textual vamping is not necessarily interested in (hetero)sexual hailing, but her vamp style intentionally and dramatically vends her female body and its products – acting, writing – as a commodity to be used and potentially disposed, if we go back to the opening letter.<sup>57</sup> I have been arguing that

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<sup>56</sup> Ann Cvetkovich’s monograph *An Archive of Feelings* evaluates “the necessarily queer process of documenting forms of trauma” (254). While I am neither making a claim about lesbian identity, nor adumbrating a historical claim about Charke’s involvement in constructing a wounded assembly and a public culture of shame, Cvetkovich’s discussion of the (female) sexual abject and their archival *corps* certainly relates to Charke’s camp strategy of narration.

<sup>57</sup> In his discussion of the vamp in early camp cinema, Michael Moon explains why directors like Warhol readily co-opted the straight vamp’s “ravenous” gaze. Vamp culture is gothic, and, as such, it inhabits a “socially and sexually

Charke's stylistically camp vamp technique simultaneously masks and reveals her abjection, a duality that resists her control even as she makes (up) time to write, perform, and publicize the memories.

### ***Shameful Citations***

Within her recent introduction to the thematically Derridean issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Jody Greene describes the elision that combines the act of remembering with the psychic threat of dismemberment. Derrida's stagey self-recollection highlights the alterity that surrounds imprecise re-citations of temps perdu: "Derrida begins this recollection of his past writing practices by misremembering his own oeuvre, by failing to cite himself confidently, as if enacting a lifetime's theorization of the failure of authorial self-presence in a momentary but illustrative lapse" (369). To err – or to forget – is human, of course, but the quoted anecdote summons us to closely and personally reexamine the uncanniness that time produces. When we forget what we said, what we wrote, or who we were in time prior, we confront the differences that grade selfhood now, then, and later, breaking our own conceited conceptions of the mastery or consistency that pretends to anchor identity. What are the consequences of the call to recall such estrangement? In her introduction to a special issue of *GLQ* devoted to queer temporality, Elizabeth Freeman reminds us that queer bodies take especial benefit by sifting through or creating within the archives of memory, a local and personal form of history. This process, which includes the autobiographical impulse, is reparative: "It suggests a potentially queer vision of how time wrinkles and folds as some minor feature of our own sexually impoverished present suddenly meets up with a richer past, or as the materials of a failed and forgotten project of the past find their uses now, in a future unimaginable in their time" (163). The unreliability of all

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marginal milieu" (81). Psychically and socially, the abjected vamp figure – or at least what she stands for: a loud and proud sexual danger – is kindred to queer culture: "[L]ike Dracula, gay youngsters are driven by desires they

memories, especially those manufactured for publication, is universal. Bad – in both senses of traumatic and faulty – memories are explicitly solicited; creative reenactments are de rigueur. But Charke’s woundedness thrives in the escapism of the memory project. Her warm embrace of temporal misquotation shows off her interest in remaking the functions of form, and time’s order is dismissed in favor of a more suitably flexible archival technique. This disorienting freedom partly accounts for the *Narrative*’s energy and especially its extreme (and sometimes extremely awkward) technique of refocusing on a self that has only been, in real time, insecurely its own agent.

Of course, the *Narrative*’s jerky cadence is partly owing to the autobiographical form, as Charke jumps the gap between the speaking “present” and the storied past tense; for its part, the *Apology* bounds back and forth, although the bulk of Cibber’s pre-theater stories are contained in the first three chapters. Analepsis and prolepsis are especially prevalent in the *Narrative* because Charke is uninterested in following a linear timeline, and in order to move farther along, she must, as will Tristram Shandy, re-summon a memory long past the narrative moment or anticipate an event far into the comparative future. And, also like Shandy, she fails to keep up. Autobiographies are necessarily incomplete because the writer cannot document his or her own death, a morbid omission that hovers over the soi-disant conclusion. Charke chooses to conclude the *Narrative* with a summary restart, a makeshift table of contents with an unusually specific date, not unlike a mock-epitaph: “This Day, *April* 19, 1766, is published the Eighth and Last Number” (140). She defends her novel sense of order by pointing out, “I have, through the whole Course of my Life, acted in Contradiction to all Points of Regularity, [and] beg to be indulged in a whimsical Conclusion of my Narrative, by introducing that last, which I will allow should have been first” (139-140). In the prose outline, Charke ticks off seven of her life’s

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may at least initially perceive as secret, forbidden, and even monstrous in the eyes of others” (81).

highlights before readdressing the reader, and the backwards-looking précis reunites with the rapidly-closing present to meet a tentative future.

And so, first is last, last is first, proper impropriety, really, in a memoir where we are rarely quite sure where we are – indeed, *when* we are. The maudlin finale is where Charke regroups, and the ineluctability of time is on her mind as she realizes that she must wrap up and exit the stage: “I have now concluded my Narrative, from my Infancy to the Time of my returning to *London*; and, if those who do me the Honour to kill Time by the Perusal, will seriously reflect on the manifold Distresses I have suffered, they must think me wonderfully favoured by Providence” (142). The grave last lines recall the fawning postures of the memoir’s beginning: “As I have nothing farther to entertain my Friends with, as to my Life, I shall, with the humblest Submission, take my Leave of them; and, as I design to pass in the *Catalogue of Authors*, will endeavour to produce something now and then to make them laugh, if possible” (143). Our pastime is borne from her passed time.

The ending that is, in many ways, just another beginning gives Charke more control of her dramatic show and shows off her cavalier disregard for normative rules about temporality and progression. Her textual strategy reminds us that identity is a repetitive performance, an assemblage of quoted affectations and lines learned elsewhere, an attitude rehearsed throughout the *Narrative*. Nonchalant about the aura of an original context and gently mocking disciplinary resistance, she applies affect without inhabiting it and creates a pastiche of various themes without bothering to feign sincerity. For citationality constitutes a large part of the *Narrative*, and Charke defends her referential style thusly: “I apprehend I shall be called in Question for my Inability, in conveying Ideas of the Passions which most tenderly affect the Heart, by so often having Recourse to abler Pens than my own, by my frequent Quotations” (66). Naturally, the

quotations, which are almost always from plays both contemporaneous and classic, hint towards Charke's allegiance to her stagecraft, and they also provide a nice lacquer of humility: "I thought there was greater Judgment in such References, than in vainly attempting to blunder out my Distress" (66). But re-citing fragments also decontextualizes canonical moments, channeling their aura onto her own project and allowing her to pervert the nominally original. Rhapsodizing on the quotation, Susan Stewart claims that its purpose is "to make present what can only be experienced abstractly, and to textualize our experience and thereby make it available for interpretation and closure" (20). The applied quotation's sharply rapid invocation of the past produces a temporal fiction of the speaker's sublime mastery, an appealing performative moment for camp.

Because quotations carry allusive baggage, Charke can draw from Shakespeare's rapidly ripening patina to queer a straight delivery; lines from *Macbeth* become lyric props, metonymies for personal emotions. For instance, her lifelong war with her sister Catherine becomes an opportunity for a battle royale revue, and we can easily envision Charke hamming through her lines: "I have generally found, in some Degree or other, my Cause revenged, though by myself unsought: And 'tis more than morally possible, I may live to see the Tears of Penitence flow from the Eyes of a yet remaining Enemy, to whose Barbarity I am not the only Victim in the Family. But,

'-----Come what come may,

*Patience and Time run thro' the roughest Day.*" (61)

Charke applies theater to make her life story more transcendent, although the drama in her original narrative far exceeds the cited lines, and, technically, even the citation is an unfaithful rehearsal – a theatrical manipulation – of Macbeth's original speech. The dialectic between

theater proper and theater of the everyday is blurred when “real” affects are best represented by artificial characters. What better defines a camp affectation than a rant that requires theater to reach its climax, that relies on (mis)quotation to summon the specter of authentic emotion?

The inclusion of old playtexts mimics the archival spirit of the *Narrative* as a whole; the fractured lines parallel the disordered temporality of Charke’s text. As Derrida expounds in *Archive Fever*, a work that also features several beginnings and digressions, “the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future” (34). Far from “neutral,” the archive transforms the past into a sketchy exorcism, a eugenic science of memory, and the dramatic selection of random quotation symbolizes Charke’s subjective cynicism about her own futurity and stability, which justifies her penchant for citing others, not for reciting the standard telos of a *Bildungsroman*. Instead, she is unabashedly up-front about her dilettantism, a highly unusual move among contemporaneous autobiographers who solicited readerly attention by crafting a noteworthy identity stable enough to authorize a quire or three. Her manic enthusiasm for self-reinvention is extensive, and even she pokes fun at her inability to commit. As a child, she decided to take the game of playing doctor outside of the house, always aware of her dearth of knowledge but smug about her acting: “[T]his Defect [her lack of schooling] was not discovered by my Patients, as I put on a Significancy of Countenance that rather served to convince them of my incomparable Skill and Abilities” (19). Although Charke recognizes that her patients were being indulgent, her fondness for pretending to work never abates. In hard times with Fielding’s troupe, she “turn’d Oil-woman and Grocer,” treating the job like a proper stage role: “The Rise and Fall of Sugars was my constant Topick; and Trading, Abroad and at Home, was as frequent in my Mouth as my Meals...and, though I seldom kept a Gallon of a Sort [of Oil] in the House, I carried on the Farce so far as to write to Country Chapmen to deal with me” (37-38). And when she and her

companion, Mrs. Brown, fall into an extended run of debt, Charke re-enters the service industry. Her depiction of playing businesswoman, the last venture she records, is worth quoting at length:

I took a little Shop, and because I was resolved to set off my Matters as grand as possible, I had a Board put over my Door, with this Inscription,

BROWN, PASTRY-COOK, FROM LONDON:

At which Place I can't charge myself with ever having, in the Course of my Life, attempted to spoil the Ingredients necessary in the Composition of a Tart. But that did not signify, as long as I was a *Londoner*, to be sure my Pastry must be good. (119)

Her shingle, capitially reprinted for us in the text, seems to allude to theater playbills, lexically conjuring her gestural style; creative marketing provides convenient maquillage for an inconveniently unadorned talent.

In summary, the re-cited memories cannily participate in Charke's specularization. In one especially curious moment full of textual highs and lows, she details how one particular instance of arrest forced a sudden separation from her young daughter Kitty, the "poor little suffering Infant" who pops in and out of the memoir like a handy stage prop. When Kitty gets word and finds her mother in prison, Charke makes sure not to spare any sentimentalism: "She immediately threw her Head upon my Bosom, and remained in speechless Grief, with which I equally encountered her...Alas! what has the POOR and FRIENDLESS TO HOPE FOR!" (49). Pointedly omitting the feminine development of familial ties increasingly present in women's narratives,<sup>58</sup> Charke's abundant vamping chews the proverbial scenery, ironically evacuating emotion by adding too much. After sending Kitty to deliver "eight and thirty Letters" asking for

relief, she is able to post bail, and upon release, she becomes concerned about her look.

Invoking Moll's strategies for hiding in plain sight, Charke sadly realizes that she should trade hats with the monitoring officer in order to remain more or less incognito, and she fondly eulogizes her costume. This thing gets equal billing with Kitty, perhaps, though her pleasure in it seems more real. "My Hat was ornamented with a beautiful Silver Lace, little the worse for wear, and of the Size which is now the present Taste; the Officer's a large one, cocked up in the Coachman's Stile, and weightened with a horrible Quantity of Crape" (50). The fabulous hat is more consequential than the comparatively mundane crime.

But the straits continue, especially for Kitty, who "was so deeply affected with the Malevolence of my Fortune, it threw her into a very dangerous Illness" (51). Charke resists divulging many of her own feelings about incarceration, debt, or deprivation. Instead, Kitty stands in, and *la pauvre miserable* internalizes her mother's troubles by falling ill and seizing. The child's death-like despair – for who can resist a distressed innocent – helps readers orient their sympathies, and Charke wastes no time putting her Kitty to good use. Her daughter's near-death experience is used to discursively reenact her style of maternal drama. "I took her up, and, overcome with strong Grief, immediately dropped her on the Floor...My screaming and her falling raised the House; and, in the Hurry of my Distraction, I run into the Street, with my Shirt-Sleeves dangling loose about my Hands, my Wig standing on End, *'Like Quills upon the fretful Porcupine'*" (52). Charke stages the scene less like a fiction writer and more like a playwright, ending with a line from *Hamlet* and choosing ambiguous descriptors like "strong Grief" in order to focus our attention on her trademark movements and gestures. Caught up in her own story, the verb tense shifts midway through the passage, transforming past action into present

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<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Charke's over-emotionally unemotional attachment to Kitty seems more similar to Defoe's representations of Moll Flanders' strange version of maternal love. Both narrators make children into catalysts for

movement, while the constative act of Kitty's fainting is constrained to the past – "[Charlotte] *run[s]* into the Street" – giving her position more vitality and currency.

This section exemplifies Charke's wonderfully perverse ability to see tragedy as a priceless opportunity for the camp vamp, a method of refocusing the attention on herself, and Kitty necessarily recedes further from the scene: "[P]roclaiming the sudden Death of my much-beloved Child, a Crowd soon gathered round me, and, in the Violence of my Distraction, instead of administring [sic] any necessary Help, wildly stood among the Mob to recount the dreadful Disaster" (52). Parental inattentiveness is disguised by her hammy retelling, and the mother's presence and voice melts into or is subsumed by the crowd. We readers are likely guilty by association; like the crowd and Charke herself, it is easy to forget about Kitty. Charke's exhibitionism, then, passes by normal behavior, or, more properly, it passes over privacy in favor of the outward forms and postures of motherly love, literalizing the tacit social solicitation for the signifiers that give significance to emotional proof and sublimating her much-vaunted anxieties of inadequacy and shame. Indeed, motherly love, or fatherly? As a final flourish, we are slyly informed that the scene was performed in drag, a detail casually inserted at the end of the anecdote: "[I]t drew them into Astonishment, to see the Figure of a young Gentleman, so extravagantly grieved for the Loss of a Child" (52). The purview has now completely shifted onto Charlotte's body and its deployed masculinity, transforming the specter of ordinary grief into extraordinary spectacle through a sartorial citation of gender that coincidentally sends up literary clichés, regimes of sentimentality, and domestic normality.

### *Affecting Style*

When Thomas King remarks that "Charlotte Charke's performances in male drag... may be among the first recorded instances of 'camping,'" ("Fop" 127) he makes the Butlerian

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storytelling and development, little blips in the eternal diva's story.

reminder that sartorial transgressions like Charke's happen to "refute the naturalness, universality, and objectivity of the masculine body" (127). As I have been demonstrating, her confrontational drag act also inhabits her writing style, meaning that Charke's sumptuary travesty acts have left a queer trace that (dis)orders her *Narrative*. Of course, Charke's predilection for drag is notorious. "Having, even then, a passionate Fondness for a Perriwig" (10), she insists that she loved impersonating her father as early as age four. The passage is replete with *things*, "a Waistcoat of my Brother's, and an enormous Tie-wig of my Father's," not to omit a monstrous Belt and large Silver-hilted Sword" (10). Girlish morphology is dwarfed by purloined possessions, but the clothes do not make her the man and instead magnify the costume's distorting effect, enlarging the disparity between natural body and travesty role. Not without bitterness, Lillian Faderman called Charke "a stage personality" (55) in her reparative lesbian history, protesting that Charke never showed commitment to same-sex desire, to transvestism, or to queerness itself, that she was always just acting out to extend her proverbial fifteen minutes of fame. Of course, it is curious to criticize Charke for not being gay enough, but we can theorize about her exposition of acting out while dressing up. In other words, she plays hide and seek, discursively speaking, with the subject of cross-dressing, sometimes mentioning it with pride, as above, other times skirting the issue, pun intended, though always refusing to theorize about her gender style decisions.

In the twentieth century and beyond, pure camp is equated with flamboyant gay transvestites, at least in the public imaginary, and while this is a sloppy metonymy, cross-dressing delimits the first and most basic link to Charke's eighteenth-century camp sensibility. Female cross-dressers were not automatically considered monstrous in the eighteenth century, and molly culture was more rigorously policed, as male-to-female transvestism became

anathema after the Caroline Restoration. However, female cross-dressers were less likely to be dismissed as harmlessly eccentric or charmingly scrappy if they used male clothing to disrupt heteronormativity or cause social discord. For instance, about ten years before the *Narrative* appeared, Charke's former boss Henry Fielding published *The Female Husband* (1746), a sensational work of creative non-fiction about Mary Hamilton, a woman who allegedly fooled another into marriage and is duly punished "for having by false and deceitful practices endeavoured to impose on some of his Majesty's subjects" (49). This sort of unacceptable gender play contrasts with permissible onstage travesty roles, which were designed to sexualize attractive actresses; breeches showed off shapely female legs in a provocatively novel way. In other words, male costume was used as an ironic prop to highlight the "real" woman beneath, designed to encourage, not complicate, a (male) spectator's heteronormative desire: "It was central to the effect that the actress's femininity showed through" (Rogers 255).

The commonly extant tension between an intentional and unintentional camp effect is exacerbated in Charke's situation because there is little extant proof that her performances found a kindred audience who fully grasped her deliberate performance of alterity.<sup>59</sup> Mostly questionable is not Charke's intentionality, a question vexed by her estranged familial relations and her persistent poverty, but whether or not her spectators – or readers, in this case – were in on her joke. It is much clearer that many did *not* get her agenda or her sense of humor. But even though the mainstream press misread the *Narrative*, this is less proof positive of Charke's naïveté and more confirmation of her outsider status. For instance, a curmudgeonly writer in a 1755 edition of *The Monthly Review* can only offer brief and rather backhanded advice: "As this unhappy woman proposes to gain something from the sale of her book, the less we say of it, the

less we shall contribute towards the frustrating her [sic] hopes, or expectations” (*Monthly Review*, Vol. 12, 478). In late 1755, *The Gentleman’s Magazine* published an abridged, altered, but lengthy reprisal of the *Narrative* over three issues, but only after exorcising Charke’s idiosyncratic style.

Hans Turley has written extensively about the *Magazine’s* strategic stylistic revisions, which notably replaced Charke’s first-person voice with a restrained third-person perspective, concluding that “*The Gentleman’s Magazine’s* epitome shows that it is not possible to understand completely Charke’s ‘real Self’ as she presents it” (196). Or, perhaps more precisely, a mainstream periodical, one that published Cibber’s annual lay, for instance, could not, or would not, make such an understanding public. Reviews about Charke’s fiction become more judgmental. If reviewers were patronizing about Charke’s memoir, they became more personally vindictive about her fictional prose. A capsule review in a 1756 edition of *The Monthly Review* says of *The History of Henry Dumont*: “Mrs. Charke’s work may, however, afford a few hours entertainment to such romance-readers as, fortunately for this class of authors, pay little regard to language, style, nature, imitation, contrivance, or, in short, to proprieties of any kind, provided they are amused with variety of *surprizing* events...As to this Authoress, the defects of her performance are the more pardonable, as it does not appear that she is a writer from genius, or choice; but from cruel necessity” (*Monthly Review*, Vol. 14, 445). These comments, while ostensibly critical of Charke’s writing style, also target her personal style. Charke’s entire sensibility or point of view is judged, and the dismissal transcends gender discrimination or neutral evaluation. The reviewers’ censure, a public shaming, clarifies the real conditions of her abjection. This example of her passing is the most literal, but her drag should also be considered

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<sup>59</sup> Fabio Cleto explains that “deliberate camp is produced by a self-consciousness in the camp(ing) subject...The deliberately camping subject fashions itself through self-parody, setting up a pantomime stage in which s/he is fully,

a metaphor for her larger boundary-crossing project.

Direct confessions of erotic desire are lacking in the pages, and for reasonable causes. Indeed, Charke minimalizes the sexual implications of her own cross-dressing until the latter sections of the *Narrative*, initially framing it as jejune playacting. The initial drag anecdotes enter rather abruptly into her story, retold at particular moments, she assures us, only because she has “promis’d to conceal nothing that might raise a Laugh” (10). Using the figure of the cute child as an analeptic motive, the narration still queers Charke’s subjectivity. Giving abjection a topological application, wee Charke chooses a strange stage to show herself to best – or perhaps worst – advantage: “[I] roll’d myself into a dry Ditch...and, in this Grotesque Pigmy-State, walk’d up and down the Ditch bowing to all who came by me...the Oddity of my Appearance soon assembled a Croud about me; which yielded me no small Joy” (11). Treading in the mud with coat-tails dragging in the rivulets, toddler Charke quite literally uses lowness to lampoon the high. It is tempting to dismiss the scene as simple proof of Charke’s singular need to incorporate her father in both body and fame, rendering it more essential to attend to her strategy of degradation. Indeed, this is no straight homage to the paternal, and she gleefully underscores the incommensurability of her impression: “I began to consider that ’twould be impossible for me to pass for Mr. *Cibber* in Girl’s Shoes” (11). The accessories, so carefully chosen, only function to make the charade more ridiculous, and her drawn-out attention to all of the details of her look ironically resonates with Cibber’s fastidious reputation, a generational slap that we have partially parsed above.

Charke’s cross-dressing moments are filtered through narrative, of course, and she delivers verbal stripteases that alternate between sidelining and spotlighting gender play, ultimately giving more attention to the gambit than the final so-called exposure. She often hints

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and centrally, as at once actor and spectator, part of it” (25).

that her gender costuming is a protective device, a plausible prophylactic in an urban London, but, of course, she takes clear pleasure in the artful mimicry, in upending bourgeois expectations about gender morphology, the very attitude that garnered bad reviews.<sup>60</sup> Her masculine incorporations, which often span both gender and class lines, transcend apparel. With an unmistakable wink at her readers, Charke discusses her cross-dressed allure by pretending not to recognize or understand its plausibility. “I appeared as Mr. *Brown*...in a very genteel Manner; and, not making the least Discovery of my Sex by my Behaviour, ever endeavouring to keep up to the well-bred Gentleman” (56). In this particular instance, she finds herself all too successful at her breeches part, attracting the desiring gaze of a woman who just happened to be “an Orphan Heiress” with “forty thousand Pounds in the Bank of *England* : Besides Effects in the *Indies*, that were worth about twenty Thousand more” (56). What unfolds is an abbreviated but queer version of the traditional domestic novel romance. Upon learning of the lady’s intentions, Charke only says, “I received the Information with infinite Concern; not more in regard to myself, than from the poor Lady’s Misfortune, in placing her Affection on an improper Object” (56-57). Tellingly, she is evasive about her own affect, redirecting implicit questions about her sexual desire onto the other woman; the latter’s “improper” love can only lead to physical disappointment.

Continuing the charade with politesse, Charke ventures to the lady’s home to set her gender straight. The confessional parlor scene is laid out in fine detail; the young lady’s embarrassment inspires our pity, while Charke, as a man, evokes natural confidence. Looking backward or forward to the likes of Lovelace or Darcy, she coolly sizes up the lovestruck girl: “She was not the most Beautiful I have beheld, but quite the Agreeable; sung finely, and play’d

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<sup>60</sup> Interested in giving women more credit for their social contributions to camp, George Piggford remarks that androgynous women, like androgynous men, “employ a camp sensibility – a code of appearance and behavior that

the Harpsichord as well; understood Languages, and was a Woman of real good Sense” (59). The narrating voice – quite intentionally, it is impossible to tell whose thoughts we are accessing, those of the female actress or the male “character”? – has decidedly firm preferences about desirable women. The passages in the scene remain tonally unstable, but the mock-seriousness cannot overwrite Charke’s sincere air of gratitude and pleasure: “I was sorry for us both, that Providence had not ordained me to be the happy Person she designed me; that I was much obliged for the Honour she conferr’d on me, and sincerely grieved it was not in my Power to make a suitable return” (59). We cannot know her amorous intentions, of course; to force an uncloseting would be, to paraphrase Thomas King, exactly how not to queer Charke. But although she claims just disinterested kindness for a woman “whose Name I would not for the Universe have banded about” (59), it is not impossible to imagine that her regrets are more melancholic.

