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Spring 2013

### Sexual Iconoclasm in Early Modern Drama

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Sexual Iconoclasm in Early Modern English Drama

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A thesis submitted as part of the requirements for Honors in English

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17 May 2013

## Sexual Iconoclasm in Early Modern Drama

**Part I: Introduction**

In an article entitled “Feminist Iconoclasm and the Problem of Eroticism,” Simon Hardy observes that:

Love has become a kind of religion, in that it provides meaning and a sense of belonging, but it is a precarious faith, one riven by the conflicting themes of equality and power, freedom and commitment... Sexual relationships have become a major cultural preoccupation, with models and definitions of them, equal or otherwise... a topic of popular representation, including the erotic. (87)

According to Hardy, the erotic is defined as “the symbolic meanings by which the sexual is represented and experienced.” That depicted eroticism, or sexual imagery, problematically reveals a patriarchal relationship in which men dominate and oppress women, and thus necessitates “female iconoclasm” in that the erotic must be redefined (through iconoclasm) in order to liberate women from the existing hegemony. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines iconoclasm broadly as “the destruction of images and pictures set up as objects of veneration,” but Hardy describes it in more gendered terms as a “general critique of...sexual representation as significantly contributing to women’s oppression...like the complex tendency it describes, it combines the heroic sense of ‘challenging deeply held beliefs’...with the more dubious sense of an authoritarian and ascetic ‘breaking of images.’” (78). Hardy’s description of love as a religion torn apart by conflicts of equality and power, which is represented through patriarchal erotic imagery in which men sexually oppress women (and necessitates a feminist iconoclasm to destroy that imagery) distinctly echoes the religious turmoil and iconoclastic logic of the

Protestant Reformation. Hardy's essay typifies the critical landscape surrounding sexuality, iconoclasm, and imagery because it is actually a contemporary discussion about pornography. Hardy completely ignores the historical and religious contexts of iconoclasm. But this exact same debate about whether erotic images should be destroyed as false representations of male-female power relations, or whether they affirm the liberty of the sexual being, is undeniably echoed by the highly debated issue of religious images and anxiety over representation that characterizes much of the English Reformation and its aftereffects. Both debates register a persistent cultural anxiety over imagery and gender politics.

Hardy's idea that feminist iconoclasm is a necessitated reaction to pornography parallels and informs my argument for the presence of (and necessity for) the dramatization of 'sexual iconoclasm' in early modern theatre. Specifically, I will examine the relationship between sexuality and iconoclasm in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594), Middleton & Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622), and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677) to establish the idea of sexual iconoclasm and argue that it contributes to the discussion of the religious and sociopolitical contexts (and commentary) of these plays and early modern theatre in general. What exactly *is* sexual iconoclasm? Simply put, it is the destruction of sexual images. By sexual images I mean images 'of sex' understood in terms of both individual sexuality and any depictions of sexual relationships, be they physically sexual or describing relationships between the male and female sexes. Using sexual iconoclasm as a type of theoretical lens allows us to examine the obsession with and destruction of sexual imagery in the context of larger sociopolitical concerns of a culture. In the case of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Changeling*, these have to do with Reformation England. Additionally, *The Rover* provides similar insight into an equally volatile period of English history: the Restoration of the monarchy after the seventeenth century English Civil

Wars. The sexual and the iconoclastic are contentious topics on their own, and have been seemingly dichotomized by contemporary criticism. But the relationship is there, and has been virtually ignored by critics even as they define sexuality in iconoclastic terms or iconoclasm and reformation through sexual metaphor.

Of what does this anxiety over images and representation consist, and from what does it emerge? Much of it stems from a religious fear of idolatry, or the worship of idols. Idols are essentially religious icons such as statues of saints, relics, paintings, etc. that the Catholic laity would worship or even make pilgrimages to gaze on. The reason idolatry is problematic is because it is the worship of a *representation* of something, rather than the thing itself. For example, religious reformers argued that the sacrament of the Eucharist, or more specifically what Catholics regarded as the miracle of transubstantiation, which is when Christ's body physically replaces the bread of the Eucharist, is an example of idolatry because people were worshipping the *bread* instead of what it represents – Christ's sacrifice. Relics and statues of saints are another example; rather than remembering the virtuous or pious acts of the saints themselves, the Catholic laity would travel far and wide on pilgrimages just to see articles of their clothing or alleged saintly body parts known as relics. Protestants wanted to reform Catholicism to place the emphasis back on Scripture and personal interpretation of the bible, not the idolatrous practices of Catholic priests. In order to do so, they purged idolatrous imagery through iconoclasm.

In *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition*, James Simpson informs us that in England, legislated iconoclasm lasted from 1538 to 1643, “despite periods of respite and image-making within those years; such sustained legislation was unique in Reformation Europe for its jurisdictional extension and duration.” He goes on to say that “the

task of destroying all religious images was large and primary, made all the more arduous by the periods of backsliding into images” (5). Indeed, the Royal Injunctions of 1538, published just two years after England’s (Henry VIII’s) break with the Roman Catholic Church, define and condemn acts of idolatry, outlawing them:

...Exhort your hearers to the works of charity, mercy, and faith, specially prescribed and commanded in Scripture, and not to repose their trust of affiance in any other works devised by men’s phantasies besides Scripture; as in wandering to pilgrimages, offering of money, candles, or tapers to images or relics, or kissing or licking the same, saying over a number of beads, not understood or minded on, or in such-like superstition, for the doing whereof you not only have no promise of reward in Scripture, but contrariwise, great threats and maledictions of God, as things tending to idolatry and superstition, which of all other offences God Almighty does most detest and abhor, for that the same diminishes most His honour and glory. (Bettenson & Maunder, 248).