Such psychic losses resonate with her in-jokes about erotic desire. Charke’s playful technique of privacy queers normative expectations about both literary convention and erotic desire, blocking the memoir reader’s anticipatory consummation with secret knowledge. Conventions like heterosexual dalliances are transformed into secrets for secret’s sake. “I was addressed by a worthy Gentleman (being then a Widow) and closely pursued ‘till I consented to an honourable, though very secret Alliance; and, in Compliance to the Person, bound myself by all the Vows sincerest Friendship could inspire, never to confess who he was. Gratitude was my Motive to consent to this Conjunction, and extream Fondness was his Inducement to request it” (47). The scant disclosure clarifies the ostensible sex of the lover but nothing else, adding far more mystery than resolution. She has little to say about the transaction or interaction, and the only perceivable frisson derives from the pleasure she has in keeping the secret.

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mocks and ironizes gender norms – in order to undermine the gender assumptions of their specific cultures” (284).

But same-sex erotic episodes, even when they are precisely cases of mistaken identity, naturally performed in drag, incorporate discursive secrecy differently. During one of her stints as a household waiter, Charke is encouraged by a female domestic to court the lady of the house: “I might marry her Mistress’s Kinswoman, if I would pay my Addresses; and that she should like me for a Master extreamly, advising me to it by all Means” (85). She shares a wink with us readers, as the punchline relies on the maid’s misrecognition of Charke’s gender, but does not balk from exploiting the soupcon of intimacy between her and the servant, letting us envision a same-sex ménage with both maid and mistress, certainly a non-normative conquest and an eagerly solicited one, at that. And true to Charke’s discursive strategy, gossip that tries to set the record straight only inspires more disorientation:

In the Interim Somebody happened to come, who hinted that I was a Woman; upon which, Madam, to my great Surprize, attacked me with insolently presuming to say she was in Love with me, which I assured her I never had the least Conception of. *No, truly; I believe*, said she, *I should hardly be ‘namour’d* WITH ONE OF MY OWN *Sect*: Upon which I burst into a Laugh, and took the Liberty to ask her, if she understood what she said?  
(85)

Only after learning Charke’s gender does the eligible mistress try to define an amatory declaration, and her haughty scorn delegitimizes same-sex desire as absurdly nugatory. Charke’s response, an evasive Medusa’s laugh, mocks the embarrassed mistress, whose speculation, of course, is more correct than she knows. But again, Charke obviates the question of her own same “*Sect*” desire by reintroducing its very possibility, for she claims to reject the bachelorette not because she is indeed a woman but because she is not the *right* one: “[T]his insensible Mortal [the aforementioned domestic] told the young Woman, that I intended to make Love to her;

which, had I really been a Man, would have never entered in my Imagination, for she had no one Qualification to recommend her to the Regard of any Thing beyond a Porter or a Hackney-Coachman” (85).

When she offers a rare direct comment about her offstage travesty habit, she explains it all by explaining nothing: “My being in Breeches was alledged to me as a very great Error, but the original Motive proceeded from a particular Cause; and I rather chuse to undergo the worst Imputation that can be laid on me on that Account, than unravel the Secret, which is an Appendix to one I am bound, as I before hinted, by all the Vows of Truth and Honour everlastingly to conceal” (73). Conceivably, she could be bound to the young lady just mentioned but is likely referring to another agreement, one never fully documented in the *Narrative*. Her incorporation of masculinity is already unmistakably defiant, and her refusal to verbally justify her non-normative dress adds another layer to her subversion. Taunting the readers with a stylized digression, she shores up her agency by refusing to consummate our will to know. A singular episode involving animal husbandry offers a tacit confirmation of Charke’s suspicion of the epistemology of gender. “[I] went, in one of my extraordinary Hurries, to buy a Sow with Pig; but, to my great Disappointment, after having kept it for near three Months, expecting it hourly to bring forth, it proved to be an old Barrow” (117-118). Mistaking a neutered old hog for an enceinte ovine, she reminds us that gender is potentially always amenable to passing, even without new clothes, at least to those who cannot read the signs. Like the poor pig, she is not, she assures us, so easily taxonomized.

Truly, even before she dresses to pass on a regular basis, her boundary-crossing gender project manifests when she describes what could or should be the picture of quintessential normativity. Upending banal normalcy with her version of matrimonial bliss, she does not spare

any dig at Richard Charke, profligate musician and estranged husband, starting with her technique of treating him as just another anecdotal distraction or diversion in her star vehicle. Youth and adulthood narratives are commingled as she pointedly holds Richard's story to relay "one unfortunate Circumstance more" (25) involving a near-catastrophic driving accident. The physical danger of the carriage caprice "put a Period to the Fertility of my mischievous Genius," she deadpans. But her seemingly artless transition from kiddie exploits to the all-too-adult business of marriage also comments on the puerility of the latter. Somewhat unlike the young lady who falls for the wrong paramour because she reads too many novels, Charke marries because it is the next thing to try, not necessarily because she has a romanticized template in mind. "Alas! I thought it a fine Thing to be married, and indulged myself in a passionate Fondness for my Lover" (27), an affection that recalls her "passionate Fondness for a Perriwig," perhaps. Marriage, we recognize, is simply another piece of drama for her personal repertory, like practicing quack physick or commandeering a surrey.

The courtship story is contained in two pages, but in spite of her brevity, we recognize her whimsical desire to play house: "it gave me an Air of more Consequence to be call'd Mrs. *Charke*, than Miss *Charlotte*" (28). Perfectly fulfilling Eve Sedgwick's triangulation theory, she pointedly outlines how Richard treats her as a negligible obstacle to her father's fame, connections, and purse, unblinkingly delineating the metaphorical sexual ménage: "I seldom had the Honour of [Richard's] Company but when Cash run low, and I as constantly supplied his Wants; and have got from my Father many an auxiliary Guinea, I am certain, to purchase myself a new Pair of Horns" (29). Thus, her cuckold's horns – usually a male accoutrement, to begin with – are not bestowed by her husband but, financially speaking, come from Colley, allowing Charke to redirect her scorn up the family tree. But her horns are also, as she explains, self-

purchased, a self-inflicted badge that makes her domestic solitude seem defiantly masturbatory, as she flagrantly embraces her avatar of marital discord. Indeed, she never veers from a measured disregard for the model of marital sexuality, and his dalliances constitute an inconvenience she finds no shame in exposing; his adultery, she breezily explains, “made me at last grow quite indifferent” (28), a testament, no doubt, to her pride but also to her affective position. But his dramatic actions catalyze her dramatic acting, and we are treated to the manic but sorrowful image of a newlywed Charlotte tramping up and down the alleys looking for her missing husband. “[His infidelity], *entre nous*, was a most horrible Bar in my Escutcheon of Content; insomuch, that married Miss was, the first Twelvemonth of her connubial State, industriously employed in the Pursuit of fresh Sorrow, by tracing her Spouse from Morn to Eve through the Hundreds of *Drury*” (28). The only intimation she reveals about her own psychology is that his “loose and unkind Behaviour, consequently made me extravagant and wild in my Imagination” (29), a vague summation of her marital insouciance. I would like to imagine that her reactionary disregard for acting properly, pun intended, catalyzes her pointed response to Richard and to the so-called respectability that he brings.

I have been arguing that her boundary-crossing project is both literal and symbolic. Crossed by Richard, then, not to mention Colley, Charke finds cross-dressing a suitable comment on the improvisational, theatrical nature of gender construction and a convenient habit for her sequence of offstage adventures. The emotional drag and duress produced by the tenets of social propriety is somewhat alleviated by the pleasures of sartorial drag. Michael McKeon has recently exposed the literary category of “secret histories,” a large spectrum of early modern texts that “signal their secrecy through allegorical, amatory ‘romance’ plots that sanction techniques of close reading to uncover their deepest public meaning” (McKeon, *Secret* 471).

Although the *Narrative* is hardly a proper allegory, the interpellative dimension that McKeon highlights is most applicable to Charke's autobiography, which circulates myriad open secrets, factoids that were likely already known by the gossipy London public. Secret histories hide in plain sight new information for those readers savvy and discerning enough to get the message, for, "read aright, what appears to be an exotic tale or history turns out to have present and public application" (471). If we queer McKeon's flexible and capacious formulation, it resonates with the social project of the camp modality, even and especially within an eighteenth century context. As the provided examples adumbrate, Charke absorbs and deploys the subaltern position – she is, she continually reminds us, the prodigal daughter, a disrespected junior actress, a gender outlaw, but she makes a compelling and complicated spectacle out of her abjection. Pastry-cook, gentleman's aide, and a camp pioneer.

## CHAPTER 4

### GOOD HAIR DAY: SURFACE PLEASURES IN *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*

“A lie has no leg, but a scandal has wings.”  
Thomas Fuller

Sublime beauty is the stuff of epics. That Alexander Pope celebrated beauty is unquestionable. We all know by rote Arabella Fermor’s position as the ultimate Catholic toast of Pope’s time, not to gloss over his verbal *ménage a trois* with the Blount sisters, well captured in a legion of letters, or his on-again, off-again war of wits with haute items such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. And while the *Lock* is an earnest champion of classic form, both literary and sensual, it is also a “heroi-comical” study of the pleasures of degradation and facsimile, two acts that are especially related to the culture of (non-royal) celebrity, a phenomenon arguably nascent in the commercially expansive, print-savvy long eighteenth century. Belinda makes a splendid and pointedly nondescript “it girl,” and the surrounding poem is partly an exquisite piece of fan fiction, gleefully sculpting the afterlife of one storied incident. Pope creates an aesthetic object out of an aesthetic event, and the poem exposes his supreme pleasure in the spectacle of a belle as she rages into that good night.

While not quite Pygmalion and Galatea redux, Pope’s sketch of Belinda definitely exposes his fascination, ambivalent as it may be, with this class of women. The satire shot throughout the mock epic is shaped by the auteur’s liminality as he haunts both the beau monde and the socio-religious margins. While avoiding the harsher, scatological inventories of female beauty performed by colleagues like Swift, Pope successfully disarms the diva; although, unlike in much of Swift, the woman remains intact. And so, the poem is always appreciating what it (partly) scorns, even, to my mind, (re)inventing the dialectic between artist and muse, and between stardom and fandom, publicly and stylishly defining how to adore superficiality

precisely for its own sake. An offhand comment within Geoffrey Tillotson's introduction to the *Lock* pithily captures the crux of the division between the gender and the individual, and between the individual and the reified *thing*: "He makes his hero a woman, and not simply any woman, but Belinda herself."<sup>61</sup> The form and technique of this act of sublimation and othering differentiates the poem and its style from other objectifying poems, from blazons to odes to satirical epistles.

Both the female toast and the crippled Catholic are styled as victims, albeit in very different ways. The camp resides in how a posed affinity with the heroine switches from an intimate confidence with the doomed abject, a ruined, broken woman, to a clipped and clearly vindictive barb at the other's Other: Pope's Belinda. The two are one, *except* when Pope says they are not; because this is Pope's poem, he can reclaim agency, at least on the page. When James Kim remarks, "[i]n Pope's view, the mock-epic depicts 'the low actions of life' – 'low' being a standard term of neoclassical poetics for the common and the everyday, of course, but one that nonetheless unmistakably registers a certain snobbish revulsion for the inglorious, undignified stuff of modernity" (16), he is isolating the significance of Pope's poetic dalliance in the mean arena of petty superficialities. Pope and the reader, assuming an alignment with the satiric agent, may share a delicious laugh facilitated by the poet's winking erudition. When a classically trained reader recognizes a (deliberately debased) trope reappropriated to the protection of a silly belle, the incongruity forms a fairy story, one that hails the clever with its unmistakable frivolity. Yet the vaginal allusions which synecdochize Belinda, all punny reductions, debase womanhood less than the heroic battalions assigned to her care; indeed, they connect Belinda's body as empire to the very familiar imperial blazons that unmistakably

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<sup>61</sup> Tillotson, Introduction, p. 116. All citations from *The Rape of the Lock* are sourced from *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, Volume II: *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*. London: Methuen & New Haven: Yale UP. Third edition,

characterize land as female possession, a figure that Pope celebrates in earnest in works such as *Windsor Forest*. “Know then, unnumber’d Spirits round thee fly, / The light *Militia* of the lower Sky; / These, tho’ unseen, are ever on the Wing, / Hang o’er the *Box*, and hover round the *Ring*” (I, 41-44).

The phrase “mock epic” seems to promise an impish levity, but, despite the moniker, mock epics do not target a single object, not even just “the epic.” The sardonic incongruity of old and new seems to define the genre in the eighteenth century, as Mr. Spectator acknowledges and conditionally accepts: “In Mock-Heroick Poems, the use of the Heathen Mythology is not only excusable but graceful, because it is the Design of such Compositions to divert, by adapting the fabulous Machines of the Ancients to low Subjects, and at the same time by ridiculing such kinds of Machinery in Modern Writers” (*Spectator* 523, 362). To divert in turn, the *Lock* smashes together old and new models of exalted and estimable mores, borrowing liberally from the epic form to produce a hybridized representation that is neither here nor there in literary time. This means that a winking poetics of anachronism drives its machinery as it takes advantage of the epic’s literal but never symbolic deadness to perform a miniature pantomime of the larger battle between the ancients and the moderns. But is Pope consistently “ridiculing such kinds of Machinery” in his own mock epic, a foreshadowing of *Peri-Bathous* and its cheeky self-deflation? Or is he ridiculing a culture that can smugly diagnose the machinery as artificial and implausible, blind to its own modern props and shortcuts? For instance, how would Mr. Spectator gauge Pope’s wry critique of the caffeinated public sphere and the powerful delusions that coffee can inspire within even the dullards who imbibe: “*Coffee*, (which makes the Politician wise, / And see thro’ all things with his half-shut Eyes) / Sent up in Vapours to the Baron’s Brain / New Stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain” (III, 117-120). The lines make light of the mystical

contrivances of genius and inspiration, but they do so without defining a particular time. Whether the Baron was struck by the eighteenth century's heady jolt of caffeine or a classical god's lightning bolt is immaterial, or, more accurately, both are equally inconsequential. Both foment artificial performances; the former is wrongly absolved from the satiric arrow because it is too close to home, too normative, too common, too bourgeois.

As parody, the *Lock* takes advantage of the insidious power of contrasts. As I explain in the introduction, fueled by the reactionary attitude that accompanies marginality, camp parody makes use of its own difference even more than straight parody. It deploys the catalytic wound that fuels its parodic energy, while it carves its own ludic yet vicious space out and away from the normative original. Pope's ambiguous mockery of the feminine realm confesses the poet's discomfited attitude about women; the *Lock* is modern camp not because it is superficially about the superficial but because it is deeply invested in (re)defining and correcting the societal place of the superficial and the material. Because its author is writing from the margins himself, the poem can showcase an intimate fondness for the feminine other it uses, abuses, but often empathizes with. The metonymic and comically hypermasculine steel gashes Belinda's beauty, true, but it also destroys other noble forms. Although Pope makes sure to place his work among the eternal at the very end, here he mourns how beauty, assumedly including his own work, is decimated by the epic foolishness of (male) puissance, a wasting power that he cannot claim to wield. "What Time wou'd spare, from Steel receives its date, / And Monuments, like Men, submit to Fate!" (III, 171-172).

Pope certainly wondered about how low one could or should go without tarnishing the composition, or "how far a Poet, in pursuing the description or image of an action, can attach himself to *little circumstances*, without vulgarity or trifling?" (qtd. in Lamb, "Comic" 119), a

rhetorical question made familiar by the *Lock*'s opening lines: "What dire Offence from am'rous Causes springs, / What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things" (I, 1-2). Pope's measure of literary anxiety is repurposed into a poem that is distractingly and cleverly extreme, a keen distraction that would have us believe that the poem's strategic ridicule is unidirectional. This writerly sublimation is not itself new – indeed, it is a vital component of the other works included in my study of camp – but the *Lock*'s up-front use – and intentional abuse – of *popularity* and the nexus of modern affects and affectation it brings strikes me as a formidable benchmark in the history of camp humor and revenge. This chapter will explore how and why, in this example of eighteenth-century mock epic, Pope's objectification of an already commodified and sexualized female presents a unique delineation of the vexed affection and identification between admirer and nearly-beloved that is resident in queer parody. The poem's ambiguous construction, intentionally presented and packaged as fine art or history, represents Belinda as priceless waste, a marginalization by the marginalized that is mean but protective, disgusted and adoring, emitting the love-to-hate-to-love tonality of modern camp.

### *The Waste Land*

The perspective of camp texts like Walpole's sardonic gothic fantasias contrast with Pope's take on literary "surplus value." Instead of a gleefully twisted family dystopia where everything is enlarged from the infamous helmet onward, in the *Lock* life is contained and miniaturized, so when small-scale affects, behaviors, and, indeed, the signifiers of femininity itself are blown up to fill the space of the epic, the sublime contrast of scale and appropriateness becomes part of the aesthetic pleasure.

And now, unveil'd, the *Toilet* stands display'd,  
Each Silver Vase in mystic Order laid.

First, rob'd in White, the Nymph intent adores  
With Head uncover'd, the *Cosmetic Pow'rs*.  
A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears,  
To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears; (I, 121-126)

The extended passage is celebrated for its playful take on the rituals of armament for battle; for women like Belinda, warfare and quotidian life require the same artful preparations. But even as the set-up mocks the gravity of the lady's dressing room and cracks open the artificiality that makes such women *women*, the tone is earnestly reverent. The "*Cosmetic Pow'rs*" are as severe as the blades that would undo them, and this persistent elevation and undercutting is the *modus operandi* of Pope's poem. Not all of the satirical imitation of elite womanhood effects degradation, but Pope's relentless use and eventual discarding of its myriad feminine subjects remains critically complex in a way that is related to the theory of drag, mimicry, and incorporation.

Arabella's presence, filtered through the perspective of poetry, is a symbol of fame. While not an actress, she fulfills a similar role, at least in the social theater – the Catholic elite – about whom Pope writes. Many critics have discussed the power of the early modern actress, framing her in more contemporary theoretical terms. Joseph Roach's study on celebrity traces the history of "public intimacy." According to many, the constituent ephemerality of stage performance – the irksome truth that, until the development of recording equipment – and even the fidelity and representation of Memorex media hosts its own critical arena – you could not own a souvenir of the acting itself: "theatrical performance, like fire – releasing energy from matter that is utterly consumed in the process, disappearing as a condition of its iteration, and leaving behind little trace of itself except the desire for more – roared to life as charismatic

attractions on the cusp of medieval vernacular religion and the magic of the market” (Roach, *It* 29). “The audience’s imagined intimacy with the theatrical and social being of the celebrated actress flourished throughout the century and surpassed that which was accorded to male players. This effect is in part a result of the culture’s regarding the feminine as more accessible than the masculine, and its exercise of a double standard in centering on the actress as a locus of cultural desires” (Nussbaum, *Rival Queens* 16).

The concept of celebrity allows an outsider to gain proximal access to the values that individual represents, facilitating a false sense of intimacy between fan and star, a relationship that often ends in the fan’s discarding and disregarding of the fallen luminary. Stella Tillyard has outlined the reasons why the concept of celebrity, which differs slightly from the broader phenomenon of fame, was born in the eighteenth century. “Celebrity was born at the moment private life became a tradeable public commodity. It had, and still has, a more feminine face than fame, because private life, and the kind of virtue around which reputations could pivot, were both seen to reside in femininity and in women” (25). Unlike fame, which is sought after and glorified, celebrity involves frisson, gossip, and the plucking of privacy; it *exposes*. Belinda’s celebrity and star quality is figured by the synecdochical lock that undergoes a quasi-apotheosis by the poem’s end:

But trust the Muse – she saw it upward rise,  
Tho’ mark’d by none but quick Poetic Eyes:  
(So *Rome*’s great Founder to the Heav’ns withdrew,  
To *Proculus* alone confess’d in view.)  
A sudden Star, it shot thro’ liquid Air,  
And drew behind a radiant *Trail of Hair*. (V, 123-128)

Readers can and do interpret this grand finale in scores of ways, but I am especially interested in its painstaking literalness. While “star” was not likely used as a true synonym for a celebrity figure in 1714,<sup>62</sup> Belinda’s fabled lock, fetishized in the Freudian and Marxian senses, is destined to outshine the woman it once adorned. Although the message provides nothing more than a classic *memento mori*, its frivolity wittily resonates with the mortally plain truth: “For, after all the Murders of your Eye, / When, after Millions slain, your self shall die” (V, 144-145). The conceit is sublimely ridiculous, metaphysical analogies turned bathetic, and the melodramatic episode of hair-raising, or hair-rising, brilliantly reminds us that the entire epic was never really about the literal, actual Arabella, or her virtue, trinkets, or family, but about the relationship between all of the myriad makeshift Astrophels and their construction of Stella. In other words, the *Lock* is a study of how to best copy a copy, or, more precisely, how to elegantly account for, satirize, and *celebrate* an ethereal chimera, a thing beloved for its thingness, nothing more, nothing less.

Therefore, when Park considers the *Lock*’s finale, the creation of the shooting star, as a moment when sincere affect peeks through the bathos, I find her description to be an inadvertently ideal capsulization of its camp parody: “To represent the plenitude and absence of this world, and then to constellate that world as a series of things signifying and containing loss, not gain, suggests a desire to engage the emotional consequences of frivolity and excess” (Park 195). That Pope is unsettled by his uneven affection for the “frivolity and excess” that Belinda represents is clear, but, as camp, his parody can simultaneously debase and promote while spectacularly masking its confusion over what its style signifies. When Belinda examines her broken silhouette after the fact, her gorgeous symmetry destroyed by the Baron’s shearing, the bathetic elevation of the haircut coldly mocks the real consequences of rape. However, the loss is

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. OED, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, “star,” n. 1, esp. definition 5.

real even when dressed as metonymy; the vehicle for the satire tells the truth even as the lines do their job of shaming a young woman's vanity.

See the poor Remnants of these slighted Hairs!

My hands shall rend what ev'n thy Rapine spares:

These, in two sable Ringlets taught to break,

Once gave new Beauties to the snowie Neck,

The Sister-Lock now sits uncouth, alone,

And in its Fellow's Fate foresees its own;

Uncurl'd it hangs, the fatal Sheers demands;

And tempts once more thy sacrilegious Hands.

Oh hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize

Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these! (IV, 167-176)

Belinda's wistfulness for the other kind of rape privileges the price of visibility over chaste morality; at least those other "Hairs" wouldn't be suffered to openly parade through the panoptic Mall. But despite the mockery, Belinda is right to mourn the loss of part of her beauty, as it grants her identity as a belle, a celebrity Catholic, and the subject of the (mock) epic poem. Her hysterical threat to rip out at the roots the remainders of her coiffure, her pledge to make even what the Baron imbalanced, anticipates the sentimental drama of the Clarissa Harlowes of the literary world, those women who are tacitly praised for giving up their subjectivity along with their hymens, although those are mostly "less in sight" to the general but judging public.

Belinda's prophylactic pledge to rid herself of the other tempting lock is both prematurely silly and honestly reflective of gendered values, although we are, at first, only supposed to credit the former reading. Is there much ado about nothing? The ambiguity deepens, depending on whether

the nothing is her symbolic virginity, a non-thing that is manifested by an empty space, or the literal lock of hair. Which thing speaks louder?

I maintain that the perplexity over the significance of the *Lock*'s multitude of things can be resolved by looking to theories of camp modernity. In a way, Pope anticipates the postmodern ambivalence about abjected objects in which camp specializes (or, perhaps, the ambivalence or anxiety was already extant in his eighteenth-century material world).<sup>63</sup> What else is Pope doing but redeploying the queer energies produced by the Blount scandal, rechanneling the waste into a sparkling (literary) production? Throughout the poem, the spoils of luxury are recycled and repurposed. Not into something better per se, but into something more useful to the requirements of meter, of course, and also to the ideological agenda.

In various Talk th' instructive hours they past,  
Who gave the *Ball*, or paid the *Visit* last:  
One speaks the Glory of the *British Queen*,  
And one describes a charming *Indian Screen*,  
A third interprets Motions, Looks, and Eyes  
At ev'ry Word a Reputation dies.  
*Snuff*, or the *Fan*, supply each Pause of Chat,  
With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that. (III, 11-18)

Pope has fun detailing the airheaded court, the quintessential space rife with know-nothings who are, in the public world, somethings. The “instructive” discussions are as dedicated to décor as

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas King, citing early modern historian Mary Baine Campbell, posits that the early things of luxury were already associated with the social margins. The cultural capital enhanced by the possession of pretty (and expensive) things such as wigs and mirrors also requires associations with those men and women ordinarily ignored at best, reviled at worst. “Proximity to powerful bodies...became the particular occupation of queer men: ribbon clerks, hairdressers, prostitutes, cooks, decorators actors....[T]he very production of ‘culture’ in the relocation and circulation of pleasurable objects across boundaries made culture itself ‘Queer, because the people who carry and transmit it are Queer’” (King, *Queer Articulations* 219).

they are to patriotism. Things literally fill up time when the limits of deep conversations are exhausted; the dismissive “all that” summarily arrests a potentially endless string of sociable but inane gerunds.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Much Ado About Nothing***

In her cultural contextualization of the *Lock*, Cynthia Wall claims that Pope “so carefully crafted his poetry – making and mending his verses – in part to reshape his world: he wanted to define and occupy literary and social *centers*, not edges” (“Introduction” 11). The centripetal force exemplifies the fable of social ambition: the poet’s mode of entry into the inner circle, whimsical verse and meter. Over and over, humility slides into patronization and back again. While giving the “little circumstances” their due, the speaker compliments the toast’s beauty while debasing manly pretensions, mocking the Baron’s short stature, for instance – a comment that Pope knew would also target his own body. But then, after the fond and flattering distraction, he returns to the toast, focusing on not only the texture of a luscious décolletage but its own quaint buttressing against the tempest of female emotions. “Oh say what stranger Cause, yet unexplor’d, / Cou’d make a gentle *Belle* reject a *Lord*? / In Tasks so bold, can Little Men engage, / And in soft Bosoms dwells such mighty Rage?” (I, 9-12). The mysteries of the female heart dually serve as a rhetorical crux – what on earth do women want? – a bathetic musing that comes across as both genuinely silly and epically serious.

That Pope could perform in poetry better than he could in person is an infamous bit of trivia. Most critics and historical biographers happily foreground Pope’s marginality and his complicated emotions about his station. William Makepeace Thackeray characterizes the poet as a delicate flower, nearly a dandy: “The tastes and sensibilities of Pope which led him to cultivate

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<sup>64</sup> After all, Pope’s signature zeugma generally yokes two things through one part of speech, generating irony out of the collapse of two opposites.

the society of persons of fine manners, or wit, or taste, or beauty, caused him to shrink equally from that shabby and boisterous crew which formed the rank and file of literature in his time” (199). I have already established that an abject perspective is crucial to the production of camp parody; queer subjectivity begets queer art. The *Lock* portrays the literary and social center of which Wall describes, but it manipulates it, repeats it with the strangeness all readers of the poem recognize. The queerness that fuels the mock epic’s stylization of the beau monde, the central focus being the female otherness that Pope’s *Other* treats, discloses the poet’s relationship with the social waste that he resents, needs, but ultimately codifies in his text. Sontag notes that Pope is one of camp’s forefathers because his celebrated skill “for surface, for symmetry” manifests “the difference...between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice” (57). The distinction transcends the regular poetics of parody, she points out; plain denotation-connotation is too dull for camp. Instead, the difference falls somewhere between pure aesthetics and philosophical insouciance. The thing is the thing itself. Or, if one absolutely insists, the thing can be or do or mean *any* thing at all, a random assignation that parodies straight interpretation and the staidness of epistemology and empirical surety.

So, Arabella Fermor is repeatedly thing-ified. However, the *Lock* is not a blazon poem. Instead of cataloguing and concatenating body parts with life and vitality, a louche translation of flesh into word, the poem is happily devoted to items and accessories. Of course, Pope’s conflation of thing for person is, at base, a replacement of thing for thing. Instead of the blazon, which imperializes the eyes, lips, cheek, or cleavage, the focus on purchasable and material goods reminds us that this female body can be itemized, or, in other words, that there is nothing structuring the body save the constituent items. The body is thus already a thing, a constructed plaything, a pretty surface constructed by smaller units of pretty surfaces. This construction

technique differs from poems such as Swift's "The Progress of Beauty" and "Strephon and Chloe," even though both authors are invested in the feminine mystique. But even though Swift routinely and gleefully substitutes things for body parts, his is a different goal, as virtually any selection of lines from "The Progress of Beauty" can well demonstrate: "Two Balls of Glass may serve for Eyes, / White Lead can plaister up a Cleft, / But these alas, are poor Supplies / If neither Cheeks, nor Lips be left" (lines 28-32). In this poem, women are decaying, disgusting ciphers; that nothingness contrasts with the objects populating Pope's fantasy world. There, women are ardently something, emphasis on the *thing*. The rest of this chapter will consider how Belinda is an *objet d'art* despite of – and because of – her vacuity, and while this is hardly a facile compliment, it is also not a Swiftian dismissal of worth. In other words, the much-discussed "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" (I, 138) line, so brilliantly devastating in its casual – maybe causal – list, is also a catalogue of Belinda herself, a recipe-receipt of her constitution.

This is what Pope conditionally celebrates: the gendered process of transubstantiating the person-thing into *thing*, though a process that can be a joy forever only with his poetic aid. How does this become camp parody? Julie Park reconsiders the *Lock*'s reputation as an early confirmation of modern commodity fetishism, pointing out that the conditions that make Belinda's world go round feature a different sort of mystification.<sup>65</sup> Although she does not mention camp proper, she does imply that the *Lock*'s tonal incongruity – its mock epicness – is kitsch, manifested when a text details the process of "creat[ing] a spectacle of fashion's pure artifice and regenerat[ing] it as that tasteless form of 'metafashion' ... This... imbalance between

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<sup>65</sup> Belinda's ethereal helpmates complicate human attachment to the products of labor. "One might argue that in some instances Pope reverses commodity fetishism when he recognizes that the human worker is mistakenly credited for the work that *already* invisible hands – those of the 'busy' Sylphs (who were once women themselves) – produce" (Park 193).

the classical and the trivial artifacts of fashionable life recalls Pope's own mock-epic animations of striving wigs and sword knots" (Park 113). According to her interpretation, when the aesthetic becomes useless for anything save self-conscious display, kitsch is born. Celeste Olalquiaga agrees that kitsch no longer has use-value in the traditional sense, but "a failed commodity that continually speaks of all it has ceased to be" (28) discloses volumes, psychically and ideologically, about a culture's collective desires: "[A]rtifice is far more than the frivolous contrivance it is often made out to be: artifice is the transformation of reality into forms that never took shape before" (174). I value Olalquiaga's reparative reading of kitsch because it attends to the connection between people and their abjected things, the tacky items that, because they mean nothing to others, mean so much to the possessing individual. Certainly, the *Lock* displays elements of kitsch, even creating forms such as Ariel out of thin, rarefied air, but, once again, it is less a poem about dead but beloved things than a poem that remarks on how the living are already things, or representations of representations. After all, the *Lock* is purposely well dressed as a copy of a copy, or an epic that masquerades as an epic, canny to the fact that even the "original," the classical epic, is still only a copy or a literary representation of living history or another literary fable.

Considering his playful irreverence, is Pope anticipating a certain kind of social "pop"? A "purist Pop intellectual like Warhol simply proclaimed that everyone (and everything) was equal" (Ross 312), plain anarchy to the tier of social aristocrats. If Pope cannot be "pop" according to the twentieth-century definition, still, Andy Warhol's ideas about the creative simulacrum resonate with the former's satirical projects.<sup>66</sup> Both share a fascination with the creative origins of a work, and both produce their subject as they create it, in a sense. Most

importantly, both are inspired by the material construct and especially the potential uses of waste. Consider Warhol's opinion on the great utility of discards:

I always like to work on leftovers, doing the leftover things. Things that were discarded, that everybody knew were no good, I always thought had a great potential to be funny.... I'm not saying that popular taste is bad so that what's left over from the bad taste is good: I'm saying that what's left over is probably bad, but if you can take it and make it good or at least interesting, then you're not wasting as much as you would otherwise. (Warhol 93)

Warhol takes outré pleasure in exposing the nether regions of the art world, lifting up the hoop skirt, so to speak. And, as I have been arguing, Pope's refashioning of leftovers transforms human beings – more frequently, women or feminized bodies – into *objets d'art*. The high social class, the low subject matter, the high allusions, the low jokes: the myriad strata are leveled by purposive art to manufacture a bit of fun out of something that is at heart quite serious.

But Warhol is interested in producing counterculture, twisting the connection between value and use, whereas Pope is working within proper culture itself. He is not attempting to devalue the concepts of aesthetics and beauty so much as ironize their power. Sixties pop makes commerce a farce; Pope accepts the market while mocking the intentionality of the exchange and the fixed price of the pretty things. When Jonathan Lamb categorizes the *Lock* as a “still life,” an array of things definitively encased in a space untouchable by action, he considers the characters akin to doll-like figurines, domestic or epic, and “there is nothing behind or beneath that surface to give the hairs an oblique or figurative point” (“Rape” 56). Once again, the central difference between Pope and Swift is that, for the former, “the beauty of the surface makes satire irrelevant”

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<sup>66</sup> *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975) contains a mélange of fancied autobiography and Wilde-style epigrams, and it also performs and parodies the linearity of memoir and memory, not to mention the academic delusion about

(56); to deny and ridicule Belinda's aesthetic value is pointless, but to parody the rippling effects of that value is a different project – as in mock-epic, the formal surface is the thing. This could be why some critics claim that Pope *is* style, as Lytton Strachey has pithily observed: “That Pope's verse is artificial there can be no doubt. But then there is only one kind of verse that is not artificial, and that is, bad verse” (25). Of course, impeccably stylized poems do not necessarily produce meaningless text, but Strachey's quip bridges the gap between the effect *and* affect of artificiality. Pope's intelligent satire, in other words, is often masked by its style, invisible to certain readers who take pleasure in its skillful manufacture. According to Sontag's un-theory, disarmingly condensed in note number two, it is not that style always trumps substance by rote. Instead, style charms a subject, and the satisfied and satisfying refusal to analyze is an act of defiance against the epistemological imperative: “To emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content. It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized -- or at least apolitical” (xx). Then, style's affective neutrality produces its own aesthetic imperative, in a sense, although the imperative fails to imply a timeline or a future that continues beyond the moment of pleasurable looking.

Thus, I agree with Lamb (and, I suppose, Sontag) that it is dangerous to overread things in the attempt to assign morals or locate grave metonymy, one of Clarissa's own errors. Lamb insists, qua Belinda, that there is nothing more within the lock, box, or billet-doux. Instead, each thing is “a thing of nothing” (“Rape” 58),<sup>67</sup> and the circuit of synecdoche, where owning a part means that one owns or masters the whole, is distracted by a more pure aesthetic satisfaction in form. However, I think that the hierarchy of emptiness and symbolic function is hardly authoritative, and the porosity of thing and meaning is part of the *Lock*'s design, most especially

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the fixed meaning of things.

<sup>67</sup> Lamb 58.

when we evaluate the “thingification” of women and beauty. The sign of camp is the so-called extra, the supplement that has always been essential to the definition of the whole. I am arguing that, in this poem, the “extra” is gendered aestheticism, the target of mockery that is simultaneously the focus of homage. The true worth of things is not alien to Pope and his constellation of values.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, the very concept of straightforward homage is vexed by the final deus ex machina. Belinda’s no-thing is raised into an ineffable something that is, in effect, debased as a (ridiculous) nothing, yet a nothing worthy of discursive preservation. Certainly, there remains the residue of that aforementioned star quality.

Lamb’s dismissal of *Lockian* things is too complacent about the impuissance of the objects and surfaces that populate the cantos: the things, the “extras” such as femininity, beauty, and pleasure. Is it completely correct to assume that it is essential “to regard a painted surface simply as a treat for the eye,” that it is categorically impossible to “find out what lies beneath it, what it represents, and what it means” (“Rape” 57)? The poem performs this battle about the real significance of insignificance, a tension appearing on several levels, from the central internecine squabble to the nondiegetic war between Belinda and the muscular form of poetic drama. This *Lock* has proven so difficult to pick, critically speaking, because it is hard to tease out its complicated take on gendered value, hard to understand who and what is being favored: masculine criticism or feminine froth; high art or lowly commerciality; dynamic manhood or plastic womanhood. As a camp site, this ambiguity – of gender, judgment, form – is part of the *Lock*’s textual performance. The rest of this chapter will examine how camp performativity produces its parody.

### ***Imitative Flattery***

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<sup>68</sup> Consider the valuable difference well-established in modern culture between those who show off power from owning material things and those who have the cultural caand those individuals with the intimate cultural capital

Satires, parodies, and mock-epics rely on a chain of citations, whether the allusions arrive from within literary or popular culture or from within the writing self, as evidenced by the long-standing trope of “pregnant” (often male) writers “giving birth” to printed miniature offspring tasked to reveal a bit of its parent’s brain. Laura Brown has commented that Pope was himself quite happy to write himself into his work, and her example happens to exemplify the playfulness evident in the *Lock*’s style. “Pope’s interest in his own verse is predictable, and self-reference, as we shall see, is common throughout Pope’s corpus....He is both imitating the classics and making the classics imitate him in a reciprocal move reminiscent of Belinda’s creation of herself as a goddess in the toilet scene” (Brown, *Alexander* 25). I like this reminder about the chiasmic intimacy between the writer and the subject, and not only as it defines satiric writing generally. Belinda’s dramatized act of performative becoming, while easily mocked and derided, is mirrored by the poet’s “serious” recreation of the social world according to his own imagery. Both undergo redressing and reenactment: Belinda’s myriad cosmetic and corporeal changes are complemented by Pope’s doting play on generic form.

When Jonathan Lamb concludes that Pope’s work in the mock-epic vein consistently finesses “the paradoxical way in which the extremes of burlesque and mock-epic on the one hand and sublimity and propriety on the other seem to meet” (“Comic” 119), he is inadvertently introducing one of camp’s accomplishments. Within the best – or perhaps worst – in the genre, the bottom becomes the top, the top bottom, and while the supreme wit and intelligence of the satiric writer is well demonstrated, so is the flimsy boundary that contains the so-called genius, that keeps it divided from the abject forms it derides. Accordingly, when Pope muses, “The use of pompous expression for low actions or thoughts is the *true Sublime of Don Quixote*” (qtd. in Lamb, “Comic” 116), he is accounting for the recognition that the dialectic of genius and

imbecility are, at base, perceptions. Although Lamb figures that Pope “relished the effects Cervantes is able to produce from the distance he sets between himself and the action of the story” (116-117), again, I maintain that the celebrated effect is not simply about a safely gaping distance but an uncanny proximity between the self and the other affect, person, or position. Indeed, Kristeva’s psychoanalytic interpretation of the sublime focuses on the concept of the supplement: “Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here*, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling” (12). Hugh Kenner has commented that “every technique which [Pope] ridicules in *The Art of Sinking* and in *The Dunciad* is in his own poetry, for they are the only techniques that there are” (55). His examples literally incorporate Pope’s juvenilia, but the *Lock* achieves a similar if not equal level of parasitic reciprocity through its integration of tropes proximally other but still uncannily related to contemporary literary mores: the wasteland of fashion and the wasted antiquity of ancient poetics. Moments of sublimity, then, fill a lack or a space that we didn’t necessarily know about; Cervantes’ depiction of Don Quixote’s epic delusions helps us – an “us” that I believe includes Pope – recall our own tenuous grasp on reality, mortality, and cognition.

The primary point of chiasmus, the crossing of subject and object, is distilled within that lock of hair, so tricky in its allure. “With hairy Sprindges we the Birds betray, / Slight Lines of Hair surprize the Finny Prey, / Fair Tresses Man's Imperial Race insnare, / And Beauty draws us with a single Hair. (II, 25-28). The vulgar is the real and, more frighteningly, the universal. Fredric Jameson aligns his postmodern conception of the “hysterical sublime” with camp because, to him, these experiences hurl an individual into a liminal state of disorientation at the “radical eclipse of Nature itself” (34). In Jameson’s infamous example, the hyper-real fidelity of

plastic representations of pudgy, suburban tourist-types uses visual wit to dissolve the distinction of copy versus reality, producing a kitschy moment of personal destabilization. Pope does not share a postmodern disillusion with the matrices of spectacle, of course, but he is certainly mocking (and feeding) the vehicles and vendors of scandal and its postures, anticipating a (post)modern and ironic reaction to a ridiculous event. His poem is certainly invested in the value of enlarging the unflattering particulars of a certain population, and it also forces us to recognize that the shallow, re-dressed in true wit or not, reads the same as the so-called profound. In other words, the unseemly mining of “*little circumstances*” constitutes a sort of literary trash-diving; the *Lock*’s reuse of established epic models and vulgar gossip is but an eighteenth-century form of recycling.<sup>69</sup> Superficial drama is transliterated into epic language, and the ageless family feud is given its commercial due, turned into something quite literally saleable.

In other words, the *Lock*’s humor is fueled by its intellectual but still fond appropriation of a so-called feminine wasteland. The nastiness so visible in early eighteenth century satire on women is tempered by Pope’s intimate fascination with the frivolity of beautiful people. The difference does not obviate his trademark didacticism and judgment, of course, but it keeps the *Lock* from seeming gleefully hateful. His literal use of elite femininity constitutes a way of accessing a female culture that might seem as mythical as the characters inhabiting epics and fables. His cooptation of femininity is a form of literary-imperial conquest, an impassioned theme for Pope, and although the *Lock* is not plainly or simply misogynistic, like most forms of imitative camp, there is a distinct attitude of mastery in his mimicry of female troubles.

However, also like most forms of imitative camp, the assumed otherness of the camped-up

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<sup>69</sup> As is likely evident by now, I am indebted to Hugh Kenner’s work on repetition and imitation in *The Counterfeiters*, as it links the early modern with the postmodern in order to unravel the illusion of literary novelty

subject is belied by a daring performance of intimate knowledge, an understanding that reveals itself through the verbal striptease of wit. Felicity Nussbaum accounts for Pope's on-again, off-again attitude of romantic sterility by rightfully attending to his deep respect for serious scholarship and hard work, but she also maintains that such a combination in women, at least, must always quash the soupçon of sexual prurience and carnality: "The ideal woman's very ethereality, her chastity, and her ability to embody moral and social mores transform her from the fortyish old maid...And of course angels have no sex" (Nussbaum, *Brink* 158). Belinda is, of course, the opposite of that ideal, wholly wanton and wanted, and her superficiality frustrates mortal admirers.

In her discussion of a different kind of imitation, Bridget Keegan claims that "pastoral [is] a queer genre in itself – one that goes about in drag, engaging in a kind of social transvestitism...a genre that pretends to be about rustic shepherds but only as such a lifestyle is envisaged by the court" (214). While it is easy to recognize the cross-class perversity residing in Marie Antoinette's notorious pastoral theatrics, aren't all writers, regardless of genre, participants in a masquerade, using performative language to transform the imaginary into literary reality? Assumedly, Keegan is noticing the bold sexuality and hyper-determined celebration of pleasure inherent to the form: its deliriously sexual dressing-up of plain alterity is queerly unique. In his own literary critique of the form, Pope also relishes its pure fakeness: "[P]astoral is an image of what they call the Golden age....We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing its miseries"(Pope, "Discourse" 4-5). In other words, most early modern fiction attempts to limn a perception of reality or use allegorical symbolism to highlight morals or, plainly, to *do* something useful, but Pope's poetic fictionalization accentuates the beautiful

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and the cult of the original. Naturally, Pope's work is legion in his examples.

and gay for no *practical* reason. As in ancient epics, Pope selectively slows time to allow the reader to fully visualize the dramatic scenes, but here the languorous duration is less instructively high-minded than pornographic.

The Peer now spreads the glitt'ring *Forfex* wide,  
T'inclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide.  
Ev'n then, before the fatal Engine clos'd,  
A wretched *Sylph* too fondly interpos'd;  
Fate urg'd the Sheers, and cut the *Sylph* in twain,  
(But Airy Substance soon unites again)  
The meeting Points the sacred Hair dissever  
From the fair Head, for ever and for ever! (III, 147-154)

In a few decades, Richardson will draw out a rape with ciphers and absences, but Pope gratifies with metaphor. The “fatal Engine,” the Baron’s metonymical machine<sup>70</sup>, cleaves thing and nothing; both “feel / The conqu’ring Force of unresisted Steel” (III, 177-178). The lock’s stubborn materiality, its rude severance from its owner, contrasts with the unfortunate sylph, who escapes unmarked, without trace of violation. So, although both Belinda and the sylphids are characterized by “Airy Substance,” the former is still defined by her (lovely) corporeality.

In a section of *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) that certainly gestures towards the *Lock*, William Hogarth contextualizes the virtues of the best-tressed: “It was once the fashion to have two curls of equal size, stuck at the same height close upon the forehead, which probably took its

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<sup>70</sup> The link between “engines” and penises becomes common throughout the mid-eighteenth century. For instance, an erection is the most wondrous example of physiological auto-mechanism to Julien La Mettrie, as outlined in his treatise *Machine Man* (1747): “Why does the sight, or the mere idea, of a beautiful woman cause singular movements and desires in us...All we have here is one spring, excited by the Ancients’ ‘beneplacitum’ or by the sight of beauty, exciting another one, which was very drowsy when the imagination awoke it. And what can cause this except the riot and tumult of the blood and spirits, which gallop with extraordinary rapidity and swell the hollowed-out organs?” (29).

rise from seeing the pretty effect of curls falling loosely over the face. A lock of hair falling thus cross the temples, and by that means breaking the regularity of the oval, has an effect too alluring to be strictly decent, as is very well known to the loose and lowest class of women” (Hogarth 39). Arabella-Belinda’s vicious asymmetry is suggestively *a derriere*, heightening the moral connotation; the ensuing infelicitous asymmetry, the telling eyesore that severs the twin locks “which graceful hung behind” (II, 20), marks a social and aesthetic disability. Joseph Litvak’s queer perspective on sophistication refuses to champion the closed, orifice-less bodies of the bourgeois that Bourdieu privileges and Bakhtin critiques. Instead, Litvak reminds us that panoptic learning is part of the discipline of the elite: “[A] school for sophistication can resemble a school of hard knocks. Reading an Austen novel means undergoing an education through intimidation, one of whose most striking...lessons is that sophistication *hurts*, that smartness *smarts*” (15). If Swift’s misogynistic poetry is invested in demeaning women, as is some of Pope’s verse, the difference lies in the sadistic technique. Instead of smearing filth, the *Lock* employs symbolic humiliation, using class to school its female targets.