Note the sexual resonances of “men’s phantasies” and “kissing or licking the same [images or relics]”; even as Henry VIII and the English Parliament sought to condemn idolatry, it was characterized as a seductive temptation that could bring down the wrath of God. Henry’s injunction against idolatry reflects the extant cultural anxiety that objects intended for religious veneration are capable of eliciting a type of improper worship. Rather than eliciting piety, images are being described as tempting to an erotic (and commodified) adoration, not unlike contemporary pornography (e.g. Hardy) or prostitution as seen in *The Rover*. The attempt to outlaw idolatry is effectively an attempt to representationally destroy the power that images have in evoking the worship of those who gaze on them. Henry VIII describes these problematic

idolatrous images almost as objects of sexual fetish that have been erotically worshipped in the place of what they are intended to represent – meaningful religious history and ideology. In what Simpson identifies as the beginning of England’s century of ‘legislated iconoclasm,’ the 1538 Royal Injunctions also declare the king’s intention to wage war against idolatrous images through iconoclasm:

...Such feigned images as you know in any of your cures to be so abused with pilgrimages or offerings of anything made thereunto, you shall for avoiding that most detestable offence of idolatry forthwith take down and delay...still admonishing your parishioners that images serve for none other purpose but as to be books of unlearned men that cannot know letters, whereby they might be otherwise admonished of the lives and conversation of them that the said images do represent; which images, if they abuse for any other intent than for such remembrances, they commit idolatry in the same to the great danger of their souls: and therefore the king’s highness, graciously tendering the weal of his subjects’ souls, has in part already, and more will hereafter travail for the abolishing of such images, as might be occasion of so great an offence to God, and so great a danger to the souls of his loving subjects. (Bettenson & Maunder, 248-9)

This is the ‘logic of iconoclasm’ in its most basic sense: if an image is problematic, destroy it. However, it is clear from Henry VIII’s injunctions that this act of oppression also arises from a certain fear of temptation or misrepresentation, which is where it seems to intersect with much of the discourse on sexual politics.

Unsurprisingly, among the images that led to idolatry were those of female saints, who were canonized and revered for their piety; these would become the model for depictions of

women in early modern plays that emphasize the importance of female virginity and chastity. Like the iconophobia produced by the debate over whether religious imagery inspires piety or results in idolatry, the presence of depicted virgins and “dutiful daughters” on the stage also creates anxiety about the worship they inspire and the possibility of a non-virgin or unchaste woman – a ‘feigned image.’ The Royal Injunctions make it clear that images known to be feigned or abused must be taken down or abolished, cleansed in order to restore religious purity under the new Anglican Church. Simpson explains that preservation of culture identity is best expressed by repudiation of adjacent religions (in this case, England’s previously Catholic tradition) and that “this repudiation manifested itself in two deeply related ways: destruction of the idols of foreign religion, and repudiation of foreign wives. Both the idols and the women were a source of cultural mixing; the connection between them was so deep as to produce one of the prime metaphorical formulations of idolatry, as ‘whoring with strange gods’ (e.g. Deuteronomy 31:16.)” (7). Simpson draws the important connection between destruction of idols (images, statues, relics that were worshipped rather than what they represented) and the ‘repudiation’ of women, defining idolatry in terms of ‘the sexual deviance with which it is habitually associated’ (85). If, as Simpson argues, “the call to liberty is what justifies and characterizes iconoclasm” and “idolatrous art enslaves...mesmerizes and captures its viewer,” (27) then the purpose of *sexual* iconoclasm is to break free from such enslavement. For women, this is to be free from the enslaving image of female purity and susceptibility to male domination (through rape, for example); for men, it is to be free from the false, seductive imagery of a woman that claims to be virginal and is not, or might not be - which is related to the ever-present patriarchal anxiety about female sexuality and power.

As I will show, both Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* and Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* are characterized as idols to be worshipped. They begin as (male-constructed) images of purity and chastity but are subsequently raped, and in Lavinia's case, disfigured. Once the dishonor is revealed, they are murdered according to a kind of iconoclasm. This iconoclasm takes the particular form of their dramatization as problematic images. While they are not removed from the stage, they are represented as detested, shamed, hideous, and threatening. *The Rover*, the latest of the three plays, is different in that it does not stage the rape and murder of its female characters. Yet female playwright Aphra Behn also incorporates the logic of iconoclasm by staging the desire for character substance and liberation rather than sexual commodification and submission in a way that forces us to question images from pictures of virgins and courtesans to the idolatrous theater itself.

The sexual politics of all three plays relate to the complex battle between iconophilia, or the love of images, erotic idolatry, and iconophobia. As perpetrators of idolatry and idolatrous images themselves, did Lavinia or Beatrice-Joanna *have* to die, given the sociopolitical context of the plays? What is the larger significance of Willmore's appropriation of Angellica Bianca's portrait in *The Rover*? These are the types of questions that sexual iconoclasm can open up to new inquiry.