Pope recreates – imitates – Arabella Fermor both to honor and to pierce, a common goal of all parodies. The matter of physical bodies and the intratextual and extratextual patterns of sexual desire and nonsexual homage define this section as I explore imitation, defined broadly, in the poem. The *Lock* is not a sensuous poem, in contrast to its sexual wit. It *is* a miniature saga written by a male for a more famous female, who is incidentally castrated by a dubiously gendered male; it imitates a stratum of real society, and the imitation, which is meant to seem jarringly fantastic, ultimately unveils the queerness of the original. The frenetic Cave of Spleen seems to summon a Bosch triptych at first, until it reveals that its populace is comprised of nothing but thinly guised Londoners. The “Maids turn’d Bottels” who “call aloud for Corks” (IV,

54) are an ingeniously vulgar but familiar metonym in urbane eighteenth-century society, as is the handmaiden “Affectation,” who, “with a sickly Mien / Shows in her Cheek the Roses of Eighteen, / Practis’d to Lisp, and hang the Head aside, / Faints into Airs, and languishes with Pride” (IV, 31-34), among other characters. Similarly, Belinda’s emotional turmoil is familiarized by its placement in the realm of the so-called fantastic, and we are repeatedly treated to a luxurious expanse of melodrama: Belinda’s anger promises to be something to behold, perhaps in poetic tribute to eighteenth-century stagecraft. “But anxious Cares the pensive Nymph opprest, / And secret Passions labour’d in her Breast. / Not youthful Kings in Battel seiz’d alive, Not scornful Virgins who their Charms survive ... / E’er felt such Rage, Resentment and Despair, / As Thou, sad Virgin! For thy ravish’d Hair” (IV, 1-4, 9-10). As always, the noble and the ignoble are interwoven in the simile. He certainly mocks Belinda for her response to cosmetic ruin, comparing it to accidental virgins ruing their unplucked honor or proud but untried kings who would claim to prefer death over dishonor. Such examples make fun of spoiled people whining over fortunate or at least repairable events.

However, desirable women, objectified as such, must play that role, a stage that includes the logic of Pope’s poem. Belinda’s extreme reaction is as simpering as any privileged woman only valued for her femininity, such as “*Cynthia*, [enraged] when her *Manteau*’s pinned awry” (IV, 8) by some clumsy maid. It matters where Belinda is plotted on the poet’s devised matrix of femininity. How and why does the heroine’s figure manifest literary camp? As Litvak points out, there is no getting past the body, most especially in matters of aesthetic or moral judgment and condescension but also in education. Sometimes learned philosophical exercises melted into somewhat meretricious fevers about female figures, as seen above in La Mettrie’s short example on the mechanics of erection. Even Edmund Burke exposed his own tastes while lecturing on the

contours that make up good form: “Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried” (149). The heroine is figured differently in the *Lock* than women generally appear in Pope’s other major works, othered in a way uncharacterized by affects of disgust or derision. The opening dedication, the one that wrought approval from Arabella, is generically deferent to an absent sort of presence who holds court but also seems to disappear at the moment of address: “The Human Persons are as Fictitious as the Airy ones; and the Character of *Belinda*, as it is now manag’d, resembles You in nothing but in Beauty” (Pope, *Lock* 143). Arabella is not Belinda, save for her beauty, but then again, Belinda is nothing but beauty; according to Pope’s tacit logic, to be nothing but in beauty is hardly profound but is still somehow noteworthy, compelling, and charming, in the end.

Compare this brand of slight with the poetic commentary later directed to Martha Blount. The *Epistle to a Lady* (1735) features a gossipy sneer of an opening line, pitting one woman – Martha – against most others: “Nothing so true as what you once let fall, / ‘Most Women have no Characters at all’” (lines 1-2). That casually dropped quotation deflects the degree of male condescension to some extent, as it frames the entire poem as a compliment to the lonely exception to the general rule about a woman’s coquettish “Love of Sway.” Nonetheless, despite the arch acrimony, the speaker belies his indebtedness to female sexuality, just as in the *Lock*: “Yet mark the fate of a whole Sex of Queens! / Pow’r all their end, but Beauty all the means. / In Youth they conquer, with so wild a rage, / As leaves them scarce a subject in their Age (lines 219-222). These four lines from the *Epistle* resonate with the *Lock*’s inconsistent verdict on

female value. On one level, the story of Belinda's wild domination is an amusing show but still just that: a contained performance that attracts attention because of status and fame, benchmarks that mean little out of context or out of time. The poet's ability to rewrite a, by then, decades-old event ironically enhances his potency – his power to intervene and resolve a social issue for socialites that could not otherwise care less about him – in comparison to the froth about which he writes. Aging's cruelty becomes a bellwether for the obliteration of a woman's very identity or "subject"; the soft and malleable material of beauty is, at base, the stuff of nonsense, predestined to evaporate. But on the other level, the "Pow'r" is undeniably irresistible, colonizing others' minds and thoughts, poets included.

The strange and inventive relationship between poet and muse, a queer transubstantiation and transference, is central to the poem's camp. Belinda is a unique woman within Pope's work, beautiful, powerful, and silly in equal measure, safely unavailable by dint of creative reinvention while remaining keenly vulnerable to the pen. Arabella-as-Belinda – or Belinda-as-Arabella – is a feasible example of the "it girl" of which Roach speaks, a type that originates within the crossroads of theater and publicity fostered by early modernity; those "its" whose "images circulate widely in the absence of their persons – a necessary condition of modern celebrity – but the very tension between their widespread visibility and their actual remoteness creates an unfulfilled need in the hearts of the public" (Roach, *It* 17). Pope's cheeky intrigue in Belinda is palpable, even though, truth be told, she is not necessarily the central figure of the poem, at least if we assign billing by number of lines or close descriptions. Instead, Belinda's power and effect is implicit and pervasive, a presence missed and anticipated especially in the many moments when it is absent. When she does appear *mano-a-mano* with her ineffectual love match, she shines, despite or because of the inanity of the context. "See fierce *Belinda* on the *Baron* flies, /

With more than usual Lightning in her Eyes; / Nor fear'd the Chief th' unequal Fight to try, /  
Who sought no more than on his Foe to die. / But this bold Lord, with manly Strength indu'd, /  
She with one Finger and a Thumb subdu'd" (V, 75-80). The Baron claims a quest for *la petite morte*, but the perspective clarifies that his masculinity is an accessory, a temporary gift, and one that Belinda is quick to snuff. In a twist on tradition, she is the aggressor, attacking him to obviate a repetition of a rape. This helps explain why Pope's dissemination of female thingness as waste *and* as compelling object is more complex here than in his other poems that critique female mores; the *Lock* is not only mocking a generic female but a minor icon in his social world.

In sum, a marginalized male figure is laying claim to a celebrated female figure, using her power to accentuate, define, and disseminate his own (poetic) identity. Of course, Pope was not "gay," but the parallel between the eighteenth-century poet and his star and the contemporary connection forged between gay men and female divas is worth exploration. There are clear differences, of course. In his theory, Andrew Ross claims that "[g]ay male identification with the power and prestige of the female star was, first and foremost, an identification with women as emotional subjects in a film world in which men 'acted' and women 'felt'" ("Uses" 323). The viewers' interior identification was limited, of course, to the visual manifestations of such "feelings." Thomas King's take on the solidarity of Othered pairs has to do with an exclusion from the heterosexual imperative, pointing out that "[t]wentieth-century gay men's notorious performative identifications with 'strong' or 'bitchy' women, who were at the same time 'tragic' because they had 'failed' to be properly heteronormative...re-marked this early discursive assimilation of the heterogeneous and contradictory: sodomites, effeminate men, and women not 'under the cover of' a man's authority" (King, *Queer Articulations* 218). And in contemporary

culture, Daniel Harris ruefully correlates cinematic divas with “‘found’ propaganda,” or a flashy, splashy object around which gay men could congregate and imitate. “At the very heart of gay diva worship is not the diva herself but the almost universal homosexual experience of ostracism and insecurity, which ultimately led to what might be called the aestheticism of maladjustment, the gay man's exploitation of cinematic visions of Hollywood grandeur to elevate himself above his antagonistic surroundings and simultaneously express membership in a secret society of upper-class aesthetes” (Harris). I maintain that Pope's ambition explains the originating motivation for his inscription of the scandal: a chance to show off his best for the best.

In *Lives of the English Poets*, Samuel Johnson marvels at Pope's talent for reproducing quotidian femaleness while adding that little bit of extra to “improve” the scene, making the boudoir-drama appear more real precisely because the normal is enhanced. The sharp focus does not render the image more grotesque à la Swift but quite the opposite: “[T]he whole detail of a female-day is here brought before us invested with so much art of decoration, that, though nothing is disguised, every thing is striking, and we feel all the appetite of curiosity for that from which we have a thousand times turned fastidiously away” (487). A smirking admirer of the *Lock*, Johnson specifies its place as “the most exquisite example of ludicrous poetry” or “the most attractive of all ludicrous compositions.” His *Dictionary* defines ludicrous as “sportive, merry, burlesque,” while burlesque itself is symbiotically listed, as a verb, “to ridicule, to lampoon,” or, as a substantive<sup>71</sup>, “ludicrous language, a jest.” In late modernity, burlesque has a decidedly more political valence, as “a transgression or inversion of existing orderings” (Robertson 28), a travesty, or an increasingly sexualized form of performance art. Of course, the airiness that Johnson admires is certainly extant, but I hope to show that Pope's early modern poem also helped redefine or recalibrate the ulterior significance of so-called light humor.

If we take Johnson at his word, then the poem should only be read and enjoyed for seeming superficially “sportive” as it lampoons the “female-day.” But within the poem’s tone, there is a frisson that propels the “art of decoration,” and a current of admiration, even, for the mechanics of Belinda’s gender performance. Johnson himself is complimenting Pope’s ability to render things feminine and negligible into a compelling melodrama. Recall the famous dressing room scene:

Now awful Beauty puts on all its Arms;  
The Fair each moment rises in her Charms,  
Repairs her Smiles, awakens ev’ry Grace,  
And calls forth all the Wonders of her Face;  
Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise,  
And keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes.  
The busy *Sylphs* surround their darling Care;  
These set the Head, and those divide the Hair,  
Some fold the Sleeve, whilst others plait the Gown;  
And *Betty*’s praised for Labours not her own. (I, 139-148)

These lines show that, even and especially in the eighteenth century, intragender performance is literally “put on” every morning, that femininity is itself a socially imperative drag whose parodic impact is covered over by its normalization. Yet, the toilette, contra Swift, compels the reader not only to *ecce mulier* but to behold and appreciate the effect that constitutes the woman. Instead of focusing on her nothingness, the lines compel us to appreciate the theater of maquillage. Although the tone and the squadron of sylphs satirize the requisite work it takes to build a celebrity’s public face, the lines display a genuine appreciation for this intimate theater.

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<sup>71</sup>To avoid tautology: “Substantive, s. ‘A noun betokening a thing.’”

Again, the holy grail is not access to interiority but the pleasures of exteriority.

Pope's physical deformation has been documented as a source of his anxiety and humor and thus a catalyst for his brand of creative wit: "I have no way so good to please 'em, as by presenting 'em with any thing rather than with my self" (qtd. in Rumbold 4). Helen Deutsch's study on the link between Pope's disability and *oeuvre* explains how his so-called monstrous form, quite literally, foments literary function. In other words, Pope's physical alterity bleeds into his output, his focus, and his obsessions. According to Deutsch, Pope's harmlessness makes him the best sort of "reporter," the unwitting eunuch allowed to bear witness to the female parlor. His cuteness<sup>72</sup> becomes a degrading asset: "That same curiosity which makes Pope marginal and monstrous also renders him...collectable, ornamental, and playfully familiar both with the market, and with the miniature world that is woman's place" (Deutsch 45). The poem turns his gaze outward; the cute imperial mastery is used to flaunt his especial talent at envisioning such drastically different worlds like ballrooms or the Cave of Spleen.

This poem does not only trace a female and her bad hair day, but it inhabits the roles and rules of femininity so to perform it more dramatically. Indeed, what *is* Pope talking about when he talks about women? Should we bother discussing the relationship between artist and subject in the *Lock*, or is this a critically unsophisticated question? Peter Staffel protests that "much critical writing [on the *Lock*] seemed to gravitate around whether Pope liked or disliked his heroine,"

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<sup>72</sup> In "The Cuteness of the Avant Garde," Sianne Ngai reminds us about the necessary vulnerability of the so-called wee or twee; this potential to damage makes it more necessary, more useful: "[I]t is only a short step to see how the formal properties associated with cuteness -- smallness, compactness, softness, simplicity, and pliancy -- call forth specific affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency. There is thus a sense in which the minor taste concept of cuteness might be said to get at the process by which all taste concepts are formed and thus at the aesthetic relation all of them capture. For in addition to being a minor aesthetic concept that is fundamentally about minorness (in a way that, for instance, the concept of the glamorous is not), it is crucial to cuteness that its diminutive object has some sort of imposed-upon aspect or mien--that is, that it bears the look of an object not only formed but all too easily *de*-formed under the pressure of the subject's feeling or attitude towards it" (xx). Pope's visage might not be "cute" in the aesthetic sense, but his social and even literary position could, at various times, be "(a)cutely harmless" or a "pet project."

and that while the poem “demonstrates the poet’s genuine attraction to the genuinely attractive Belinda,” her character is simple and “nevertheless offers a rather narrow range for contestation [about Pope’s philosophy of gender]” (86). Pope’s desire for Belinda – or Arabella – is matched by his established desire for, say, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for fame and status, for acceptance, for physical rehabilitation; in sum, the desires are matched by palpable sentiments of anger and resistance, no matter the object. The compulsion to recode and master female frippery in the *Lock* is on one hand no less significant than Pope’s compulsion to recode and master the breed of overly prolific “hacks” like Eliza Haywood or Colley Cibber; the gender imperialism performed in the *Lock* is in line with the more literal brand of imperialism championed in *Windsor-Forest*.

Pope’s familiarity with imitation and mimicry is legion, a skill mentioned by virtually every biography from Samuel Johnson’s onward<sup>73</sup> and, of course, central to pastiche works such as *Peri Bathous* (1728), where his own poetic discards are reframed. The appeal of bad text is explored in a poetics of the terrible that cites myriad works from famed writers, including Pope himself. Literary waste is recycled and used to highlight the tenuous difference among the aesthetically good, bad, and ugly, and the difference between imitation and authenticity is exposed as categorically intertwined, a basic truth of parody.<sup>74</sup> For instance, the text’s fifteenth chapter, “A Receipt to make an Epic Poem,” certainly mocks the *Lock* itself: “For a *Battle*. Pick a large Quantity of Images and Descriptions from *Homer’s Iliads*, with a Spice or two of *Virgil*, and if there remain any Overplus, you may lay them by for a *Skirmish*. Season it well with

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<sup>73</sup> Thackeray’s chapter on Pope emphasizes his pleasure in the imitative task: “He learnt versification from Dryden, he said. In his youthful poem of ‘Alexander,’ he imitated every poet, Cowley, Milton, Spenser, Statius, Homer, Virgil...’This I did,’ he says, ‘without any design, except to amuse myself.’”

<sup>74</sup> A common baseline definition of parody. Linda Hutcheon provides ample context in *A Theory of Parody*: “Parody, therefore, is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text” (6).

*Similes*, and it will make an *Excellent Battle*” (Pope, *Peri* 435). The list puts pressure on our rote measurements of qualitative differences; not only does “Overplus” help create an effectively satirical literary primer, but it also becomes the very thing it claims to critique.

Consequently, *Peri Bathous* and the *Lock* exemplify literary drag, campily tracing the pleasurable collisions of wit and judgment which occur when the imitated and the imitation bleed together.<sup>75</sup> Not only is the *Lock* simply a clever experiment in imitation – that is a critical platitude – but its imitative technique is meant to *exceed* the moment of the original. This excess differs from the sort found within an encomiastic poem, a form also meant to enlarge and flatter the subject. That genre uses rhetorical exaggeration to bring greater honor; the poem is a metonym for its target, a decorous part that accessorizes the whole to advantage. Here, Pope’s purposively awry imitation and repetition of genre and gender cannot be mistaken as earnest homage, as something meant to better something or someone else. Instead, the poem’s extended “repetition with a difference” – repetition of the scandal, repetition of the epic form – overwrites and displaces the original, producing a meta-artificial thing of beauty: a camp diva.

If we jump forward again to the other end of modernity’s timeline, perhaps the symbiosis between eighteenth-century poet and celebutante is comparable to the connection between gay men and camp divas. The juiciness and bizarreness of the *Lock*’s squabble makes for a compelling and well-sexed soap; indeed, eighteenth-century scholar Sophie Gee has turned the occasional context into a historical novel, *The Scandal of the Season*. In the afterword’s interview, Gee affirms that the poem works precisely because Pope did not belong in the elite

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<sup>75</sup> This brings to mind Judith Butler’s classic rhetorical posit about the reliability of original and copy, straight and queer: “[S]imple inversions are not really possible [...] the entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other and confounds the possibility of any stable way to locate the temporal or logical priority of either term” (“Imitation” 22). Butler’s perspective on drag/camp aligns with Hutcheon’s theory of parody; both elucidate Pope’s imitative ethos.

social circles: “The satirical attack on something from which the writer feels excluded is essentially the basis of all English comedy.... We watch him taking on this world of power and money and very tight social circles as an outsider” (Gee 351). Pope finesses a reparative connection between his degraded muse and himself, an affinity and intimacy the text invents and then cements. Her trajectory in the plot goes up and down and up again, before ascending to the ether at the end, when she becomes that storied star in consequence of the poet’s art. When Belinda bemoans her fate, we do not trust her sincerity because we note the ironic publicity framing her plea for privacy, anonymity, and retirement: “Oh had I rather un-admir’d remain’d / In some lone Isle, or distant *Northern* Land” (IV, 153-154). And, indeed, her “would haves, should haves” align with Pope’s own, well-known ambitions for literary success, as he, like Belinda-Arabella, chose secular ambition over religion and seclusion: “What mov’d my Mind with youthful Lords to rome? / O had I stay’d, and said my Pray’rs at home!” (IV, 159-160). The poem resolves this plaintive theatric by reaffirming her notoriety and fame – and Pope’s as well – in the last canto. What Belinda does with her stigma, that is, to turn the cosmetic slight into scenery-chewing, simultaneously encodes, like a *mise-en-abyme*, Pope’s own act of resentment.

The dialectic between Pope and Arabella – or between literary speaker and Belinda, a wholly different pairing, of course, but not *always* materially so – contrasts with the narrative trends toward realism and depth and not simply because of the limitations of poetic form. In other words, his imitative parody of the feminized world is so compelling and legible because it refuses realism<sup>76</sup> in favor of a mannered depiction. The belle’s allure doesn’t make sense; its

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<sup>76</sup> Madeleine Kahn has written about “narrative transvestism,” or gender ventriloquy, in the eighteenth-century novel, a term that accounts for the techniques eighteenth-century male writers would use to realistically inhabit or become their female characters. Her theory about strategy and rationale is salient to my discussion: “[W]hile the transvestite can participate to some extent in the female realm, he never really creates a female body – only the

energating power frustrates logic even as it triumphs: “Yet graceful Ease, and Sweetness void of Pride, / Might hide her faults, if Belles had Faults to hide: / If to her share some Female Errors fall, / Look on her Face, and you’ll forget ‘em all” (II, 15-18). Furthermore, the larger gambit of gossip is braided into the *Lock*’s structure. The femininity of “mere” speech, airy and untraceable verbiage, is fully part of the story, especially in the depths of Canto IV. Women battle women throughout this upside-down epic, especially when we account for the destabilizing treatment of gender, where nearly everyone is unsexed, from the hapless Baron to the order of sprites to the moralistic Clarissa. In many ways, the speaker’s attitude in *Epistle to a Lady* faintly echoes Clarissa’s in the speech from Canto V. In the former poem, male judgment is informed by the presumption of female confidence. In the *Lock*, Clarissa’s fulmination summons the finest in armchair masculinity, deliberately playing on the moralistic discourse of classical drama. “Merit wins the soul,” she insists, and “good Humor can prevail, / When Airs, and Flights, and Screams, and Scolding fail” (V, 31-32). Naturally, the speech is received as unnaturally unfeminine, prudish, and unhelpful by her audience: the sprites and socialites that excel in these battle acts.

The gambit is not meant to be an authentic “key to the lock” but an act of felicitous irony. Clarissa instigates in two ways: by providing the “fatal Sheers” and by providing an ineffective public critique. Nonetheless, we attend to Belinda’s virility and the baron’s affected surrender; the war, like the entire epic, illustrates a tableau where characteristic traits and values detach from physiognomy, morphology, and ontological gender. Even though, midway through the war, a mythical figure of judgment tilts the balance towards “Men’s Wits,” the larger context surely destabilizes the gravity of the sentence: “Now *Jove* suspends his golden Scales in Air, / Weighs

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illusion of one... The cross-dressing, no matter how elaborate, is not the goal; rather, it is part of the process of creating a male self” (13). Obviously, I am not trying to claim that Pope is trying to become a woman through the character of Belinda, but I am analyzing the performativity of his creation and manipulation of the feminine world. He, too, is creating a (male) self through his literary performance.

the Men's Wits against the Lady's Hair; / The doubtful Beam long nods from side to side; / At length the Wits mount up, the Hairs subside" (V, 71-74). Aside from the irresistible plot pun, where men gamely rise in proximity to ladies' hairs, the verdict's interpretation is deliberately unclear. The wits are lighter, the women heavier; the winning result is ambiguous. Furthermore, the balance must be read in line with the chaotic scene, where, again, men become women, and women, men. Clarissa makes a facetious paragon, plotwise, as the accomplice and accessory to the rape and a pivotal player in the triangle between the baron and the belle. Her parodic speech, added in 1717, only heightens her figural androgyny and cements her place as talisman of the *Lock's* brand of mockery and even as symbol for the poet himself. Pope's critical and social androgyny – betwixt and between conservative Catholicism and the Protestant majority; the suburban poor and the riche metropole; disability and disfigurement and model masculinity – is, indeed, notably performed throughout the poem, most noticeably in the myriad characters' gender drag. Clarissa's lecture evaporates as quickly as it arrives, which knits together the established masculine and feminine modes of speech and pokes at – or clips – the authority of figures like, of course, Pope himself.

Clarissa's killjoy dramatics certainly disrupt the poem's energy; her speech is a camp spectacle because, in spite of its arch hostility, it misses its mark, and its ooze of jealousy trumps its honestly sound advice about gendered norms. While I will more fully analyze the antisocial camp value of (female) spite in the next chapter, here, Clarissa's anxious desire to both publicly school and punish Belinda falls flat because she is the lonely "Prude," a nonce within and without the poem's world; her seeming asexuality, a type mirrored by Ariel and his consorts, nullifies her subjectivity. Lacking charisma, the currency of choice, her speech has the opposite effect on the heroine; instead of feeling chastened, the beauty becomes an androgynous "fierce

Virago” (V, 37), launching the queer war foreshadowed in the first canto’s dressing table scene.

Dullness foments mayhem: a grave truth in both masculine and feminine battlegrounds alike.

“All side in Parties, and begin th’ Attack; / Fans clap, Silks russle, and tough Whalebones crack;  
/ Heroes’ and Heroins’ Shouts confus’dly rise, / And base, and treble Voices strike the Skies” (V,  
39-42). The feminized and imperialized vehicles of violence are effectively comic while  
continuing its agenda of confusing and conflating normative gender roles within the normally  
and securely masculine arena of war. After all, in this realm, the men are the women, and the  
women, men, except when both are neither.

Of course, Aubrey Beardsley’s revisionary drawings of *The Rape of the Lock* appeared far too late for Pope’s perusal. Printed in 1896, the series of nine looks jarringly outré even in comparison to the original’s eighteenth-century cheek. The pictures are unmistakably mannered, distorted, and stylized in typical Beardsley fashion, but they are still uncannily true to Pope’s own wicked perspective. Beardsley’s fin-de-siecle decadence, in other words, spotlights the queerness inherent to the eighteenth-century original, while providing a rough temporal median that links Pope’s conception of modernity to our own. His perversion of aesthetic examples of scale and detail and winking manipulation of gendered form and physique illustrate the ironic commentary that defines Pope’s camp humor. Although it is well established that the *Lock* champions imperial commercialism while paying sincere homage to classical form, relatively scant attention has been paid to its wry poetics of desire, more specifically through its queer use of gender; Beardsley’s frames literally illustrate what is already resident in Pope’s lines. In opposition to Belinda is the twee Baron, not to mention the categories of immaterial bodies that populate the poem. The dynamic between the masculinized and warlike Belinda and the more ethereal and ungendered nymphs, “*Sylphs and Sylphids*,” even the “*Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves*,

and *Daemons*” (II, 73-74) differs from the relationship between Belinda as reified thing and the ambiguous and shifty gender role inhabited by her beau. Epic battles over beauty are nothing new, but Pope’s ingenious redaction of the same old story not only makes a novel contribution about techniques of picturing desire in the eighteenth century, but explores and knowingly exploits its culture of resistant meanings. Even key plates such as “The Rape of the Lock” and “The Battle of the Beaux and Belles” are tellingly dominated by suggestive swirls of hair and voluminous formalwear decorated with fine filigrees of costuming embroidery. In these salon scenes, an impish midget, perhaps the queerest of all signatures, stares out at the viewer with a grotesque grin. His gaze interpellates the viewer, inviting us with a wink to smirk at the melodrama: “Come on, you think that the Baron is really into women?”

At first glance, Beardsley’s belated series could be dismissed as inconsequential to Pope scholarship, if, indeed, it simply “turns such violence into merely the subject of another elegant tableau, and another authentication of the canon. The trespassing of personal boundaries, having been exaggerated as rape, is now trivialized as merely an elegant temper tantrum” (Snodgrass 285-286). Analyses like the latter imply that Beardsley totally misreads Pope, but his portrayal of the teacup tempests helpfully illumine the poem’s strange and strategic fascination with gender’s disorder. Interestingly, the engravings paired with the 1714 edition provide piquant and even similar commentary. The first canto of the *Lock*, of course, is largely devoted to Belinda’s demesne but also delivers a soupçon of queer information about the higher powers that be. We first meet both characters in bed, where sleeping Belinda is piqued by an apparition – a dashing figure “more glitt’ring than a *Birth-night Beau*” (I, 23). Accordingly, the companion illustration from 1714 shows a sleeping belle, with Shock pawing at the folds of her bedding and heeled slippers tossed askew on the floor, one sole provocatively on display. The sylph intimately floats

over Belinda's head, half-lover, half-cherub. The dream is rousing; Belinda's nightclothes have slipped away, exposing her breasts and underscoring the sexuality that was, of course, always part of both the poem and the plot. The voluminous canopy drapes reveal a darker cavern, an image echoed by an unexplained set of legs in the left foreground.<sup>77</sup> These animal-like limbs, exposed by a swath of bustled fabric, not only make a visual pun on human haunches or hams but point at the unfolding sexual fable. Still, Belinda is a prototypical heroine, and Ariel's power - and sexual prowess - is diminished.

In "The Morning Dream" (see fig. 1), Beardsley makes Ariel the unchallenged star; instead of the innocent, Raphaelite sprite portrayed in the eighteenth-century version, the artist delivers a fully equipped fop. This sylph holds a star-topped staff and is decked out in a tri-corner hat, dotted blouson, ruffle-trimmed waistcoat, feathered full skirt, and clocked stockings. Most interestingly, Belinda is absent, although she is presumably tucked behind the elaborate, lacy, festooned canopy that just happens to complement Ariel's outfit quite well. The rape, the drawing hints, is not really about feminine virtue but about fashion, surface, and the wickedly pagan powers that be, and Ariel's striking appearance reminds us of the subversiveness inherent to Pope's order of sprites and fairies. The balletic posture, luxuriantly curled wig, heavily hooded eyes, and *nez retroussé* exude suspicious excess and hyperbolize his<sup>78</sup> reigning position as the ultimate fairy godmother.

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<sup>77</sup> In his comparative study of the myriad illustrations for the *Lock*, Robert Halsband writes: "Visible beneath the skirt of the dressing-table is an ambiguous form: either a leg, ending in a claw-and-ball foot, of the stool on which Belinda will sit [...] or the leg and cloven hoof of a satyr. If the latter, then the illustration has introduced a pagan symbol unmentioned in the text, a hint of the poem's erotic underpinning" (11).



Figure 1. The Morning Dream.

In other words, Beardsley literalizes Ariel's ambivalently gendered body, turning Pope's intentional ambiguity into a fin-de-siècle camp. The frame seems to capture the moment before he disappears into the ether, reminding Belinda to take care: "Warn'd by thy *Sylph*, oh Pious Maid beware! / This to disclose is all thy Guardian can. Beware of all, but most beware of Man!" (I, 112-114). Again, in his drawing, Beardsley exploits the sexual currency of the dandy, and Ariel's airy physicality lightens the epic didacticism, hinting that we are simply peeking in at a bit of conspiratorial dish – girl talk about boy troubles. Although this would not be the eighteenth-century reader's inference, of course, Beardsley's anachronistic interpretation slyly limns Ariel's form and function. Spurred by Beardsley's camp wit, it is easy to reexamine the queerness resident in Pope's canto. For one, Ariel both is and is not the "*Birth-night Beau*" that dazzles Belinda, but the near-bedtrick is still undeniably strange, sexual in an impossible way.

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<sup>78</sup> The pronoun "his" is technically contestable, but is aligned with the text and the extant scholarship.

Beardsley's overweening and effete Ariel, a non-normative object of (heterosexual) affection, simply dramatizes the queer affinity inherent to Pope's vision.

The embedded origin story of the sylphs and the other "light *Militia* of the lower Sky" (I, 42) is most plainly an homage to the pantheon of classical metamorphoses. Nonetheless, Beardsley's depiction also foregrounds the strange elision of physicality, body, and gender in Ariel's story. The speech does more than spin the classics, as it is intentionally tendentious about gender fixity, an ambiguity gleefully championed by the artist. For instance, the sylphs were "light Coquettes," former denizens of the ballrooms "once inclos'd in Woman's beauteous Mold." In other words, there is and always will be very little difference between belles and sprites, as she is predestined to effervesce in kind, distilled to "their first Elements" (I, 58).

In light of Ariel's disclosure, Belinda's night dream seems nearly scandalously gothic, especially if we try to puzzle out who or what actually "caus'd her Cheek to glow." Indeed, the liminal space described and produced by this origin story inspires more questions than it resolves. The sylphs' mission is self-serving, as they protect the soi-disant innocence of their living parallels, guarding women from the dangers that would prevent the mimetic metempsychosis. In a fashion, the circularity of the relationship between the sprites and the belles mimics the risible repetition of the heteronormative courtship game, as each social role is destined – or doomed – to (re)play the same part. This mimicry at the character level within the *Lock* is also echoed in the mimicry inherent to the mock epic genre, and the poem's network of "bad copies" produces a camp way of thinking about judgment, originality, and difference.



Figure 2. The Baron's Prayer

If asexual but proactive Ariel is the protector of Belinda's body, Beardsley ironizes the Baron-rapist by highlighting his effeminate impotence. In "The Baron's Prayer" (see fig. 2), Beardsley illustrates his offering to the gods of love, an altar "Of twelve vast *French* Romances, neatly gilt. / There lay three Garters, half a Pair of Gloves; / And all the Trophies of his former Loves" (II, 38-40). The fabled hypersexuality is expressed through physical evidence, the intimate spoils from women's costumes, as well as ideological stimuli in the crisp form of suggestive – but attractively bound – reads. In Beardsley's drawing, the Baron, delicate of foot and hand, wears a spotted dressing gown that connotes venereal pox, as he genuflects at the girthy stack of books. A limp tasseled ribbon, a bookmark, lolls out from the bottommost volume, making a vulgar contrast with the slim and towering obelisk of a candle that rises along the left side; the

placement of the garters and glove against the candle base gestures toward “any Hairs but these.” Instead of providing us with a figure of (hetero)sexual power and desire, Beardsley dramatizes Pope’s intimation about the Baron’s sexual strategy, one whose prayerful passivity is immediately followed by Ariel’s bellicose activity and who needs the stern Clarissa to instigate the theft. After all this, the poem reminds us that he is only “granted half his Pray’r” (II, 45).

That Pope mocks Belinda’s world and our own for falling prey to feminine vapidness is indubitable; however, he does not or cannot suggest a more compelling or satisfactory substitution for beauty’s empire. Because Belinda’s power is resident in her surfaces, she seems restricted to an icon, a spoof, an allegory for luxe femininity and sexuality, but not a character, *per se*.<sup>79</sup> Deidre Lynch’s argument about the increasing fullness of modern fictional characterizations correlates the burgeoning mores of Western individualism with market competition.<sup>80</sup> There remains a stubborn gap, however, that this trend towards realism ignores: the persistent eighteenth-century popularity of performances such as satyrs and stock pantomimes. But the co-existence of a so-called interior realism and an external, gestural romance is symbiotic. Within a visual reading of Hogarth’s famous etching *Characters and Caricaturas*, Lynch puts those two types on a continuum, reminding us, contra Hogarth himself, that the latter does not oppose the former but, depending on the spectator, can be virtually identical: “Only a fine line separates the marks that individualize the countenance from the marks that exaggerate it” (64). If the eighteenth-century novelist is meant to help readers calibrate their subjectivity by producing characterizations that inhabit a more mimetic fictional

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<sup>79</sup> Epic poetry (and mock epic poetry) is disinterested in producing characters as we define them in modern literary theory, but theories of characterization help to define the true utility and complexity of a characterless spectacle in camp.

<sup>80</sup> “[T]he books of characters had to win a place in a culture market in which distinction, and not typicality, was a selling point” (Lynch 55). Many of the allusions about female softness, male solidity, and the broader definition of characters are certainly indebted to observations made in *The Economy of Character*.

world, a contemporary eighteenth-century artist produces figures who idealize “bodily seemliness” (63).

Both types of characters are fictional; both are equally constrained to surfaces. They can only be what they appear, which is not necessarily equitable with truth. A “normal” character, then, may or may not be realistic, even and especially when it seeks to represent the average, which is itself a construct that cannot represent any one thing with particular accuracy. After all, characterizations in the early to mid eighteenth-century drama, a third genre that inflects the *Lock*, do not display “fleshed out” individuals, but instead provide opportunities for “passions [to be] put through their paces” (Lynch 71); on stage, true character *is* pantomime. Sontag’s invocation of the importance (or lack) of character anticipates this character-caricature continuum; here, she and I agree that intimate cathexis to a superficial type drives camp affection: “What Camp taste responds to is ‘instant character’ (this is, of course, very eighteenth century); and, conversely, what it is not stirred by is the sense of the development of character. Character is understood as a state of continual incandescence – a person being one, very intense thing” (Sontag 61). Character is related to the charismatic “it” that Roach and Nussbaum pin to the eighteenth century; character is appearance (that plays to realism in one genre, to the rafters in another).

Because, to Pope, most females “have no character at all,” the boundary between character and caricature is even more delicate. There is not a definitive standard of valid character against which the *Lock*’s inflation, deflation, magnification, or minimization of the toast and her *beau monde* can be measured. How can we tell if something is an inflated caricature if we do not what the natural character is supposed to be? After all, “hyperbole extends in two directions...it means augmenting *or* diminishing to excess” (67), so the co-

existence of reduction (of value) and enlargement (of style, type) lays the ground for the poem's camp site. Although, at certain points in the text, we cannot quite tell if she is being debased or worshipped or both, the tonal shifts only reinforce the heroine's manufactured plasticity. Belinda cannot *not* be purely contrived, so she can remain a force *de trop* while incorporating the melodramatic role of a caricature: that is, a (female) character.

In sum, the *Lock* is camp because it produces something flashy, extreme, but still beautiful out of a social nothing. Belinda's position as unattainable beauty and iconic star that can only be contained and controlled with poetic line is compromised by her gendered abjection, a marginality with which Pope partly identifies even as he participates in the ideological barriers that ensconce her. His pleasure in deflating and inflating her "character," scare quotes intended, skirts sadism by virtue of their shared marginality, although he Others her otherness to suit his aesthetic composition and literary ego. The *Lock*'s fond mockery of women, fashion, sexuality, not to mention its poet's own desire, is not just a work that feigns seriousness about frivolity but a performative reminder that even frivolity itself is an affective mask.

## CHAPTER 5

### STRIKING CAMP: SENTIMENTAL ANTISOCIALITY AND MODERNITY

“You're maudlin and full of self-pity. You're magnificent!”  
Addison DeWitt, *All About Eve* (1940)

“You know, the opposite of love isn't hate. It's indifference.”  
Bree Olson, *Desperate Housewives*  
(with apologies to Elie Wiesel)

Jane Austen may or may not have claimed that Miss Woodhouse is “a heroine whom no one but myself will much like,” but the legacy remains because Emma can be easy to hate, especially when we read her insights about disliking others, which are frequent. Emma hedges about admitting why she dislikes the lovely Jane Fairfax so: jealousy, it is clear, though “so little just” (Austen 156). Even before *Emma*, Austen had lampooned sensibility and sentimentalism in much of her work, but the now-developed language of sentimental camp marks, for instance, most of Miss Woodhouse's initial descriptions of Jane.<sup>81</sup> As would a bona fide sentimental protagonist, Emma finds that she struggles to articulate her feelings for her acquaintance, although, unlike Yorick or Harley, her speech is not arrested by fluster but by pride: “Why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer” (156). The omniscient narrator of a sentimental novel frequently interrupts to translate or clarify the hero's unspeakable feelings for our benefit. In this passage, we eavesdrop on Emma's sarcasm and self-pity about taxing social charity; she “was sorry; – to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like through three long months! to be always doing more than she wished, and less than she ought!” (156). Quickly, the narrative cuts to an earlier conversation with Mr. Knightley which details her puerile dislike, a list that ironically highlights Jane's lack of sensibility and sociability: “But ‘she could never get acquainted with her: she did not know how it was, but there was such coldness

and reserve” (156). The conversation with Knightley is a pointed substitute for fresh monologue; instead of a narrative that fades out because the narrator feels an abundance of (positive) emotion, here, the switch marks Emma’s rash impatience for Jane, her unwillingness to spend yet more time inventing new words and rationales about a woman whom everyone but herself seems to like. Indeed, most of Emma’s interactions with Jane seem catty or bitchy – it is no accident that the social dynamic was so plausibly and effectively modernized into the Valley Girl film adaptation *Clueless* – and I argue that its recitation of Emma’s meaner thoughts wittily parodies the accomplishments of sentimental narrative.

However, the irrationality of irritation is the necessary partner to the perspective of sentimentality and sensibility. As we have seen, affected nerves are admirable boons within sentimental situations, but in order to get on one’s nerves in the pejorative sense, the same level of social proximity and intimacy are prerequisite. However, I am not focusing on heteronormative romance, even when gender roles are seemingly qualified by the awkwardly neutered encounters that pepper the sentimental genre. Instead, after examining the idiosyncrasies of sentimental culture, I examine the camp effects visible in vitriolic and jealous representations of female friendships and acquaintances. These alliances are often triangulated, to borrow Sedgwick’s geometry, or otherwise filtered through male love objects, but not exclusively, and I argue that the characters’ aggravated nerves are played up to play out the sentimental values otherwise espoused by the literary culture of sensibility.

This chapter is invested in the collusion between eighteenth-century sentimentalism and twentieth-century camp, as it argues that the genealogy of the trademark camp bitch must begin with the sentimental hero, the once *en vogue* man of feeling, a man characterized, however, by his androgyny. All sentimental performances turn emotions into visible props or masks, making

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<sup>81</sup> Indeed, free indirect discourse in general frequently takes advantage of character intimacy to produce camp.

invisible feelings somehow “real” by dint of visibility, but I am interested in tracing the development of literary characters, who are either feminized or female, that take advantage of this ready-made sentimental audience and textual template for socially negative or antisocial purposes. Their campy self-conscious affects-cum-affectations do not pretend to spread benevolence but instead exist only to pique, a striking effect in the residual spotlight they have produced from the dregs of sociable expectations. This chapter evaluates literary shifts in sentimental characterization and in readerly identification as it explores the novel product of such a “touching feeling”<sup>82</sup> culture: antisocial sensibility. A lot of attention is paid to the virtues of sensibility and sentimentality, the struggles that language makes to embody the ineffable, or the happy accidents and confusions that effervesce from naïve players, but comparatively less scholarship focuses on how the mechanics of sympathetic feeling within the sentimental genre are used to hurt, pain, or wound. Camp is, after all, a reaction; it redeploys negative energy and abjection through its parodic structure.

### ***Camping in Character***

Once again, locating camp in the eighteenth century is a knowingly anachronistic project at its most literal. Its capaciousness is both vexing and liberating, but its idiosyncratic impact upon literary and social concepts is incredibly valuable and, to me, its parody inhabits several eighteenth-century forms of humor and tone, producing a benchmark of modernity. I have been conceptualizing camp as a stylized hyper-representation of the normal; camp adopts what has been marginalized as “other” and uses it to deliberately transform the surrounding culture. It translates queer affect into a visible representation. In this light, I am not claiming that all sentimental novels are automatically camp because, in general, the genre does not acknowledge its own transgressive components, such as its antisociability, but rather luxuriates in its own

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<sup>82</sup> With apologies to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose book *Touching Feeling* will reappear later in the chapter.

didacticism or moral worth; sentimental characters consciously find nothing in their own actions or deeds to be embarrassing or disagreeable.<sup>83</sup> Even though Samuel Richardson's Pamela Andrews self-deprecatingly calls herself a "Sawce-box" in her plaintive letters to her parents, the narrative clearly endorses her "very pretty romantic Turn for Virtue, and all that" (Richardson 69); although some of the situations seem camp to unimpressed readers – and, even in a sense, to pursuers like Mr. B. – such observers are, at least according to the novel's agenda, simply not delicate enough to appreciate the genuineness of her flexible displays of goodness. Even though Mr. B's interrupted desire may, in some cases, mirror our own frustrations, I would claim that the novel is uninterested in parsing its heroine's gift for sensibility to find a more complicated truth. After all, in the standard sentimental novel's frame, if a character's sincerity is recognized by other morally reliable characters, this is supposed to be proof positive of that character's goodness. To continue with Richardson, Clarissa Harlowe, as many critics have pointed out, is securely "good" because the other "good" (if still imperfect) protagonists – Belford, Anna Howe, Dr. H. and others – testify to her chastity and decency. Meanwhile, Pamela Andrews can only be as good as *her* word: "[E]xpressive bodies are rarely depicted in solitary isolation, but rather appear before a viewing figure... whose own responses provide a testimony of the virtue on display" (Goring 153). The audience grants subjectivity by verifying the sentiment.

A genre analysis, not a gender analysis, though the two are especially related in sentimental culture, must attend to how quickly the vogue for the sentimental rose and fell within the eighteenth century,<sup>84</sup> although I generally agree with Leo Braudy that the sentimental novel is not just an embarrassing blip in literary history but, at root, further develops a "structural and thematic continuity with earlier eighteenth-century novelists" (5). Without getting too distracted

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<sup>83</sup> Posthumous and skeptical readers often consider such novels campy, but that is a separate issue.

by a rise of the novel discussion, unsocial literary examples are only visible and identifiable because of the concurrent interest in sociable, sentimental characters and feelings, a paradigm shift that makes resistant examples of bad behavior stand out in complementary relief. For instance, in her material theory presented in *How Novels Think*, Nancy Armstrong points out that protagonists within “realistic” Western literary fiction, as opposed to religious allegory or courtly romance, share bourgeois values. This commonality is made possible by print culture and secularization, an elemental theory I agree with. The rest of her theory explains how modernity facilitated the development of a different sort of literary hero: a “bad subject,” or a character that makes decisions that do not always conform to the dictates of an imaginary authority, a resistance that becomes an admirable and imitable quality to the projected reader. Armstrong’s theory helpfully overlaps with mine by virtue of its attention to extra-social characters – she calls such creations “misfits” – and to resistant techniques of writing, the strategies that make bad characters seem oh so good to a readership. But her concept differs from mine because her examples ultimately pursue authors’ attempts to rehabilitate the misfit into a template for ideological change. For instance, she acknowledges that Moll Flanders is essentially a prostitute, not yet a vocation, despite the example Mary Magdalene could offer, that bourgeois early eighteenth-century readers would feel comfortable modeling or praising. But she argues that Defoe’s technique of faux-autobiography makes Moll’s sexual license forgettable, a somewhat unseemly (if entertaining) accessory to her more valuable talent for writing and storytelling, noteworthy agents for change: “But if, instead of sexuality, we think of writing as the additive that transforms her from a docile body into a misfit whose upward mobility, as marked by literacy, we can admire, then it suddenly becomes possible to imagine turning such a misfit into a

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<sup>84</sup> Of course, sentimental fiction never dies and enjoys transatlantic popularity in the nineteenth century and beyond, but I focus on the mode and the subtle counter-responses within the bounds of the eighteenth century.

self-governing subject” (Armstrong, *Novels* 41).

But what do we do with characters who seem remarkable because they remain excessively antisocial or asocial within a normally sociable context, and what did this atonality contribute to modern eighteenth-century literary culture? The examples that I isolate are more than stock “bad guys,” the types that further plot. When read within the context of sentimental culture, such antagonistic moments are *de trop*, explained and detailed and narrated in a fashion that encourages a reader to try to get inside of their heads, a dangerous identificatory process rarely solicited within premodern prose. The style foreshadows melodrama, a camp gem of the twentieth century, but all camp texts, early modern through postmodern, use their seeming gratuitousness to produce transgression, to purposefully circumvent or, at least, enliven dime-a-dozen “facts,” narratives, and fables like romantic consummation or familial war. Reception matters in any discussion of camp; unintentional kitsch is different from purposive camp. In my examples, understanding the triangulation between reader, author, and fictional character(s) is essential in order to receive the text properly, especially the antisocial components that I isolate. Readers of satirical texts, for instance, are often unsure if they are the target or the joker. Felicitous readers of sentimental texts are *supposed* to take the morals at face value, as I demonstrated above through *Pamela*, although Henry Fielding, one example among many, proved his resistance to such gravity by publishing *Shamela*.

In respect to camp reception, Pamela Robertson’s book *Guilty Pleasures* focuses on female participants, as my examples in this chapter focus on female writers or characters, and her theory explains how women can participate in what seems like their own domination in a patriarchal context. In an audience of successful camp, the readers or spectators who are in on the performative joke, must wear “different masks, different ‘identities’” when they participate,

adopting a liminal stance between receiving the object and then, in turn, stepping back one level to then perceive themselves receiving the object: “Camp offers a . . . model of negotiation to account for the overlap between passivity and activity in a viewer who sees through, simultaneously perhaps, one mask of serious femininity and another mask of laughing femininity” (Robertson 15). This receptive division operates similarly in the sentimental genre. Especially in the eighteenth century, the imagined or hypothetical process of watching oneself watching someone else, or feeling oneself being someone else, an aestheticization of the ethical self, is a compulsory performance, an artificial exercise that is ironically a requisite step toward being a good, social person, as Adam Smith and others well know. The eighteenth-century reader of a sentimental novel must, to borrow Robertson’s template, overlay queerly excessive content onto any categorical imperatives that he or she must share as a member of society. The writers and readers I examine might not - do not – consider the significance of the antisocial residue that marks their pages as a manifestation of “camp,” but I maintain that certain eighteenth-century texts which incorporate female characters indulging in moments of excessive “otherness” are savvy about their agenda, producing an early version of camp that sees sentimentality with double vision.