## **Part II: Titus Andronicus**

In this section, I will examine the logic of sexual iconoclasm in Shakespeare's earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*. The revenge plot between Titus Andronicus and Tamora, Queen of the Goths, and its bloody consequences make Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* a tragedy for almost every character. Most are murdered, some are sacrificed, some are even cannibalized –

but only one is raped, brutally maimed, and then later murdered by her own father: Lavinia. The destruction of Lavinia's chaste sexuality on stage (through the rape off-stage) marks Lavinia's transformation into a mute, disfigured 'object' that demands visual attention on the stage. Like an idolatrous icon, Lavinia is then repeatedly 'misread' by men, especially Titus, which results in the final act of sexual iconoclasm in Act 5 when she is killed in so many ways *because* of sexual politics and iconoclastic logic. The sacrifices, rituals, and seemingly barbaric actions performed by most characters in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* are not without historical significance. As Nicholas Moschovakis argues, "for Elizabethan audiences, representations of Roman paganism and human sacrifice would recall Protestants' denunciations of idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church – or even in the Church of England." (462). While much criticism has focused on the sociopolitical implications of Lavinia's role in *Titus*, Moschovakis's argument is useful for informing mine that Shakespeare's use of religious rhetoric – at a time when Catholicism and Protestantism were in the midst of iconographic warfare – also cannot be ignored within discussions of the play's sexual politics.

Relatively early in the play (Act 2, Scene 3), Lavinia's husband Bassianus is murdered before her eyes by Tamora's two sons before they drag her into the woods, their intentions for rape having been made clear earlier in Act 2. Lavinia perceives their intentions, and begs Tamora to kill her: "O, keep me from their worse than killing lust, / And tumble me into some loathsome pit, / Where never man's eye may behold my body..." (2.3.175-7) She is specifically requesting *not* to be looked upon; to her, the men's desires and the loss of her honour, her image of purity, are worse than death. As "Rome's rich ornament" (1.1.52) and given the historical/iconoclastic context of the play, Lavinia is staged in the role of an idolized image, saint, or virgin (imagery that Reformers were mostly seeking to destroy) and asking to be destroyed instead of looked

upon with lust. However, she is powerless to stop Tamora's sons, which then establishes Lavinia as 'merely' a woman (within patriarchy), a 'powerless' image, on stage.

At the beginning of Scene 4, Shakespeare's stage direction demands a shocking sight for the audience:

*Enter the Empress's sons, [Demetrius and Chiron,] with  
Lavinia, her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and  
ravished.*

On the stage, Lavinia is no longer able to speak and therefore can only be seen and not heard; Shakespeare's stage direction will essentially provide the script for staging Lavinia as an image – one that is not only outwardly disfigured and maimed, but inwardly 'ravished' and shamed, which eventually results in the iconoclastic response of her father Titus. After raping Lavinia, Tamora's sons then mock her and abandon her in the forest, where she is discovered by Marcus Andronicus (Titus's brother) in a scene that has been omitted from many performances mostly because of its disturbingly detailed, gruesome and yet oddly reverent description of Lavinia's body (2.4.11-57). Given the tragedy of Lavinia's rape and mutilation, Marcus's descriptions of her wounds are uncomfortably sexual (not unlike a morbid take on a Petrarchan lover), with phrases like "a crimson river of warm blood...doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips, / Coming and going with thy honey breath." (2.4.22-25). Yet Marcus fails to truly discern what happened to her even as the audience is being forced to gaze on Lavinia's disfigured body on the stage with full knowledge of her rape.

This same type of disparity between sign (Lavinia's rape) and signifier (Marcus's beautifully naive depiction of events) is the same type conflict that Reformation England railed against as idolatry, or mistaking an image for what it represents. Indeed, from this point forward,

Lavinia is often referred to as more of an image or object (or martyr) than a real person, especially when Marcus first brings Lavinia back to Titus after discovering her in the forest:

**Marcus.**

This was thy daughter.

**Titus Andronicus.**

Why, Marcus, so she is.

**Lucius.**

Ay me, this object kills me!

**Titus Andronicus.**

Faint-hearted boy, arise and look upon her.

Speak, Lavinia, what accursed hand

Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight?

(3.1.63-67)

Marcus's statement 'this *was* thy daughter' reveals that in his eyes at least, Lavinia is no longer part of the Andronicus family, foreshadowing her death in Act 5 by Titus's own hand. However, Titus's reply makes it clear he still considers her his daughter, because he has not yet learned of her rape. Lucius refers to her merely as "object," reducing her to a grisly, inhuman entity. Titus's response calls for him to 'arise and look upon her,' forcing him to recognize her pain and suffering, making her a martyr, in a way that seems to echo a priestly command to look on the body of Christ as image or Eucharist (which Reformers in the audience undoubtedly would have seen as the height of idolatry).

The disparity between Lucius's response and Titus's response echoes the Catholic-Protestant paradigm with regard to image-worship; if the play were meant to dramatize the fall of

Roman Catholicism under the Reformation through the fate of “old Rome” (Titus and almost every other character who dies) and “new Rome” (Lucius, the savior thereof), then Lucius in the role of Reformer would recoil from ‘this object’ – a living martyr (idolatrous image) while Titus would call the audience and other characters to gaze upon her or worship her sacrifice.

Significantly, Titus continuously misinterprets Lavinia, lamenting his inability to discern who Lavinia’s attackers were, despite his assertion that he can “interpret all her martyred signs”

(3.2.36):

**Titus Andronicus.**

But that which gives my soul the greatest spurn

Is dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul.

Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,

It would have maddened me; what shall I do

Now I behold thy lively body so?

Thou hast no hands to wipe away thy tears,

Nor tongue to tell me who hath mart’red thee.

(3.1.101-107)

Titus’s statement that had he but seen Lavinia’s picture, he would have been ‘maddened,’ but the sight of her body (the adjective lively clearly distinguishes it from being an image) puts him at a loss for action, makes clear his dependence on being able to interpret her. Despite Lavinia’s ‘lively’ body, Titus again refers to her as a martyr, placing her in a decidedly liminal state.

My argument for the intersection of religion and sexuality in Lavinia-as-image is helpfully informed by Coppélia Kahn’s assertion that “Shakespeare makes the hauntingly mute, hideously disfigured Lavinia much more than a patriarchal icon of the dutiful daughter. Deprived

of speech and the usual means of writing, Lavinia herself becomes a signifier.” (48). Many critics of *Titus Andronicus* have focused on Lavinia’s enforced silence as an oppressive requirement of patriarchal culture; a reading through the lens of sexual iconoclasm highly lends itself to this reading. As Kahn argues, “this sophisticated awareness of the politics of textuality is interwoven with the play’s central concern: the politics of sexuality. And in the schematically patriarchal world of *Titus*, sexuality is a family matter that only the father can deal with.” (47). Yet Titus is unable to interpret her, leaving her sexuality – and therefore Titus’s honor – in a state of liminality. This is problematic not only because, as Emily Detmer-Goebel explains, “the play registers the cultural anxiety over losing male authority by dramatizing the Andronici family’s dependence on [Lavinia’s] words” (82), but also in an iconoclastic sense, in that none of the men are able to interpret her ‘martyred signs.’

The scenes following Lavinia’s rape and disfigurement (Acts 3 through 5) are described by Detmer-Goebel as “a situation where the audience watches missed opportunities for the men to know about Lavinia’s rape; her mutilated yet muted presence keeps the rape in mind for the audience while the repeated attempts to “read” Lavinia foregrounds the men’s need for her words.” (82). Similarly, Kahn writes that “Lavinia’s rape is signified to us as audience or readers by her mutilations, but her male kin take those signs for the thing itself. Until she writes “Stuprum” [meaning ‘rape’] in the dust, they remain transfixed by her external wounds and ignorant of the internal one, which has greater symbolic significance.” (57). Kahn’s point about the importance of female writing within sexual politics – and its oppression – is elucidated further by adding a discourse of religious images and iconoclasm. Lavinia becomes a physical reminder of sacrifice on the stage, and like the idolatrous images of saints and relics she is unable to speak, but her presence demands visual attention; the audience and other characters in the play

*must* gaze upon her and personally try to interpret her meaning (the meaning of her gestures). It certainly says something that no one is able to interpret her, perhaps implying the futility of gazing on images that cannot speak (which would align with Reformers' views). The fact that Titus, Lucius, and the other characters are preoccupied with her physical appearance rather than the inner truth of her rape also echoes the claims of religious Reformers that making a spectacle of God's work, especially in drama, distracts from its true meaning. The struggle to interpret Lavinia's body distinctly parallels the theological divisions within the Church over the nature and purpose of images – relics, saints, sacrifices, sacraments – in a way that would have registered with Shakespeare's audience, informs our reading of the play's sexual politics, and necessitates Lavinia's 'sexual iconoclasm' through the destruction of her image on stage.

Despite her consignment to the role of image/signifier, Lavinia is finally able to reveal her rape (and rapists) in Act 4 Scene 1: "*She takes the staff in her mouth, and guides it with her stumps and writes.*" By seizing her Uncle's staff - which is not only a phallic image but also becomes a writing implement, both of which symbolize power - Lavinia is able to finally 'speak' by writing in the dirt. This serves to be problematic for her both as a "mute" image (icon) and as a woman conscribed in patriarchy (because of her sex). Where Kahn argues that in revealing her true desecration "Lavinia depends not on the feminine art of textiles" (as did Philomel in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the story on which Lavinia's rape is based) "but...on the texts authored by men that authorize patriarchal culture," the point can also be made that Lavinia resorts to *text* rather than *imagery* (such as the tapestry weaved by Philomel to reveal her rapists in *Metamorphoses*). Read through the perspective of England's religious reformation, the implication is that true meaning can be found in *text* rather than images (idols), which aligns with Protestants' ideology about personal interpretation of the bible rather than idolatrous Catholic mass. In Shakespeare's

deviation from the classical story of Philomel in *Metamorphoses*, Lavinia not only lacks the hands to weave a tapestry (or make intelligible signs) but is unable to rely on images to reveal her rape. Only through text is Lavinia able to get her meaning across to the male characters.