As I will show, the heroes of sentimental literature also endorse a self-absorption that, in many ways, blocks or alienates a reader while he or she is being asked to empathize. I have been claiming that early sentimental literature is uncomfortable with its selfish structure and the “unsocial passions” that supplement its legibility, and it uses excess to distract readers from this truth; excess appears in the form of incredible situations or manipulative verbosity, signs that distinguish themselves from the realistic novel upon which it has an ambiguous reliance. One way that the genre writes itself out of the paradox is by scapegoating female relationships, using

the ensuing melodramatic selfishness – a selfishness that exists within all sentimental heroes, regardless of sex<sup>85</sup> – to pathologize the virtues of sensibility while protecting its own values. A rehearsal of two critical points, both dealing with objectification, will orient my argument about female relationships in my iteration of eighteenth-century camp. Dramatic scenes such as the interminable *Dynasty* catfight between Alexis and Krystle can be camp products because they are benchmarks of excess (that score!), waste (what happens to the dresses! the hat?), and vampy overacting (articulation! The freewheeling arm paddle!) while remaining “safely” part of the realm of women, still a secondary target market.<sup>86</sup> Mark Finch, one of many voices representing the *Dynasty* camp, gives a great deal of the credit to Joan Collins and her aura that bleeds into her role, for “Alexis of all characters comes closest to direct address; she has more lines to deliver as soliloquy” (157). Finch’s comment points to one major explanation of her appeal as a(n) (gay) icon: the patrician diva as a reified object always ready for her close up, something that is beloved precisely because it seems plastic. Chuck Kleinhans agrees that modern camp texts are partly made knowable by their surfaces, that they recognize and dramatize their superficiality and thingness: “The characters do not have any psychological problems or interior life, the Oedipal situation is totally externalized; they do not have any fantasies, they live them” (183). Swirling melodramas literally wear their hearts on their Technicolor sleeves.

Eighteenth-century novels, on the other hand, were also figuring out how to negotiate the mandates of narrative and character depth to manipulate readers into recognizing themselves within the text, an unfinished project, of course. Julie Park, interested in the conceit of living

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<sup>85</sup> Once more, I am also alluding to the gender slippages that threaten the masculinity of sentimental heroes.

<sup>86</sup> So-called masculine texts that dramatically feature epics, bloody fights, and bare-chested, sword-wielding men, as I have argued in my discussion on the *Lock*, also have camp value, although their gender commentary is more transgressive.

dolls and the strange way eighteenth-century people related to their things, borrows from Claudia Johnson's work on sensibility to make a Mulveyian or Bergerian observation about gender and agency: "[W]omen in novels of sensibility are rarely seen to deploy sympathy for social betterment, or to look compassionately at others: 'women of feeling weep over their own troubles, while men weep only as they look on. Women, for their part, rarely look'" (59). Men act, women appear. Although Park simply means to summarize why feminine men could get away with their gender transgression, and I maintain that men with sensibility were sociable, proactive heroes only secondarily, I agree that women in the sentimental genre were often used as props: beautiful, miserable, self-indulgent, and melodramatic props. If women are represented as such, then how do we read their relationships with other things? As sentimental fiction is and was, camp texts are often marketed towards and designed for women and their stereotypical sensibilities; they encourage women to relate to or distance themselves from the antics splashed on the screen or stage.

Finch's other claim, if hastily sketched, connects audience and story. Returning to the *Dynasty* example, he gestures towards the tension Joan/Alexis produces between the contained story-world and an off-camera reality: a porous line, no matter the media, as Sedgwick and Watt recognized. Joan manipulates the scripted material, chewing scenery to make Alexis hyper-real, a straight drag parody of women, rendering the entire soap a glitzy joke that only she – and particular audience members – can appreciate. The other women within the diegesis are not in on the joke; if they were, her diva would recede, and her camp effect would vanish: "Alexis's construction (role as enunciator) makes sense of the text's wit, claims it for her own, and this is appreciable from a gay subject position" (157). To my mind, Finch's theory, if (over)protective of the gay gaze, explains the compelling and unreasonable allure of "thingified" main characters,

the reified hyper-real objects that also populated eighteenth-century sentimental literature. However, if we twist Finch's words, being deliberately obtuse for the purpose of example to swap a "gay" subject position for a "sentimental" one, or even, yes, sanguine, optimistic, *gay*, might this account for the readerly appeal of Sterne's *Journey*? To the others in his story, Yorick is an unremarkable citizen of the world; Sterne's is a readerly text. While a reader does not have to be an earnest sentimentalist to find pleasure in Yorick's travails – indeed, I believe Sterne is mocking the stability of such an individual – he or she will enjoy the text much more if the purported "wink" is received.

### *I'm Getting Sentimental Over...Me*

As I have argued in an earlier chapter, the vicious – and camp – attacks on women seen in eighteenth-century works such as *The Rape of the Lock* are meant to appear as decorous and light as their parlor settings. When Swift tries to embarrass Celia for her "dirty smock...[b]eneath the armpits well besmeared" (lines 11-12) in "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1732), while it is true that weaponized physical abasement is a hallmark of modern day camp, he ultimately hacks her into abstract synecdoche.<sup>87</sup> The values of sentimental fiction, most especially as the ethos becomes ironic, contribute another layer to the camp site, one that borrows from but transcends the staid and timeworn arguments about techniques of realism or satire, and one that seems the most visible and resident to the logic of modern camp parody.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's response, "The Reasons that Induced Dr. Swift to Write a Poem Called the Lady's Dressing Room" (1734), takes up the gauntlet and introduces the personal into her satirical volley by alluding to Swift's erectile dysfunction.

<sup>88</sup> Walpole's mockery of the earnest family romance makes such faith in blood and honor seem twisted and terrifying, forecasting an accurate explanation of why perverse sexualities must always inhabit the gothic genre today, even and especially those examples that claim to champion chastity. Charke's stagey casting of herself as needy star also exploits and therefore sends up the rights and rites of sentimental and familial love. These two authors, the only two writing in mid-century (and the *Lock* is only potentially sentimental, and only briefly, about the fate of Belinda's star and the poet's own reputation) certainly produce strategies still visible in modern camp. But, by design, neither are interested in emotive depth, not even Charke. All of my camp texts are impelled by their

Not accidentally, the literary quibble over the differences among sentiment, sentimentality, and sensibility might be almost as vexed a debate as the proper definition and classification of camp.<sup>89</sup> The trendiness of emotional effluvia is remarked in early century public media such as *The Spectator*, where alleged (male) readers marvel at the compulsion to perform emotions for the pleasure of their fellow men: “If [your friend] happens to be taken from you, you are immediately surrounded with Numbers of those Spectators, who expect a melancholy Shrug of your Shoulders, a Pathetical Shake of your Head, and an Expressive Distortion of your Face, to measure your Affection and Value for the Deceased: But there is nothing, on these Occasions, so much in their Favour as immoderate Weeping” (*Spectator* 95, 403). Sentiment is, according to Janet Todd, at once “a moral reflection” and “a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion” (7), while the less neutral word sentimentality connotes a “debased and affected feeling, an indulgence in and display of emotion for its own sake beyond the stimulus and beyond propriety” (8). The sentimental novel began as a celebration of the former but, towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the next, seemingly decomposed into the latter, with Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) standing in as the best example of a work that cleverly straddles the gap between earnest sentiment and something more critically sly. Finally, Christopher C. Nagle defines sensibility as “the shorthand for a dominant cultural belief in feeling as the glue that holds society together” (5), an ideal or a form that reminds us to “only connect,” with all of its sexual and visceral connotations. Few critics agree about whether, for instance, sentiment inheres in the mind, and sensibility, the body, or vice versa, but some sort of mind-body causal relationship is a common if very inchoate point of agreement.

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alterity, as I have argued, but the literary developments of sensibility within the texts in *this* chapter best explain or provide history behind the reactive form and the gender politics that are absolutely key to modern camp parody.

In (post)modern culture, sentimentality is kitschy. Deborah Knight reconsiders the breezy dismissal of all things sentimental by questioning the established philosophical or aesthetic definitions of the term. Sentimentality “has consequences for us as persons” (414); what was once a proud and obvious standard in eighteenth-century literature has become a sign and symptom of weakness and irrationality in the twentieth and beyond. Even in Henry Mackenzie’s ambiguous novel *The Man of Feeling* (1771), the protagonist, Harley, vacillates between uncritical heroism and dubiousness. In the honestly-named chapter “The Man of Feeling in a Brothel,” the narrator observes the hero as he politely invites the conniving but wan waif to share some claret. Not the most street-savvy of moves, of course, but this earnestness defines Harley. However, the narrator doesn’t assume that a darker subtext is impossible; instead, he assumes it is possible, so possible that he doesn’t want to seek and expose one. “From what impulse he [Harley] did this, we do not mean to inquire; as it has ever been against our nature to search for motives where bad ones are to be found” (37). In other words, *we* are accomplices when we insist upon Harley’s innocence. Indeed, Knight reminds us that “sentimentality leads us away from active, cognitive engagement with the ambiguities and complexities of the real. [It] encourages complacency” (417). A sentimental perspective is uncritical, happily naïve about the dominance of goodness, or at least docile simplicity. However, such a blanket criticism of the uncritical – the sentimental – flirts with becoming a rote, uncritical judgment itself: “The philosophical condemnation of sentimentality can, in short, be a sentimental activity” (419). While I am not claiming that there really is so much more to that Thomas Kinkade in the den, I am interested in eighteenth-century literary culture’s critique of its own sentimental products. “Perhaps, though, the point is that there isn’t a differentiation to be made between sentimentality

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<sup>89</sup> See also G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*; Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*; Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*; Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and*

and its denunciation,” resolves Eve Sedgwick (*Epistemology* 153).<sup>90</sup> Sedgwick’s archeology of camp seems to originate in the epistemology of sentimentality, a surprising location for casual onlookers who might equate camp with surface, not internalized emotion. Much of the derision spins off from “the all too predictable tears of women, of gay men, of people with something to cry about” (146), an association that, to her, begins in the nineteenth century, fomented by its notorious gender panic. The eighteenth century, however, was less conflicted about the philosophical meaning of tears, although Sedgwick’s and Knight’s postmodern rhetorical questions about the Mobius strip of (anti)sentimental judgment inform my inquiry about the later (de)valuation of sentiment.

For although pure sentiment’s star eventually fizzles, the value of empathic identification remains a skill and an asset of character, not to mention a cliché Christian imperative: do unto others! Indeed, the chiasmic exchange between self and other is the nexus of sentimental math. The dominant theory is that a finely tuned constitution is a badge among members of the cultural elite, and membership is visually expressed by the cognition and dissemination of “a generally accessible language of gesture, a language which ‘all men understand’ (or at least, all men of a certain culture and with a certain level of aesthetic education and taste)” (Williams 472-473). Mid-century sentimental enthusiasts are not the marginalized gay men about whom Sedgwick speaks but instead bourgeois men with cultural capital to spend. Most mid-century sentimental novels choose to show off how their heroes and heroines naturally use the self to become, paradoxically, selfless, a strange alchemy, as Adam Smith’s famous example demonstrates: “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will

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*the Novel.*

<sup>90</sup> Sedgwick recuperates the conundrum – that being, “to enter into the discourse of sentimentality at any point or with any purpose is almost inevitably to be caught up in a momentum of essentially scapegoating attribution” (154)

never inform us of what he suffers....It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy....His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels” (11-12). In the line of Hobbes or Mandeville, Smith’s model originates with self-interest and egocentrism. Our bodies, ourselves; we must make the effort of manufacturing the Lockean impression of phantom pain in order to care about the other in the first place. Our personal experience of pain is transmuted onto the sufferer’s experience of pain, an affective hologram that is volleyed back to us. Indeed, despite our most selfless protests, we do not really want to experience that otherness. In her analysis of a sentimental rhetoric that finds how well-intentioned charity often degrades into imperial smugness, Lynn Festa reminds us that, even when dealing with living people, not hypothetical examples, “sympathetic identification creates difference rather than similitude; the reader is neither invited to meld ecstatically with these wretched people nor to change places with them” (4). There remains a hierarchy of being; suffering becomes an opportunity for emotive tourism. The other’s pain is only meaningful when we *pretend* that it becomes our own. It is hardly surprising, then, that much of the canon of sentimental literature is marked by the epistolary or first-person formats and the appealing solipsism of the “I.”

Theory on the narrative “I” fills out a standard chapter in most histories of the novel, but it also deserves an entry on the camp timeline. Similar in intention to the lyric “I,” although the latter mode intentionally sets itself apart from quotidian speech, sublimely obviating most claims towards naturalness of language (but not feeling), the narrative “I” manages to forge non-diegetic connections while it proudly talks and talks and talks only of itself. Gabrielle Starr reminds us

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– to conclude that the binary of sentimentality and antisentimentality reconciles a difference between kitsch and camp. The former assigns negativity to other people and things, while the latter embraces it, *recognizes* it.

that the lyric, a form that she argues was consistently embedded within the realistic novel throughout the long eighteenth century, and its reliance on the speaking “I,” is responsible for creating a solution out of the “limits of subjectivity” made between defining and delimiting pronouns such as me and you, “I” and it: “From the impasse they create comes the necessity of speech...[The letter] carries the burden of conveying or carrying affect as well as describing it” (11). The eighteenth-century reading public’s embrace of this “letter,” which specifically refers to the epistolary in Starr’s argument but also well applies to the narrative “I,” explains how camp and other forms of marginalized humor could take root.

Always connect; the isolated, subjective embrace of the “I” leaps forward to recall Sedgwick’s uncanny feeling of belonging, described in the *Epistemology*, when she had a singular moment of identification with a homoerotic Willie Nelson lyric on the Ithaca airwaves decades ago. In these moments of solitude and anxiety, a kindred consumer of camp asks, “What if the right audience for this were exactly *me*?” (136). Interestingly, the pleasures of social identification across media are also mentioned in *The Rise of the Novel*, specifically in one of the chapters on the affective efficacy of sentimental novel forms: “The private nature of the novel’s mode of performance,” marvels Ian Watt, “is heightened by the fact that we are usually alone when we read, and that the book, for the time being, becomes a kind of extension of our personal life – a private possession that we keep with us in our pocket or under the pillow” (198). Watt’s description, nearly masturbatory, claims a paradigm shift in not only styles of writing but also techniques of reading, a private consumption of public matter than has apostolic faith in making a discursive connection through non-discursive, commercial, tangible print. The compulsion to reach out and touch someone – and to be touched in return – through language, as AT&T’s kitschy-sentimental slogan from the 1980s would attest, is humorously anticipated, of course, by

Yorick's final non-verbal gesture in his *Journey*: "[W]hen I stretch'd out my hand, I caught hold of the Fille de Chambre's / END OF VOL. II" (Sterne 173). The bawdy joke, lightly sanitized by the layout of white space, reminds us that there is still a great deal of pleasure to be taken in physical touch.

The bare outline of the novel's rise, at least according to Watt and his developers: the eighteenth century public found pleasure in community, a process mirrored and produced by its reading materials and dissemination of language, and more specifically in its taste for a realistic, intimate, and nimbly sentimental genre that fostered the comforting illusion of identification and interpersonal sympathy. However, there is still ample room for skepticism about the miraculous transubstantiation of the "I," and this doubt is marked by textual moments such as Sterne's *fin*, which reintroduces the vulgarity of real bodies into the ether of sensibility, a telling last impression with which to close the novel. But the limitations of charitable feelings are tested right away; when faced with an alms-seeking monk, Yorick rues, "No man cares to have his virtues the sport of contingencies" (Sterne 7). Contingent virtues are a distinct possibility when one reads nonverbal cues, and the scene cleverly plays this out; misreading is a constant problem when the lexicon of sensibility, the lingua franca for this privileged set, partly defines itself through ambiguity. The paradox: the qualities that make Yorick a hero also make him a villain; the confrontation could be showcasing Yorick's excellent discernment – that he can read at a glance the monk's true worth – or it could cast him as unflatteringly cynical, cold, and antisocial: "The moment I cast my eyes upon him, I was predetermined not to give him a single sous" (8). But what does this mean? Can one be "predetermined" *after* one has already espied the very object of predetermination? Would Yorick, for instance, be pre-determined to refuse the monk any alms if he had not already "cast his eyes upon him" at that moment – if the monk, that is,

were not annoyingly proximal? Instead, it seems, the determination is proleptic; after seeing the monk, annoyed by his unsuitable Catholicism, Yorick decides against him but transforms the effect into a cause: a “pre”-determination made ex post facto.

What do we make of the sentimental hero now? Although the eighteenth-century – or modern-day – reader might not think through Yorick’s psychology on a painstakingly conscious level, he or she is invested in his decisions particularly because he is billed as a “good” sentimental hero, and to recognize goodness is to share it, according to the calculus of sensibility. In her cognitive study of reader investment in (eighteenth-century) fiction, Blakey Vermeule ventures that “[l]ate twentieth-century Americans may be far less comfortable with fictions than eighteenth-century men and women were. That is because fiction now permeates every aspect of our cultural life (18). Her hypothesis makes sense when it nods towards postmodern jadedness, but can only speculate regarding the eighteenth-century audience. For instance, as shown in my examples above, many sentimental novels labor to connect readers with the sociable hero, surely a sign of a less-than-gullible audience. As if to convince himself and readers alike, Yorick continually addresses a skeptical readership in a paranoid style: “[T]here was but one way of doing it [of getting the Piedmontese discreetly into her bed], and that I leave to the reader to devise; protesting as I do it, that if it is not the most delicate in nature, ‘tis the fault of his own imagination – against which this is not my first complaint” (Sterne 172). We have, he protests, predetermined to sully his purity, a prejudice he must continually correct by reversing the blame, insisting that the reader, not he, is the authors of any potentially naughty bits. Yet, have we only questioned our hero’s beneficence because the narration directly interpellates a latent suspicion, or that it predetermines our predetermination?

Still, Vermeule’s project, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*, asks a question

especially valuable to sentimental narrative and its imperative of care and love: “Caring about anybody takes energy, and when we care about fictional people, the costs seem unlikely ever to be recouped. Why should we spend attention on people who will never care about us in return?” (Vermeule 12). Are novels trying to get us to practice our own sociability? After all, unlike religious fables, which expect readers to believe that its contents are real, or romances, which are less character-driven, sentimental novels seem especially insidious about suspending the reality of their make-believe. But are their fictions much removed from reality? Real-life individuals in possession of sensibility reify others in order to know them, thus fictionalizing and simplifying their “characters”; a tear for instance, is only a code, a shorthand, and the person who shed the tear is qualified synecdochically through its symbol. Indeed, we, in turn, whether we are creatures of sentiment or not, reify in order to recognize them. An eighteenth-century admirer of any Greuze tableau of a girl and a dead bird is meant to sympathize with her sorrow while approving of her aesthetic beauty, innocence, and charm. When that patron, then or now, peers through the glaze in search of darker symbolism, the aura is shattered; the girl’s beautiful “thingness” is not meant to be vivified. Still, our disappointment is somewhat alleviated by the fact that we know that a character is a fiction or that the painted girl is a canvas. Meanwhile, the sociable world refuses to admit that its sociability is itself based in fiction, that its real social relationships are constructs of ideology.

This means that the inward gaze of sensibility – the root that is outwardly performed only secondarily – is inherently antisocial at its core, a slightly inconvenient truth that eighteenth-century writers tried to obviate: “Novelists were able to concede that habits of sociability were limited or exceptional, only just surviving in a world in which fellow-feeling was rare and malevolence prevailed; but they were able to position each private reader as the exceptional

connoisseur of commendable sympathies” (Mullan 13). To encourage readership, the novel adapted to the constraints of the cult of sensibility, a “contract,” as Mullan conceives it, by encouraging each private reader to feel welcomed as an honorary citizen of the elite sentimental world. In a creative analogy, Festa calls “users of the sentimental... a public engaged in what might be called emotional bungee jumping” (34), making each affective interaction seem like cruising, a sexy sequence of thrills: “This take-it-or-leave-it relation to feeling means the individual must be able to unhook himself or herself from one object and move onto the next; sentimentality is about both the encounter with the object – the quasi-pornographic usage of sentimental scenes – and the ability to disengage from the scene” (35). In this light, eighteenth-century novel readers, Ian Watt, Eve Sedgwick, Samuel Richardson, Willie Nelson, and all of us are connected by a psychic-erotic process of self-recognition within the textual other. And this satisfying collectivity originates, at its core, in the solitary, the isolated, and the self-centered. A text like *A Sentimental Journey* is especially adept at looping the reader and the hero or the self and the other together; its performativity is felicitous. David Richter claims that the novel skillfully deploys “corrective satire” (Richter 143), meaning that Sterne shames us, rollercoastering us through Yorick’s quasi-parodic, quasi-sincere sentimental situations, into immediately recognizing our own flawed position on the spectrum of moral goodness, or into identifying with Yorick’s compromised positions because we shamefully recollect our own experiences. After criticizing Yorick and criticizing the scene, we are finally and “ultimately victimized into abashed self-consciousness of our own lewd thoughts and desires” (143) because, in the end, the laughter directed at our intended object, usually Yorick, underscores our lack of humanity. Richter’s formulation has been enriched by contemporary satire theory, which notes the dividedness *within* the satirist and the satiric object, as well as the more obvious dividedness

*between* the two: “[S]atire works to *produce* a difference between two figures whom the satirist – who is usually one of these figures – perceives to be insufficiently differentiated” (Bogel, *Difference* 42). In one sense, Sterne is the satirist and Yorick is his object. But, in another sense, we are the satirists and Yorick is our object, or, in another, Sterne (through Yorick) satirizes us by pulling us in to participate in the story’s completion. Said participation is culled, according to critics like Smitten, because of the universal language of gesture: “[T]he reader can simultaneously view the scene through the eyes of a spectator and respond to it more directly as a quasi-participant” (Smitten 94). If “an interest in fiction evolved to keep track of cheaters, free riders, and other morally costly defectors” (qtd. in Vermeule 163), a theory that recalls Mr. Spectator and his preferred way of (not) participating in the social world, then fiction provided a liminal but panoptic space to practice monitoring, discussing, and typecasting others without any risk of being perceived in turn. Any maudlin-yet-sincere scenes are ripe with satiric opportunity because the reader safely incorporates himself into the ensuing drama, perhaps because of the novel’s use of gesture and expression or perhaps because of its exploitation of “translation” and communication. Nonetheless, readers are simultaneously passive watchers while merely pretending to be agent-actors. But this division is hardly the only one, as Bogel notes.

### ***Masks or Faces?***

The self-satisfied plenitude that washes over a sentimental observer is a pleasant illusion, so even when, in his anecdote on torture, Smith analyzes “unsocial passions” such as hatred, or Yorick humorously turns sociability into charming awkwardness, the unsocial or antisocial is framed within the social imperative. According to Smith’s model, before reason or cognition can mediate, anger blocks sympathy, and bitterness repels an onlooker. “[T]hese passions are by nature the objects of our aversion. Their disagreeable and boisterous appearance never excites,

never prepares, and often disturbs our sympathy” (45). Indeed, Sianne Ngai diagnoses Smith’s reparative reading as a compulsion to “draw others into its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability” (*Ugly* 336). The unsocial creates, dialectically, the opportunity for a mobbish and common social response. Even the generally less sanguine Hume admits that when the pitch “rise[s] up to cruelty,” then “[a]ll the pity and concern which we have for the miserable sufferers by this vice, turns against the person guilty of it, and produces a stronger hatred than we are sensible of on any other occasion” (*Treatise* 605-606). We cannot help but agree to react against the inappropriately cruel, as Hume’s collective pronoun attests. However, what if we do not recuperate the unsocial impulses as Smith was wont to do?