By seizing the staff and naming her attackers, Lavinia is at once obtaining power and ‘necessitating’ her iconoclasm (the destruction of her image on stage; death) according to the religious and patriarchal logic of the play. As Kahn points out, “the polluted Lavinia, neither maid nor wife nor simply widow, passes from a state of liminality and passivity to an active role as communicator of her own meaning” (58). In doing so, Lavinia becomes at once an image that speaks and a woman with some degree of agency; she is also destroying the image of ‘innocent’ (still chaste) martyr that Titus believe her to be, in a sense transforming into a fallen image.<sup>1</sup>

Lavinia’s constant, tragic presence on stage – yet one still empowered by having “spoken” and revealed her rapists – is problematic for Titus by Act 5 when he has accomplished revenge by baking Tamora’s sons into a pie. As a disfigured, ‘unchaste’ daughter, Lavinia is tragically worthless to her father. Still, it comes as quite a shock, given Lavinia is “dearer than [his] soul,” when Titus kills her:

**Titus Andronicus.** And if your highness knew my heart, you were.

My lord the emperor, resolve me this:

Was it well done of rash Virginius

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Detmer-Goebel points out that Lavinia chooses to write “Stuprum” in the dust rather than “raptus,” which is a possible reference to a different Ovidian tale of Io, who was raped and transformed into a cow; “Stuprum might be read as naming her ‘transformation’ as much as it names what was done to her.” (86). Furthermore, once the rape is revealed, none of the men offer sympathy or comfort to Lavinia; instead, the focus of the play turns to Titus and the other Andronici seeking revenge (Detmer-Goebel, 87). I would extend Detmer-Goebel’s argument to assert that Lavinia’s rape, transformation and its tragedy – so apparent to the audience yet appropriated by the male Andronici for their own purpose (justifying their revenge on Tamora and her sons) is an example of sexual idolatry in that they disregard Lavinia’s experience and exploit her ‘sacrifice’ for their own reasons.

To slay his daughter with his own right hand,  
Because she was enforced, stain'd, and deflower'd?

**Saturninus.** It was, Andronicus.

**Titus Andronicus.** Your reason, mighty lord?

**Saturninus.** Because the girl should not survive her shame,  
And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

**Titus Andronicus.** A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;

A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant,  
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.  
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee;

*[Kills LAVINIA]*

And, with thy shame, thy father's sorrow die!

**Saturninus.** What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?

**Titus Andronicus.** Kill'd her, for whom my tears have made me blind.

(Act 5.3.34-48)

Even though the audience is aware of Lavinia's rape, unlike Saturnius, Titus's decision to kill Lavinia seems unprovoked, as he is mostly seeking Saturnius's approval with his intention clear – a few seconds later – to the audience. Emily Detmer-Goebel explains the Andronici's patriarchal logic that “once Lavinia is able to inform them of the particular details that they needed, they prefer to “bury” her specificity. In other words, the men will save her reappropriated words in brass and bury the real woman.” (87). In so doing, I would also argue that Titus kills not only his desecrated daughter but also the idolatry her physical depiction elicits as a living martyr who must be gazed upon. Just as Lavinia desired to be thrown into a pit rather

than have ‘man’s eye behold [her] body,’ Titus must sacrifice her to do away with his own shame, much as reformers believed the Church had to do away with idolatry.

Titus kills Lavinia’s “lively body” but wishes to engrave what happened into brass (4.1.101-3); this seems to be a relevant example of James Simpson’s (2010) argument that iconoclasts (rather ironically) need to erect monuments in honor of their liberty after destroying images that tended to idolatry and represented a previously dominant culture (e.g. the Catholic church, paganism). Therefore, by burying Titus and Lavinia in the Andronici family monument, Lucius, Rome’s new Emperor, is effectively confining their experiences to a past generation and evolving, for better or worse, into a new culture. Yet this is only made possible because of Lavinia’s sacrifice; through her repeated ‘sexual iconoclasm’ on stage, Shakespeare is also dramatizing the conflict over imagery – religious, patriarchal, sexual – that so divided England during the Reformation. Even though Lavinia’s voice is omitted from much of *Titus Andronicus*, her ‘voice’ and experience – her enduring image - are very much present in a way that provides Lavinia agency beyond the confines of the early modern English stage.

### **Part III: The Changeling**

First licensed for performance in London on May 7, 1622, Middleton & Rowley’s *The Changeling* stages the sexual iconoclasm of its heroine Beatrice-Joanna in a way that both emulates and deviates from the fall of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Many critics have remarked on Beatrice-Joanna’s name as it reflects her fate in *The Changeling*; she changes from Beatrice, a name associated with religion and purity, to Joanna, one associated with prostitution and whoredom. Judith Haber argues that Beatrice-Joanna’s fall ‘could not choose but follow,’ a recurring line throughout the play. What Haber classifies as erotic logic, I argue, must

necessarily also be studied as the logic of iconoclasm that leads to the destruction of Beatrice-Joanna's [image of] purity. In staging the worship, questioning, and destruction of Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, Middleton & Rowley undeniably dramatize an iconoclastic anxiety over representation that is both religious and sexual.

In the very first speech of *The Changeling*, 'a nobleman' Alsemero appears on stage alone, and provides our first introduction to Beatrice-Joanna:

**Alsemero.**

'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her,  
 And now again the same – what omen yet  
 Follows of that? None but imaginary.  
 Why should my hopes of fate be timorous?  
 The place is holy, so is my intent;  
 I love her beauties to the holy purpose,  
 And that, methinks, admits comparison  
 With man's first creation – the place blest,  
 And is his right home back, if he achieve it.  
 The church hath first begun our interview,  
 And that's the place must join us into one,  
 So there's beginning and perfection too.

(1.1.1-12)

Alsemero's soliloquy significantly blends religion, worship, marriage, and desire. Since no context is provided, Alsemero could easily be referring to anything he beheld in the temple, like images of saints (perhaps even the Virgin Mary) yet it quickly becomes clear he is referring to

Beatrice-Joanna. He “love[s] her beauties to the holy purpose” – marriage – and compares her beauty to the Garden of Eden, language that is distinctly idolatrous; nothing man-made (like Beatrice-Joanna) is comparable to the work of God. Alsemero is using the language of religion to justify his probably rather unchaste thoughts about Beatrice, and his idolatry will eventually end in her destruction. Michael Neill makes interesting note of the connection: “With Alsemero’s pseudo-pious sophistry, compare [Francis] Bacon’s [1561-1626] description of love: as if man, made for the contemplation of heaven and all noble objects, should do nothing but kneel before a little idol, and make himself subject, though not of the mouth (as beasts are), yet of the eye, which was given them for higher purposes’ (*Of Love*, p.29).” (Neill, 5). The audience’s immediate introduction to *The Changeling* is through the idolatrous eyes of Alsemero. As it becomes clear, he is mistaking the virginal, male-constructed image of Beatrice-Joanna for her true substance (‘whore’).

When Jasperino sees his friend Alsemero greet Beatrice-Joanna for the first time with a kiss, he declares in an aside, “How now! The laws of the Medes are changed, sure! Salute a woman? He kisses too – wonderful! Where learnt he this? And does it perfectly too! In my conscience, he ne’er rehearsed it before.” (1.1.55-59) Michael Neill notes “on the supposedly unbreakable laws of the Medes, see Daniel 6:8” (8), which reads “Now, O king, establish the decree, and signe the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes & Persians, which altereth not,” although a better definition for my argument is Daniel 6:15, “the law of the Medes...is, that no decree nor statute which the king establisheth, may bee changed.” (King James Bible, 1611). Jasperino’s aside implies that to salute or kiss a woman is a change in the unchangeable laws of Medes; that a king has outlawed the type of worshipful reverence Alsemero is exhibiting toward Beatrice – perhaps a reference to legislation like the Royal

Injunctions of 1538, forbidding people ‘to lick or kiss’ images or relics. Beatrice-Joanna is able to keep her status as chaste, pious woman until she commits the sin of murder, revealing herself to the audience but not to Alsemero, who nevertheless begins suspecting her later in the play of being false.

Beatrice-Joanna’s transition from chastity to whoredom (or pure image to false image) throughout the play is paralleled by the side plot in ‘the madhouse’. In a way, the madhouse plot seems to parody and predict the events of the main plot, perhaps suggesting the two plots are not as dichotomous as they seem. In the scene just after Deflores carries out Beatrice-Joanna’s request to murder her fiancée Alonzo de Piracquo in order to marry Alsemero, Lollo (a servant in the madhouse) attempts to have his way with his master’s wife Isabella, but only after discovering she intends to cuckold her husband. As the false fool Antonio kisses her, “Lollo enters to spy on Isabella, as Deflores has previously done on Beatrice-Joanna in [2.2]. In both scenes the treacherous servant plans to use his discoveries to blackmail erotic favours from his mistress” (Neill, 60). It is after realizing Isabella to be an idolatrous image - which she seems to affirm in her reflection just before Lollo re-enters the room - that he attempts to rape (appropriate, sexually ‘break’) her:

**Isabella.** Here the restrained current might make breach

Spite of the watchful bankers. Would a woman stray,

She need not gad abroad to seek her sin –

It would be brought home one ways or other:

The needle’s point will to the fixed north,

Such drawing Arctics women’s beauties are.

*Enter Lollo.*

**Lollo.** How dost thou, sweet rogue?

**Isabella.** How now?

**Lollo.** Come, there are degrees – one fool may be better than another.

**Isabella.** What's the matter?

**Lollo.** Nay, if you giv'st thy mind to fools'-flesh, have at thee!

[*Tries to kiss her*]

**Isabella.** You bold slave, you!

[Lollo calls her "Lacedemonian" i.e. 'whore,' "*grabs indecently at her*"]

**Isabella.** Sirrah, no more! I see you have discovered

This love's knight-errant, who hath made adventure

For purchase of my love. Be silent, mute –

Mute as a statue – or his injunction

For me enjoying shall be to cut thy throat:

I'll do it, though for no other purpose;

And be sure he'll not refuse it.

**Lollo.** My share, that's all! I'll have my fool's part with you.

**Isabella.** No more – your master!

(3.2.204-237).