Thirty years earlier in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714, 1723), Mandeville opined that it is hardly natural or necessary for charitable or otherwise positive feelings to produce social boons: “Pity, tho’ it is the most gentle and the least mischievous of all our Passions, is yet as much a Frailty of our Nature, as Anger, Pride, or Fear” (91). But by the middle of the century, visible, visceral pity is more frequently – if not exclusively – aligned with good, and the *Fable*’s thesis about greed and self-interest provides a valuable complement to what will become sentiment’s golden rule. According to Mandeville’s theory, alleged blessings like pity and charity are passions, “and all Passions center in Self-Love” (108), mainlining a self-interested ego investment that, in a way, anticipates Smith’s example about sympathy for the tortured. In other words, goodness is like any vice, socially constructed and narcissistic at the core. All passions are base and vulgar and unstable, a truth that he embraces: “Passions may do Good by chance, but there can be no merit but in the conquest of them” (107).

So, if good passions are not inherently good, what about the bad? How should we frame negative emotions and impulses? If we return to Smith’s concluding segments in his section on

the unsocial, we see that he considers these passions most dangerous because they are self-divisive within “a *good* mind” (46, my emphasis), a good mind being one ensconced within “the cool and impartial spectator” (47). Smith’s Addisonian ideal citizen<sup>91</sup> is already partitioned from the fray in that he is compelled to act more with more “magnanimity” to support the effort “to maintain [his] own rank and dignity” (47), a moral and social stratification that fits well within a Mandevillian purview. To Smith, the unsocial passions are dangerous because they begin within the imagination and catalyze internal conflict and self-doubt: “What most disturbs them [those who harbor unsocial passions] is the idea of perfidy and ingratitude exercised towards themselves; and the discordant and disagreeable passions which this excites, constitute, in their own opinion, the chief part of the injury which they suffer” (46). The judgment of others inspires a paranoia that shatters social connections, but Smith contends that these reactionary affects, though natural and reflexive, can be harnessed and controlled, *impartially*: “When resentment is guarded and qualified in this manner, it may be admitted to be even generous and noble” (47). According to the enlightened plan, the dangerous remainders of the unsocial passions are reabsorbed into the elements of the social world through sublimation.

It seems like a majority of eighteenth-century thinkers devoted copious energy towards structural theories about the new public and the common weal. *On the Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau’s contribution to the leviathan problem of ordering the people, offers a cost-benefit analysis of sacrifices and liberties, ultimately claiming that libertinism and selfishness are itself enslavements. Rousseau’s outlook limns the private – or the intimate – sphere, designating this psychic space as the singularly appropriate outlet to contain what Smith would perhaps consider

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<sup>91</sup> We are undoubtedly meant to recall the first Spectator paper, which introduces the main character: “In short, where-ever I see a Cluster of People I always mix with them, tho’ I never open my Lips but in my own Club. Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species....In short, I have acted in all the parts of my Life as a Looker-on” (Spectator 1, 4-5).

the unsocial passions: “In fact, each individual can, as a man, have a private will contrary to or even different from the general will that he has as a citizen. His private interest can speak to him in an entirely different manner than the common interest” (Rousseau 150). Where Mandeville assumes that, no matter the controls in place, human avarice will leach into public interactions, Rousseau has faith in the preventive imperative, the superego *avant la lettre*.

So what happens when one does not adopt the social goals of either Smith’s or Rousseau’s versions of *sensus communis*, or when the unsocial is not reformed or repressed or cordoned off into the private domain? The diagnostic summary of latter-day psychopathy, the newer iteration of antisocial personality disorder, does not necessarily summon visions of mass murderers or other deviants. Instead, according to the foremost clinical metric, Robert Hare’s *Psychopathy Checklist, Revised*, the description contains relatively mundane and common, if unflattering, human character traits. Psychopaths, including those distinctly classified as antisocial, present with taxonomized traits along axes such as

Interpersonal (glibness/superficial charm, grandiose sense of self worth, pathological deception, conning/manipulative); Affective (lack of remorse or guilt, shallow affect, callous/lack of empathy, failure to accept responsibility for actions); Lifestyle (need for stimulation/proneness to boredom, parasitic lifestyle, lack of realistic long-term goals, impulsivity, irresponsibility); and Antisocial (poor behavioral controls, early behavior problems, juvenile delinquency...).

(Hare and Neumann 219-220)

There is an expected focus on egocentrism and a corresponding aggressive harm or passive neglect towards others and their feelings; in psychopaths, the social vibrations that foment society have seemingly become, to everyone else, uncomfortably numb.

What is a normal or acceptable social connection? How much should one feel to be properly adjusted? For instance, in Mackenzie's novel, Harley's narrator vouchsafes that the average person, a reader like you and me, is a lesser subject according to the standards of sensibility. Our sublime feelings of goodwill, love, and empathy are mere simulacra: "[I]n this world of semblance, we are contented with personating happiness; to feel it, is an art beyond us" (Mackenzie 74). If men like Harley are the real, if we are only actors who approximate the feelings and sensations that they genuinely own, are we "psychopathic" for pretending to be equitable, even though we play on out of good will? In contrast, critics of sentimentalism, including Jane Austen, have classified those with exquisite sensibility as the insidiously "psychopathic," as they, "in need for stimulation," indulge in a "parasitic lifestyle" fueled by Radcliffean sensation,<sup>92</sup> a rather eighteenth-century danger that would be substantiated by Foucault in *History of Madness*: "[The novel] detached the soul from all that was immediate and natural in the sensible, dragging it into an imaginary world of feelings that were all the more violent for being unreal, and therefore unregulated by the sweet laws of nature" (371). Novel-gazers and impressionable sensationalists such as Catherine Morland, the polar opposite of Emma Woodhouse, who "read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" (Austen, *Northanger* 7), are mocked – the cutting adverb "so" proves irresistible, inserted twice for ironic effect – for living in fiction. But the heartfelt sentimentalists such as Harley and his admirers can only pity the critical observers for their inability to express the social affects in an authentically profound way. We are used to siding with Austen and consider overly sentimental creatures and characters as queerly peculiar, and Foucauldian theory explains that this is a condition of our ingrained enlightenment and post-enlightenment values, the same

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<sup>92</sup> The suicide of young Werther is also relevant.

judgments that lead us to dismiss sentimentalism. A sentimental person is just another confineable unit of the counterpublic: “If libertines, blasphemers, the debauched and the prodigal were thrown together with those whom we would describe as mentally ill, it was not because too little account was taken of the innocence or determinism of madness, but simply because unreason was given pride of place” (Foucault 157). Speechlessness, an infamous habit of sentimental protagonists, can be coded as both a proof of unreason and imbecility and a foil to reason’s limitations, an aporia. “There were a thousand sentiments; -- but they gushed so impetuous on his [Harley’s] heart, that he could not utter a syllable. \* \* \* \*” (Mackenzie 78). The ineffable nature of Harley’s feelings consequently elude the narrator and the rational grammar of language, as evidenced by the narrator’s inability to recite or fill in the affective blanks on Harley’s behalf. The aposiopesis, ineffectually translated into asterisks, denotes not only the hero’s loss, but also the narrator’s and our own. Definitive, empirical meaning is impossible, even for the soi-disant reasonable, which incidentally complicates the legitimacy of the regime of reason.

This issue of pathological sociability relates to but is more than simply *schadenfreude*. *Schadenfreude* accounts for the real satisfaction we experience when we bear witness to the misfortunes or accidents, but, in my understanding, it is itself a secretive pleasure, an emotion that would slide into guilt if confirmed or exposed among mixed company, even though the pleasure is understood to be universal. In eighteenth-century sentimental literature, the phenomenon is openly coded as social – even viral – not solitary, but the sociability needed to catalyze the gossip quickly gives way to the antisocial or the pathological: “The desire of communicating knowledge [is] one of the earliest propensities we discover; but it may be doubted whether the pleasure (for pleasure there certainly is) arising from it be not often more

selfish than social: for we frequently observe the tidings of Ill communicated as eagerly as the annunciation of Good” (Mackenzie 79). It feels good to talk and to share, especially when the content drips with “tidings of Ill.” A social exchange is needed in order to showcase the sentimentally virtuous and gifted and to disseminate the antisocial gossip. What Mackenzie notes is that the two are laced together as one.

This and the previous textual examples begin to illustrate the neural center of my inquiry about the negative, antisocial, or vindictive frissons of sentimental characterizations. As I have already mentioned, the tension was extant during the eighteenth century, hence the contemporary parodies and responses. It accounts for, as Nagle suggests, the *jouissance* we experience when watching characters like Yorick or Harley gingerly negotiate the sensible world: “[T]he central paradox at the heart of any thorough study of Sensibility: under its influence, society seems to derive pleasure from navigating the very fault lines that threaten to undo the social order” (11). Thus, it seems essential to explore how (anti)sociability was bifurcated from the singular vein of affect promoted by the sentimental novel and the larger culture of sensibility.

### *Women’s Pictures*

I have been arguing that the performance of sensibility and sentimentality is itself a dramatic “cover up” or prop that masks an uncomfortably antisocial or unsocial truth, and I consider this an important benchmark in the parodic structure of modern camp because insincerity is thoroughly integrated into the performance of sincerity, less a “lie that tells the truth,”<sup>93</sup> than a truth that tells a lie. This destabilizes the concurrent, culturally self-defined values that “authentic” sincerity, charity, and sentiment otherwise brandish. Other scholars and certainly eighteenth-century writers themselves are and were aware of sensibility’s “dirty little secret”: its navel-gazing could be indulgent, solipsistic, or even quite literally harmful as it

proved for young Werther. However, I am mostly interested in examining this not-so-secret antisocial shame, and I maintain that particularly savvy literary manipulations of the antisocial could *only* originate within the sentimental genre, and the unique intermingling of earnest emotion, psychic theaters of private intimacy, and the satire produced from this new ability to play – in private – to an audience created singular archetypes of modern camp. Patricia Meyer Spacks maintains that many eighteenth-century writers in the genre chose to ignore the antisocial problem by highlighting one side of the Janus coin at a time: “The disturbing discrepancy between disinterested concern and complete forgetting, between turning outward and inward, creates a gap not readily bridgeable. Burney herself does not attempt to bridge it: her characters generally manifest either the self-regarding or the outward-turning kind of sensibility, not both” (58). This means that Spacks’s theory is still based in a reparative reading of sensibility and sentimentality; generally, the “bad” kind of sensibility – the self-regarding – is repaired into something more socially useful and validating by the denouement. This section of my argument will analyze the camp core of “bad feelings,” specifically within representations of female friendships and relationships.

Eighteenth-century novels are notorious for their “namely” titles that emphasize character over plot: *Belinda*, *Clarissa*, *Evelina*, *Pamela*.<sup>94</sup> By dint of this, we are meant to focus on that character’s individuality, even when the heroine is eventually dominated or overruled before the happy ending<sup>95</sup>. Fictional renderings of economic bootstrappers are more frequent and successful

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<sup>93</sup> This is, of course, an allusion to Phillip Core’s camp glossary.

<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, more male protagonists – Moll Flanders being an exception – are presented with their surnames: Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy.

<sup>95</sup> April London also considers the rote characterization of female independence to be ultimately shallow: “Eighteenth-century novels consistently locate female characters within plots that allow them to exercise reformative agency (both individual and social) by drawing on their properties of industriousness and by realizing selfhood through active relationship with the things of this world. That agency is then relocated within male characters by way of endings that assert the primacy of real property and hence women’s subordination to the men who control it” (7). See also Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think* (2005).

than fantasies that celebrate female agency and freedom, an argument first developed in Armstrong's earlier book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*: "Novels rewarding self-assertion on the part of those in an inferior position undoubtedly provided the middle-class readership with a fable for their own emergence" (Armstrong, *Desire* 51). Few period novels explicitly focus on female dyads, trios, or any combination of equal homosocial relationships, which may seem surprising when we consider gendered imperatives about delicacy, shyness, or collectivity, but less surprising when we remember that the saucy heroines generally end up safely married – or dead. Is it paradoxical to talk of "strong female characters," a book club cliché in today's terms, but perhaps equally chimerical items in the eighteenth century? If male friendship is broadly coded as honorably impersonal, female friendship is often defined by its gooeyness. Indeed, this stereotyped vision of touching female intimacy is partly responsible, according to scholars such as Valerie Traub, for filtering the representation of erotic same-sex relationships out of early modern literature.<sup>96</sup> Because of this context, women who behave badly towards other women are noteworthy for their departure from the ideal "sugar and spice." Women who act out their aggression transgress eighteenth-century gender norms of docility and kindness. However, sentimental literature itself endorses alternative gender models through its soft and sweet male heroes. In latter-day culture, excessively strong and dramatic women, depending on their delivery and context, of course, can become camp icons. How does female agency resonate with the strictures of eighteenth-century sentimentality and sensibility? What might the advent of punishable and punished female strength anticipate about camp values?

My argument about the sentimental origins of camp focuses on vexed relationships

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<sup>96</sup> Traub's timeline claims that, by the seventeenth century, the public became more suspicious about the intimate female friendships that used to be (un)seen as anodyne or "harmless friendship," leading to "increasing suspicious about those forms of female intimacy previously considered chaste: the sharing of beds, kissing and caressing, and

between female characters because, in part, the contextualizing literary and social culture is obsessed with redefining and reappropriating the feminine. Feminine sensibility was (m)aligned with frailty by period critics such as Addison and Steele or Wollstonecraft, but literary scholars such as Claudia Johnson and G. J. Barker-Benfield have continued to explore the feminizing forces produced by eighteenth-century modes of sensibility and sentimentality.<sup>97</sup> It is worthwhile to think that “sensibility was...a religion of women” (Barker-Benfield 262) because the theory nods to women’s manipulative power, as manifested by movements such as abolition and temperance but also in a legion of antisocial and insidious retaliations. But when Barker-Benfield claims that religion’s “fundamental intention was to reshape men, although each sex was to be softened and sensitized” (263), I find an invitation to examine the dangers in assuming that all was *luxe, calme, et volupté*. Perhaps reshaping men was only a secondary pleasure to backstabbing other women. For instance, in a journal entry from May 1770, a young Fanny Burney confides, “I am just returned from making a visit to 5 sisters, 2 married and 3 single, who all Live together – and rejoiced am I that I *am* returned. There is with them a child, not 3 years old, Grandson to one of them, who is the Idol of them All: the poor Boy, by their ill judged and ruinous indulgence, is rendered an object of dislike to all others: they have taught him to speak, like a Parrot, only such words as they dictate; they make him affect the Language of a man” (13). Burney’s critique is conveyed in an ironically antisocial manner, as wounding gossip quietly

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exclusive friendships” (19). I think that the culture of sentimentality commonly provides many exceptions to the stigma because visible affection is held at a premium.

<sup>97</sup> Perhaps it is more correct to say that men such as Harley and Yorick form a third sex; in *The Secret History of Domesticity*, Michael McKeon claims that “[t]he man of feeling’s affectivity is a withdrawal from the publicness of both aggressively male productivity and excessively female reproductivity” (674). These sentimental heroes borrow from the feminized side of the binary while contesting or vexing the preexisting mores of stoic masculinity, transcending the dull and pedestrian mortal limits of empirical sense: “Like the category of the aesthetic imagination, the idea of sensibility sought to capture that quality of sensation that was rooted in the physical senses but that represented a detached abstraction from sense experience” (673). In sum, the eighteenth-century body becomes a valuable thought experiment, a headier, more philosophical piece of liminal matter. Still, the concept does not *not* evade or elude the impact of so-called feminine culture and sensitivity.

bound within the reflexive covers of a diary.

A diary entry is not a line in a novel, let alone a sentimental novel, but the narration exemplifies the knitting of insincere sociability and sincere cattiness all under the facade of the shared good: the adoration of a child, the courtesies of a social call, and the polish of parlor manners. Burney's anecdote is only vaguely and incidentally about the boy. Her acquaintance's fatuousness, she frets, is halting his future prospects at sociability and masculinity, as he "affects" or performs a hybridized gender contrived by the collective coven. In sum, the child is merely an alibi for snark. And the conspiratorial whisper of a diary bears close relation to the narrative style of many sentimental novels written in the first person or in epistolary form. For instance, Burney's tone resurfaces in the sentimentally-inflected bildungsroman *Evelina* (1778), such as when the eponymous character interacts with her déclassé French grandmother Madame Duval. Evelina's deep mortification is confessed in a personal letter to her guardian, the Reverend Villars, a moral extension of herself and one with whom she assumes accord. Her embarrassment is characteristically ineffable – "I cannot otherwise express myself" (98), and their initial meeting rehearses the same sort of cross-class, cross-generational shame and visceral disgust for female acquaintance that resides in Burney's diary excerpt.

Evelina's first person letters, while not "written to the moment," supplement her physical markers of fine sensibility; the intimate "I" of a letter (or a diary) provides a simple shortcut to interiority. In complement, Lady Howard's letter to Villars, the first exchange of the novel, is also riddled with gossip about the Duval's poor manners, a reaction which mainlines our own opinion of the old woman and thus ameliorates our understanding of Evelina's dislike: "[I]t is evident, from her writing, that she is still as vulgar and illiterate as when her first husband, Mr. Evelyn, had the weakness to marry her" (57). Lady Howard's more restrained and politic style of

insult deliberately lacks any signs of sensibility; in contrast, Evelina's bodily histrionics become more effectively insulting precisely because the insult is masked by her own delicacy. When she evaluates her grandmother's faux-sensibility, her comments highlight every subtle failure: "[Madame Duval] received me with as much tenderness as I believe she is capable of feeling. Indeed, our meeting seems really to have affected her; for when, overcome by the variety of emotions which the sight of her occasioned, I almost fainted in her arms, she burst into tears" (98). Well prepared to despise Madame Duval, Evelina's reaction to "the bitterness, the *grossness*" of her grandmother's behavior becomes a shimmering benchmark for her talent at fine feeling. Still, the undertone of the demonstration is not about Evelina's virtue but her condescension and snobbery, socially negative attributes that are bleached by the alchemical screen of a sentimental perspective. We unthinkingly empathize with Evelina's shame about her foreign relation, immediately forgetting that there is nothing necessarily natural – or naturally good – about her opinion, taste, or judgment. Indeed, her innate sensibility is made legible only through her social haughtiness.

Duval is set up to fail as a deplorable (grand)mother figure, and it seems that many eighteenth-century novels fetishize motherless daughters, as well as daughters who would be better off if they were. The eponymous absentee mothers from Defoe's early eighteenth-century novels *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* are not nurturers according to sentimental standards, although, as Felicity Nussbaum points out, these characters are under economic duress, rendering maternal delicacy an unattainable luxury: "The problem for...these women is not that they are devoid of maternal feelings, but that they are unemployed and left without the support of the fathers of their children" (*Torrid* 29). How does motherhood affect my discussion of early modern camp and antisocial sentimentality? Midcentury mothers seem to be judged according to a particular

standard of emotion and affection, one that seems uncannily familiar to today. Indeed, scholars correlate the rise of sentimentalism with the push towards breastfeeding; (male) doctors would frequently harangue their patients about the seemingly alchemical power of mother's milk: "What Madness is it then to leave a Body and a Mind, formed upon noble and generous Principles, to be corrupted by the base Mixture and Allay of a Stranger's Milk" (qtd. in Jones 84). A socioeconomic judgment that relates to Nussbaum's thesis is in play here; only well-to-do mothers who do not need to work or leave the house are guaranteed to have a fine "Disposition and Temper" with qualities of "Strength and Beauty" worthy of passing on to the next generation. This theory compromises the sentimentalist's tacit trust in strangers and the public, while confirming the rote compulsion to give of oneself, although, in this example, charity starts at home. Nursing, then, is an opportunity for a privileged mother to practice a privileged form of selflessness: "That those Mothers who do, as it were, discharge their Children from them, and thus dispose of them, do at least weaken, if not dissolve that Bond of Love and Tenderness which Nature ties between them" (84). Maternal love is, somehow, simultaneously natural and acquired, a paradox that recalls the conditions of sentimentality and sensibility.

Although I am not necessarily subscribing to the theory that all pre-modern parents resisted attachment because of infant mortality and practicality, it seems safer to point out that midcentury parents, especially mothers, were more interested in *looking like* good mothers, and were also in the strange position of producing that inchoate definition while simultaneously being defined by it. Lawrence Stone's sweeping history of family relations attests to a spiked interest in the visible performance of parental love "as exemplified in the growing popularity of family portrait groups, no longer stiffly and formally posed... This is how eighteenth-century noblewomen, and even noblemen, wanted themselves to be remembered – as affectionate, even

doting, mothers and fathers” (259). Once again, we have no way of assessing the truth of this adoration, but that is no matter; the appearance of fondness is the ostensible concern. Joshua Reynolds’s romantic but effective mother-daughter portrait *The Duchess of Devonshire and Her Child* (1786), for instance, features Georgiana locked in gaze with her “Little G.” Both are captured with their arms in the air, mid-frolic; we catch them candidly at play, in defiance of formalized posing. Because of the visible affection, the painting feels much different than the myriad portraits of the socialite. In this canvas, the duchess refuses to look outward but seems absolutely captivated by her daughter, who, in turn, peers adoringly but also playfully – not shyly – at her mother, kicking out a chubby bare foot at the viewer. Little G, dressed in a white and black outfit that complements her mother’s black and white, appears the perfect supplement to her mother’s bliss.

That Little G could not ultimately complete her mother’s lack is well known, but more significant are sentimental culture’s directives that she should, and, as with all elements of intangible sentimentality and sensibility, ontology collapses into the epistemology of seeing; to be is to look the part. Queer theorists and psychoanalytic critics have discussed at length the conditions of the desirous relationship between parent and child of either sex. The bond between mother and son or father and daughter, while not discussed here, hosts a more virulent taboo, not least because of biology. Meanwhile, same-sex love, such as the mother-daughter love demanded by dominant culture, is a lot more difficult to police and abhor: “Every interaction between mother and daughter entails a show of lavish affection that is nevertheless fraught with incestuous undertones in the usual manner of gothic-child narratives to undermine the tenuous distinction between parental love and parental seduction” (Hanson, “Knowing” 121). In this light, the imperative to love, albeit not too much, shares a commonality with the erotics of sentimental

culture, where citizens are also commanded to love not only with unseen emotions but through bodily demonstrations; the boundary of appropriateness is intentionally slight.

Although bad mothering has been lore since *Medea*, the stigma appears more personal from the age of sensibility onward because of the composite discourse on “natural” affection. What makes bad mothers seem especially antisocial and thus worthy of attention in the timeline of early modern camp? The word mother itself is acknowledged as a punny catchword in the prefatory note to Esther Newton’s *Mother Camp*, “mother” being a signifier for “the absurdities of the patriarchal nuclear family,” as well as an allusion to the “your mom” jokes that volley from audience to performer and back: “Your mother’s gonna explain all these dirty words to you” (xx). Jump forward a few centuries to *Mommie Dearest* (1981); the movie has been reduced to the image of a demented mom brandishing offensive wire hangers and has correspondingly ascended to the camp annals. Faye Dunaway’s brittle poses recall, say, Gloria Swanson’s gothic close ups, but the maternal subtext heightens the melodrama, and intentionally so, considering the script is based on Christina Crawford’s memoir: behold Tina, the “innocent” adoptee! However, in his DVD audio commentary, John Waters declares that the film is not camp because the erasure of Joan Crawford’s excessive presence was legitimately tragic, not ludicrously tragic: “I get why people think it's campy, because Joan Crawford's life was over the top. But I think it's a really, really good movie. Joan was a big movie star, and in many senses, that was all she had. And in that time, you were never in real life. You lose all barriers and boundaries and you become this creature, really -- and that's what's interesting to me.”<sup>98</sup> Waters shows avuncular concern for Crawford’s subjectivity, but what is “interesting to me,” in respect to my argument, is the open secret that the film bleges: bad mothers queer the sentimental imperative.