In her speech alone, Isabella reflects on beauty's ability fix 'the needle's point north' – a clearly phallic image – implying the power women (or their images - beauty without substance) can have over men. When she says "this love's knight-errant, who hath made adventure / For purchase of my love," it is almost as if she is speaking as an idol or a saint, referring to a pilgrimage. She then implores Lollo to be 'Mute as a statue' – which would make him an image

that cannot talk; if he speaks, ‘his injunction / For me enjoying shall be to cut thy throat’ which given the context, is another possible reference to the injunctions that necessitated the destruction of such idolatrous images as talking (and mute) statues, or punishment ‘for me enjoying’ i.e., succumbing to idolatry. Where Isabella is able to ward off Lollio, Beatrice-Joanna is ‘deflowered’ by Deflores in the very next scene, and she spends the rest of the play attempting to conceal her lost virginity – her broken image of purity.

Alsemero’s anxiety over his new wife’s chastity is most evident when he demands she take a chastity test (Act 4, Scene 2), not knowing she’d seen its effects – and could therefore fake it – by testing it on her servant Diaphanta. When Beatrice-Joanna enters the room not knowing Alsemero has already sent for the virginity test, he says “Push, modesty's shrine is set in yonder forehead. / I cannot be too sure though.--My Joanna.” (4.2.125-6), portraying her as both a shrine of modesty and a source of erotic anxiety. In her analysis of this conflation, Haber argues that not only is “the purest woman...viewed as possibly complicit in her own ravishment” but in a society that idolizes virginity and chastity, “in which desire is intertwined with and regularly issues in disgust...the purest woman – the most desirable woman – is especially suspect” (82). Haber therefore argues that Alsemero’s chastity test is an important sign of “the bride’s *iconic* status” (83, emphasis added), but her argument overlooks the simple flaw of the virginity test in that it attempts to make visible that which is not – or in religious discourse, the true substance behind the image – which gives the image power in that it may be a true or false representation. Problematically, Beatrice-Joanna is able to maintain her false image because Alsemero cannot distinguish between her (faked) reaction and what he knows are the ‘true signs’ of virginity, as dramatized through the effects of the potion.

This questioning of Beatrice-Joanna's 'iconic status' and its failure to identify her as a false image seems to be explained by the iconoclastic logic James Simpson describes as part of the history of legislated iconoclasm: "it's impossible to distinguish between those images that provoke idolatry and those that don't...No one ever confesses to idolatry, and there can be no reliable empirical test for it. So the first wave of iconoclasm is characteristically followed by a second. This subsequent wave commands destruction of *all* religious images. (13) The problem of interpretation – and anxiety over misrepresentation – necessitates the destruction of all images that are worshipped, which includes 'iconic brides' and women depicted as having 'modesty's shrine set in yonder forehead.' In drama, this seems to manifest in the exploration of a woman's agency – such as Lavinia's seizing her uncle's staff, or Beatrice-Joanna's plotting the murder of her fiancée, Alonzo de Piracquo, in order to marry Alsemero – their misinterpretation and subsequent destruction.

After finally discovering his beloved Beatrice-Joanna has committed murder, Alsemero locks her in his closet, literally removing her image from the stage. This prompts Deflores to ask if she 'hath confessed it:'

**Alsemero.** As sure as death to both of you,

And much more than that.

**Deflores.** It could not be much more –

'Twas but one thing, and that is she's a whore.

**Alsemero.** It could not choose but follow. O cunning devils,

How should blind men know you from fair-faced saints?

(5.3.107-110)

Alsemero seems almost unsurprised at finally discovering the truth about the extent of Beatrice-Joanna's sin; Judith Haber remarks that the phrase 'could not choose but follow' "echoes throughout, evoking both erotic compulsion and the logical 'inevitability' of Beatrice's progression from murderess to whore." (85). However, Haber overlooks Alsemero's next line, which demonstrates a clear anxiety about his – and other 'blind' men's – ability to distinguish 'cunning devils' from 'fair-faced saints,' implying blindness as a result of love, rapture – or the sort of erotic idolatry that Beatrice-Joanna elicits. Once all is revealed and Beatrice-Joanna's father Vermandero appears on the scene, Beatrice-Joanna seems to affirm her status as fallen image: "O come not near me, sir, I shall defile you: / I am that of your blood was taken from you / For your better health; look no more upon't, / But cast it to the ground regardlessly" (5.3.149-152). Even as Beatrice-Joanna compares herself to blood that must be sacrificed for her father's better health (i.e. bloodletting – Neill, p. 122) she calls for the visual and physical destruction of her image, imploring everyone watching to 'look no more upon't' and 'cast it to the ground regardlessly.'

In *The Changeling*, Beatrice-Joanna is idolized by Alsemero from the very beginning of the play, setting in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy in which obsession with Beatrice's body, particularly her virginity/chastity, her virtue, leads to her blackmail and rape, and finally her death (iconoclasm). Beatrice-Joanna is problematic as an image in that she gives herself sexual agency (within a patriarchy) by choosing Alsemero over Alonzo de Piracquo, is complicit in de Piracquo's murder, and succumbs to Deflores's manipulations. This is followed not by a misreading like that of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, but a misrepresentation; much of *The Changeling* focuses on Beatrice Joanna's attempts to cover up that which is not visible *except through representation* anyway – her loss of virginity and 'iconic status.' In a way, *The*

*Changeling* can be read as a play as much about Alsemero's fate for committing idolatry as Beatrice-Joanna's fate for being a false image and descending into her final status as revealed (or martyred) 'whore.'