Crawford’s hysteria and resentment of Christina oozes from the celluloid, and whether

the depiction is true or false is immaterial. The shocking, over-the-top effect emerging from the postmodern mother-daughter histrionics registers as camp because of our dubiety about bad mothers, a suspicion that I argue originated during the cult of sensibility. When sanitized by the Christian model of maternity, a mother is defined by her child, a connection that the sentimental latches onto. Of course, except for that virginal Mary, one can't become a mother without primary carnality, and this inconvenient truth did not go unnoticed in the eighteenth century. Nussbaum's analysis of the tension compares "good" English domestic maternity with foreign or imperially-inflected models of monstrous (m)others, and while mine is less focused on race and ethnicity, we share a similar investment in the overwrought figure of the overwrought mother and other signs of hot blood within the female branches of the family tree: "This perverse mother is a center of energy and violence rather than nurturing love, and her excesses...are made akin to the 'barbaric' or 'savage' of both sexes" (Nussbaum, *Torrid* 48). Her sexuality overwrites her sensibility.

Although it is not part of the midcentury wave of sentimental novels, Amelia Opie's novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) offers pointed comments on the dangerousness of sentimental values while producing its own sentimental text, creating a form of camp in its portrayal of bad motherhood. It correlates unbridled sensibility with debilitating sexuality, tracing its effect through two fraught generations of mothers and daughters. The novel is best known as a fictionalized take on the relationship between Opie's friends Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin and bears similarities to Wollstonecraft's own cautionary tale *Mary* (1788), especially in its feminist critique of sentimental values. However, *Adeline Mowbray* is especially focused on the shame of maternal carnality, painting a fascinatingly grotesque portrait of Editha Woodville, Adeline's hypersexual and competitive mother and, according to the moral, the root cause of

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<sup>98</sup> DVD.

Adeline's own misdirected sexual choices. Faithful to Wollstonecraft's preachings, Opie points out that Editha could have been an intellect, if only she disciplined and structured her pursuit of knowledge. Not just a child born during a period of sentimental mania but also, unfortunately, a girl, her scholarly inquiries are contextualized by wastefulness, misdirection, and uselessness: "To her the present moment had scarcely ever existence; and this propensity to lose herself in a sort of ideal world, was considerably increased by the nature of her studies," the chosen subjects being, atypically, "morals and metaphysics, or new theories in politics" (Opie 4), abstract concepts that, in an untrained and "too timid, and too indolent" (5) mind, flit around inchoate. Not satisfied by passively receiving the scholarship she does not quite understand, she also desires to produce, to be a philosopher agent herself, a harbinger of her future compulsion to procreate and to apply the principles that she skimmed over in old books: "She soon, however, ceased to be contented with reading, and was eager to become a writer also" (4). The maternal script is a prime opportunity to incorporate anew.

Editha is pegged as blameworthy for her antisocial insularity and her desire to remain self-absorbed, and some of her parenting choices would fit into the screenplay of *Mommie Dearest*. Unlike the wicked stepmother template, this bad mother is less defined by outward malice and deliberation, relatively simplistic characteristics of an evil queen. Instead, her character's self-centeredness is unintentional or accidental, a symptom of sensibility's imaginative fancy. In sum, the antagonism is more modern and subtle, as it requires others to lean in and participate in their own treatment: "[O]ne of the first lessons which Editha Woodville learnt was that of egotism, and to consider it as the chief duty of all who approached her, to study the gratification of her whims and caprices" (3). Officially, she is a "bad subject" of the sentimental kingdom, but, as we know, even "good subjects," despite their efforts to apply

sympathy and charity to others, outwardly, also expect their audience to genuflect towards their auras; we as readers are constantly indulging a sentimental hero(ine)'s "whims and caprices" in order to make sense of an affective moral or accomplishment. Although this bad mother is, officially, an antagonist, she is also a passable sentimental subject, by dint of her self-centered gaze, when we continue to qualify the definition of "good."

Her motherhood is meant to redouble our generalized wariness of sentimental culture. The daughter's body is a synecdoche for her mother's ego, a pleasingly literal and visible transubstantiation of shame. She readily compensates for her own indulgence by mandating her daughter's abstention, a prescient and transparent metaphor for her sexual agenda: "[A]s she herself was too much used to the indulgencies of the palate to be able to set her in reality an example of temperance, she dined in appearance with Adeline at one o'clock on pudding without butter, and potatoes without salt; but while the child was taking her afternoon's walk, her own table was covered with viands fitted for the appetite of opulence" (6). Pushing the metaphor further, Editha's carelessness literally cuts her daughter open, since Adeline punctures her body – the blood dripping through the cleft of her toes – in consequence of her mother's experiments:

Adeline burst open the parlour door, and, crying bitterly, held up her bleeding toes to her mother.

'Mamma, mamma!' cried she, 'you forget to send for a pair of new shoes for me; and see, how the stones in the gravel have cut me!'

This sight, this appeal, decided the question in dispute. The feet of Adeline bleeding on a new Turkey carpet proved that some clothing for the feet was necessary. (7)

The subdued but sardonic tone – save the carpet! – nicely shows how easily Editha can substitute in value one material possession for another: home décor for darling daughter. Perhaps there

shall never be wire hangers for Joan, but definitely no stains on the rug permitted in the Mowbray home.

Because of her ideological upbringing, the most important half-learned philosophy being that of libertinism and the right to love without the constricting bonds of marriage, adult Adeline feels no shame about proposing to cohabit with her intellectual mate, Glenmurray. Much to Adeline's surprise, however, Editha is flummoxed by her daughter's plan. Able to turn the situation into a sinkhole of self-pity, she fell "into a violent hysteric; and long was it before she was restored to composure" (40). When Editha recuperates enough to relaunch the discussion, Adeline, the dutiful daughter, waves the white flag to attempt a truce. She pledges to abandon her plans to live with Glenmurray outside of wedlock, swapping his love and companionship for whatever Editha can provide in return: "[T]hough I will never marry, out of regard to my own principles, I will also never contract any other union, out of respect to your wishes, – but will lead with you a quiet, if not a *happy*, life" (41). Although Editha is appeased for a moment, she is nonplussed when the conversation turns towards her own viability and vitality: her own future prospects as a wife with a (younger) suitor of her own. When Adeline discloses that this very country squire, Sir Patrick, incidentally an acquaintance of Glenmurray's, made inappropriate advances towards her, Editha's brief term of maternal satisfaction is over. The purpose of the conversation switches from what could pass as a protective parental lecture into a sexual competition between two desirable women. She fiercely defends her independent sexuality:

‘I am sure that, spite of his ardent passion for me, he never, even when alone with me, hazarded any improper liberty.’

“The ardent passion which he feels for you, madam!’ exclaimed Adeline, turning pale in her turn.

‘Yes, miss Mowbray! What, I suppose you think me too old to inspire one! – But, I assure you, there are people who think the mother handsomer than the daughter!’ (42)

Her self-confident defense comes across as a delusional rant. For, during the aforementioned visit, Patrick admits to Adeline that he has been dallying with Editha because he knows she has a purse, summarizing their unilateral courtship as “deeming my clean inches (six feet one, without shoes) well worth her dirty acres” (32), a strange but crudely physical joke that mocks her wasted body.

Editha’s narcissism, a permutation of anti-sociability, queers the family dynamic, especially within the context of sentimental culture.<sup>99</sup> The technique Opie uses to portray bad mothering is especially remarkable when read against the aftermath of sentimental maternity and sociability that is endorsed within the non-diegetic and story worlds. Her maternal aberrance becomes abhorrent, marked by her general disregard for the future of her child; instead of sublimating her desires by displacing sexuality onto her younger, more fruitful daughter, the imperative according to the so-called natural order of things, she quickly claims carnal pleasure as her own: “Mrs. Mowbray, as she gazed on his handsome person [Sir Patrick], thought it would be absurd for her to sacrifice her own happiness to her daughter’s” (47). Although the ultimate punchline is on Editha, as both Sir Patrick and consequently the reader find her an obviously unsuitable love interest, the mother seems to circumvent notions of shame and blame. In a consistently melodramatic and often sentimental novel riding a didactic hobbyhorse about libertinism, Editha’s displaced desire and her performance of motherhood leave the lasting impression.

Despite her aberrant behavior, the novel does not punish her with a mawkish death. Unlike her daughter, Editha survives beyond the last page as a compelling grotesque; Adeline passes right after watching her two Edithas, grandmother and granddaughter, united in embrace, a simulacrum of the mother-daughter relationship that hastened her own demise. The friends and acquaintances who have borne witness to the family drama, some of whom gleefully participated in Adeline's shame, all urge Editha to push for reconciliation, to remember that her maternity should overrule her pride. However, the mother remains cold until the very end. For instance, when pressed to defend her own parenting strategies, she refocuses the argument onto herself, not her daughter, by theatrically rewriting the significance of her selfish techniques: "I am sure that I paid the greatest attention to my daughter's education. If you were but to see the voluminous manuscript on the subject, which I wrote for her improvement –" (250). Interestingly, two of Editha's most persistent critics are figures of alterity – a Quaker, Mrs. Pemberton, and Savanna, an African servant – and their marginal position as outsiders judging the center amplifies the effect of her own monstrosity. Mrs. Pemberton ominously lectures Editha, mimicking similar language that the narrator used at the beginning of the novel, although her observation has little effect: "[A] thick curtain of self-love seems to have been dropped between thy heart and maternal affection" (251). Meanwhile, Savanna, Adeline's confidant and employee, also relishes the opportunity to be tartly snide: "Savanna, beholding her distress, with a sort of dreadful pleasure, exclaimed, 'Ah! have you at last learn [sic] to feel?'" (261). These women's modalities of otherness set off Editha's centrally privileged selfishness and insularity, as their bodies are used as complicated parodies, marked by their affected dialects and morphologies, of the mother's (in)humanity.

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<sup>99</sup> In a sense, Editha's queer resistance also anticipates what Lee Edelman calls reproductive futurism, as she resents and questions the call to displace rhetorical hopes, aspirations, resources, and pleasures onto the imagined future of a

One more example: although it is not a sentimental novel but instead a parodic piece of nonfiction that rebels from the principles of sociability, Jane Collier's ironic conduct book *An Essay in the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753), a primer on nastiness and vengeance, supplies surprisingly effective and psychologically manipulative methods to divide the self from one's dreary, base, and annoying environs and subjects like friends and acquaintances. An anti-Emily Post for the eighteenth-century parlor set, Collier conspiratorially admits, "[T]o see one's dearest friend get the start of one in any thing, is too much for such friendship to bear" (105). As Emma Woodhouse (and the porcine Napoleon) would later conclude, it is best to take care that some are more equal than others. The first part of her *Essay* credits "Dean Swift" (42) and his *Directions to Servants* (1745), itself a popular satire on the downstairs' revenge against the upstairs, although when she addresses those already part of the "establishment," those who "have an exterior power from visible authority" (49), the text feels more brutal than Swift's; I argue this is because Collier routinely exploits those social untouchables, sensibility and sentimentality. Swift's text, in contrast, is a primer of wicked tricks and pranks, many involving chamber pots and waste, but instructions for insults are not psychologically deep: "Persuade the footman who got you with child to marry you before you are six months gone, and if your lady asks you why you would take a fellow who was not worth a groat, let her answer be that service is no inheritance" (Swift 66). The response is sassy and saucy but not profound, and the jokes are intentionally insolent but light. Collier's style is cleverly manipulative and antisocial.

Indeed, her lessons expose the postures of emotion, pointing out that artifice supersedes raw truth, that acting is often more real than reality because it is visible, performative. While theater critics such as Boswell and Diderot were well aware of the professional actor's two bodies – the player is dead, long live the role – defending the craft from accusations of

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child – especially her child. See *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.

immorality, Collier uniquely applies acting theory to everyday behavior. In *On the Profession of a Player* (1770), Boswell shows his investment in moral philosophy, insisting that “the art of a player is not dissimulation, but a mysterious power of being to a certain degree the character which he represents,” which means that actors are not liars because they genuinely incorporate the identity of the role. Collier, on the other hand, is much more interested in labeling (offstage) actors as bona fide and intelligent liars, considering them supremely more effective players at life, and her example alludes to the clichéd signs of a sentimental body as well as the unthinking social response: “[M]uch more tenderness and indulgence is generally exerted towards the counterfeits of any weakness or distress, than to those who labour under a real weakness of body, or affliction of mind. These are facts; let the searchers into human nature declare their causes. But in this willful want of distinguishing, lies the chief power of tormenting” (79). People who make much ado about nothing get more attention than people who suffer in silence, so, by all means, *act* out.

Her underlying message: not only is sociability able to be equaled by someone with an antisocial motive – lying – but authentic sociability itself is less effective than antisocial manipulations. Her advice in the latter half is dedicated to those “who have no legal or exterior authority [over the tormentee], but who may be said to have an interior power arising from affection of the person, with whom they are connected” (81); those, in sum, who are crafty enough to perceive and manipulate the liminal space between “real” emotion and art. She teaches readers how to produce difference from placidity, rising up through a hegemonic locus of control: the trappings of friendship. Dominating with the fullest consent, tormentors can take advantage of a friend’s love or devotion by reorganizing what seems like a flat social plane shared by a circle of friends into more suitable strata.

The gap left by the difference is subtle, she acknowledges, but it provides enough space for a discerning person to use, and such a person is usually female. Therefore, the second and most fascinating half of Collier's work is primarily addressed to women, as lovers, wives, and friends; only the first half includes men as parents and masters. Implicit in Collier's separation of the sexes is the observation that men cannot be as profoundly wounding because their "connexion" is less personal or intimate, a Mars versus Venus dichotomy that has persisted in psychology and culture, pop and otherwise, well into the twenty-first century. If eighteenth-century male writers of domestic fiction choose to assemble pretty women together at the tea table but then hastily move on to detail a more rambunctious adventure, astute women writers like Collier understand that those same pretty women, all under the guise of innocent friendship and sociability, are sizing each other up to smirk at chips in the japanning. Because we can best hurt those who are closest, the pleasures of tormenting and torturing go hand in hand with intimate connections, and Collier's female friends do not partake of the more ideal *amitié* that binds with a "kind of love more equable and more equitable" (Montaigne 211), such as the fabled, heroic love between men celebrated for centuries<sup>100</sup>. Early modern writers such as Montaigne celebrate the Platonic beauty in (male) friendships, a simple, harmonious theory that places full faith in a balanced dynamic between two men: "[T]he union of such friends, being truly perfect, leads them to lose any awareness of such services, to hate and to drive out from between them all terms of division and difference" (214). Such friendships assume an even exchange of affection, intimacy, and love. Of course, literary representations of friendship are not always that perfect or straightforward; for instance, although the imperial "friendship" between Crusoe and Friday is not part of this study, it is a one-sided relationship to say the least.

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<sup>100</sup> For more discussion of the intersection between classically ideal (male) friendships and same-sex relationships, see Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1996) and David Halperin, *One Hundred*

Still, Defoe means us to believe in Crusoe's earnest attempt at society with the other.

Since tormenting is a form of drama, Collier reminds women who are at a loss for good role models of "true coquette-behavior" to "read over most of our comedies since the Restoration" (82). If overscrupulous Fanny Price, who will later protest that she "cannot act" for notorious Mary Crawford, is the poster child for good girls who won't play, the *Essay* encourages readers to take their cues from characters like Mary. Acknowledging that the best Restoration and early eighteenth-century comedies are showcases for witty depictions of bickering between lovers and exes, Collier describes a more trenchant commitment to roleplaying, an early anticipation of immersive Method acting. While some of her tips for tormenting men are standard – "find out what he likes, in order never to do any one thing that will please him" (89) – other techniques call for abusing female homosocial relationships; women can best attack their husbands by teasing other women. To a practiced tormentor, men are rather large tools for female scheming.

Indeed, plots featuring female characters in not-so-solidarity are common in the period's theater. For example, William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) is filled with women double-crossing other women in order to avenge men. A sly servant such as Foible will sell out her patroness, the elderly Lady Wishfort, when supplied with sexual favors by the rake Mirabell – albeit those favors are derived lawfully from Mirabell's employee, Waitwell. Meanwhile, a young lady not in possession of a good fortune such as Mrs. Marwood spends her time cheating with her friend's husband while pretending that she is an enemy to the male race. Collier's text adapts precisely this sort of operatic intrigue among women. Instead of simply screaming at a cheating husband, for instance, one should enact revenge by aiming the arrow straight at the conniving vixen: "You may declare your fondness so great for dear Billy, that you can forgive

*him* any thing, altho' you are determined, if possible, to stab or poison the base wanton harlot who seduced him from your lawful bed" (88). The forgiveness, however, is a strategic act of "feigned love" meant to torture and smother the wayward husband while conveniently providing ample opportunities to barb the other woman. The advice uncannily incorporates the camp nuances of female retribution.

Key to a camp frisson is the quick elision of sentimental feelings or earnest anger towards her husband. Such an elision, however, does not signify total absence of affect, but sincerity is overcompensated by retaliation. In contrast, underneath the wit and complex plots, many of the contemporary stage comedies respect or at least stage room for the characters' traditional sentiments. Early in the *World*, Marwood and Mrs. Fainall, the wife of Marwood's rakish lover, stroll through St. James's Park, *tête à tête*, falsely claiming to despise men in preferment of the constancy of female friendship. At first, their discourse seems quite in line with Collier's methods of tormenting and teasing. In order to "carry [her] aversion further" (Act II, lines 42-43), Marwood pledges to "do [herself the violence" of marrying (line 47) only for the anticipation of head games:

*Mrs. Fainall:* You would not make him a cuckold?

*Mrs. Marwood:* No, but I'd make him believe I did, and that's as bad.

*Mrs. Fainall:* Why had you not as good do it?

*Mrs. Marwood:* Oh, if he should ever discover it, he would then know the worst, and be out of his pain; but I would have him ever to continue upon the rack of fear and jealousy. (II, lines 49-54)

Onstage, the women's intimacy is visually enforced, as Marwood gets her friend to draw close to shake on their hatred of the male race, but the rest of the teasing dialogue plays out their mutual

distrust and non-confidence. Mrs. Fainall is more interested in exposing Marwood's stronger feelings for the alpha rake, Mirabell, a man with whom Mrs. Fainall was once involved.

*Mrs. Fainall:* Would thou wert married to Mirabell.

*Mrs. Marwood:* Would I were!

*Mrs. Fainall:* You change color.

*Mrs. Marwood:* Because I hate him.

*Mrs. Fainall:* So do I; but I can hear him named. But what reason have you to hate him in particular? (lines 55-60)

Marwood's misandry is flushed away by Mrs. Fainall's knowing tease, a satisfaction well earned, it is true, but the exchange illuminates her secret desires for a happy ending. Despite her vamping, which persists until the final act, when all plots unravel, Marwood's wit is a means to an end, an interim device towards the security of a future romance – or at least a financial reward, which is, to Congreve, just as significant if not completely interchangeable with true love. It is not wickedness for wickedness's sake; it is merely the welcome and entertaining residue.

Collier's ideal female tormentors, however, are not taxed with playing out a bothersome plot device. The *Essay's* parody works because it takes advantage of sentimental mores such as sisterly bonds without being a sentimental novel itself; it cites the bond of friendship and devotion in order to deploy it as a weapon. It transcends "simpler" strategies and punishments in favor of the close, closet drama performed in a predominantly female demesne, thus providing literary evidence of the high social valuation of female-to-female bonding, correspondence, and love in order to upturn any mawkishness: "[T]here is, in female friendship, a much more intimate connexion, and more frequent opportunities of practising the subtle strokes of teasing, than

amongst the men” (97). In a twist on *les belles dames sans merci* that will later populate the fin-de-siecle, these female tormentors seem to triumph in primarily homosocial relationships; for instance, female in-laws present as even better targets than the husband himself. “[C]onsider them as new subjects of your own power,” Collier coolly advises, “for you cannot well have better game” (88). She instantly distills the family dynamic into a timeless but still rather camp trump card: sex. Anticipating the plot line of countless soap operas, she reassures her readers that, no matter how retaliatory in-laws might become, a husband will never choose blood over lust: “I have sometimes seen the husband’s sisters attempting this sort of pastime with her, but, generally, with very ill success; unless the husband be of so mighty uncommon a temper, as to suffer any woman, who is *not* his bed-fellow, to have the least ascendancy over him” (88). The very sexuality that caused marital problems in the first scenario is now an apt solution to the second. With sex – not love, of course – only in play as a form of meretricious insurance, Collier’s parodic text punctures both romance and the esteemed bonds of friendship to design a system of affective manipulation for those for whom sustainable, monetary, or juridical forms of power are impossible. And, not accidentally, these so-called subjects of alterity are also the subjects that literary culture chooses to endow with sensibility.

I have been demonstrating how the vicious female characters who exploit sentimentality mark an important stage in the development of eighteenth-century literature. Complex forms of insidiousness, more readily and plausibly attached to women – or the effeminate of either gender – then and now, not only add texture to realistic emotional exchanges, paradoxically accentuating the lyric connection between reader and fiction, but also point to the unsettling failures and blinders of the sociable imperative. These characters play up the sentiments that have been otherwise exiled, and their excessively negative hysterics serve to remind us that

sentimentality itself is a mode of emotional drag for which there is no original, a message that “straight” sentimentality did not wish to transmit. The fragile and short-lived vogue for literary sentimentality, sociability, and sensibility fostered the conditions to make this mode of camp legible. Indeed, “camp sensibility,” Sontag’s aestheticizing phrase, has been critically maligned for its breeziness, but eighteenth-century culture reminds us that such lightness is itself a pose and a compensatory performance. In his retort, Mark Booth insists, “Camp is primarily a manner of self-presentation rather than of sensibility” (69), but sensibility is already nothing but the most mannered of self-presentations.

### **The Camp Legacy of Camp**

While I have been analyzing the social and generic tensions that aligned to host the earliest forms of modern camp, latter-day critics are asking if, based on our jaded and post-jaded tastes, “camp is evolving or taking a break?” (Stockton 212). Stockton invokes *New York Times Magazine* critic Daniel Mendelsohn, who protests that residents of the early aughts take its drama very seriously, hold the irony. To him, drama does not function as camp to an audience hungry for lush affects, not wry affectations; this “melodrama...is more straight than it first appears” (qtd. in 212). Stockton gamely points out that Mendelsohn’s tired differentiation implies “‘camp’ is always the ‘empty’ part of [his] perceived mix of modes. And so it goes: camp is light and empty, while melodrama plays for more serious effects” (213). Of course, locating the straight original of authentic melodrama is, like all performatives, queerly elusive. And perhaps it is not quite correct to side with Stockton’s well-intended comment, which takes offense at camp-as-cipher. If camp seems empty (to some), that is an insidious disguise, a nothing that is, of course, *not*, as I hope my literary examples reinforce.

Truly, such a back-and-forth critique over camp’s meaning echoes and restates the

capsule history of camp criticism presented at the beginning. Debates about the birth and death of camp refuse to die, and although I, like Stockton, cannot imagine camp without a constitutive and pleasurably obdurate darkness, its quality and shade obviously shift across generations and genres. The abjection-cum-literature resident in authors such as Walpole, Charke, or Pope differs in catalyst and urgency from today's camp. The gay men who needfully populate and define twentieth-century camp-as-camp were different, all puns intended, in the eighteenth-century world, which partially explains the relative absence of homosexual men in my study. But the *ideological significance* of their difference is not all that different between then and now. The subversive remainders of abjection, despite continual shifts in morphology, are wonderfully, seriously, and critically disruptive; those disruptions may have looked different in the early modern literary world but have produced challenging, inviting, and uncannily familiar camp sites.

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