#### **Part IV: The Rover**

Aphra Behn's 1677 comedy *The Rover, or The Banished Cavaliers*, is often identified as a play about liberation, politics, commerce and sexuality. Much scholarship has focused, with good reason, on the character and courtesan Angellica Bianca and the wealthy virgin sisters Hellena and Florinda, all of whom are conscribed in a patriarchal (or as Brian Lockey reads it, a Spanish-oppressed) society. Angellica is depicted as both whore and saint; Hellena as both pious virgin / nun, and gipsy; Florinda as pious virgin and commodified object (to a Father-arranged marriage); these are all confluences of the sexual and sociopolitical, *of which religion is a part*. Throughout *The Rover*, sexuality and religious imagery are not only juxtaposed but unavoidably intermingled, and examining Behn's staged sexual iconoclasm only adds to current discourses on the play. The relationship between sexual and religious imagery in *The Rover* has been largely ignored by critics who elucidate that very relationship in their discussions of the social, political, commercial, sexual, and as I will show, theological, implications of Behn's play.

I will focus particularly on the scene in Act 2 in which Willmore initially encounters the portrait of the courtesan/prostitute, Angellica Bianca. Elin Diamond has identified Willmore's appropriation of Angellica's portrait in Act 2 as a 'Brechtian gest,' or "that moment in theatrical performance in which contradictory social attitudes in both text and society are made heuristically visible to spectators" (532) insofar as it reveals the underlying commodification (and fetishization) of female sexuality. Other criticism has viewed this 'gest' as a type of rape.

However, the description of Willmore stealing / taking down Angellica's picture also has undeniably iconoclastic overtones. Especially revealing is the staging of Willmore's reaction to the picture. Before it is hung up, he seems outraged at Angellica's fee of a thousand crowns, and foreshadows the 'gest' when he says "I long to see the shadow of the fair substance; a man may gaze on that for nothing." (Act 2 Scene 1; MacMillin, 184). The act of 'gazing on' is recurrent throughout *The Rover*, and although is not necessarily religious, 'shadow of the fair substance' decidedly enters the realm of idolatry, where images are mistakenly worshipped for the substance they represent. Willmore affirms idolatry by suggesting the shadow is just as edifying as the substance yet is free. His opinion changes rapidly once he "gazes on the picture," however:

WILLMORE May she languish for mankind till she die, and be damned for that one sin alone.

*Enter two BRAVOS and hang up a great picture of Angellica's against the balcony, and two little ones at each side of the door.*

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

WILLMORE *gazes on the picture.*

...

WILLMORE How wondrous fair she is! A thousand crowns a month? By heaven, as many kingdoms were too little! A plague of this poverty, of which I ne'er complain but when it hinders my approach to beauty which virtue ne'er could purchase.

*Turns from the picture.*

(Act 2 Scene 1; MacMillin, 186)

As Diamond explains, “Willmore...monarchy’s representative, succumbs to the lure of the signs, believing not only in their iconicity but in their value as pleasurable objects – for the original one must pay one thousand crowns, but on the portraits one can gaze for nothing.” (531) Diamond’s assertion that Willmore is “monarchy’s representative” reiterates the critical consensus that Willmore is an analogue for England’s King Charles II specifically and royalists more generally.<sup>2</sup> His devotion to Angellica’s portrait makes sense, then, since Charles II was a Catholic and the anti-Catholic anxiety that would lead to the Popish Plot (which began only a year after the first performance of *The Rover*) inevitably includes a discussion of idolatry and iconoclasm. Brian Lockey agrees that “Angellica’s portrait situates the play within a trajectory of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatic and literary works in which portraits are used to inspire devotion, adoration, and idolatry.” (168).

Having conveniently forgotten his rendezvous with Hellena (who should embody religion as a nun but instead becomes one of the play’s most multifaceted characters) Willmore, in Catholic fashion, is distracted by Angellica’s portrait (idolatry), Angellica-as-actress and sexual commodity.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that Willmore’s fascination with Angellica’s image leads to his ‘gest’:

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<sup>2</sup> Although many critics seem to agree on this point, whether or not Willmore is actually a dramatization of Charles II is still a topic of debate. For a counterargument, read Timothy Raylor (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Diamond seems to relate Willmore’s fascination with Angellica’s portrait to idolatry without explicitly making the connection:

The epistemological link between the theater apparatus and illicit female signs is not of course new to the Restoration...Actors in paint and costume contaminate their true God-given identities...To the Puritan mind the presence of women on stage was an affront to feminine modesty, but more damning was the fact that the means of illusionism – use of costume, paint, masking – involved specifically female vices. The nature of theatrical representation, like the “nature” of woman, was to ensnare, deceive, and seduce. (523)

Here Diamond reveals an anxiety that is both anti-Catholic, anti-theatrical, and anti-female (seeking a type of sexual iconoclasm) that influenced how Angellica’s portrait and Willmore’s ‘gest’ would be seen

WILLMORE, *having gazed all this while on the picture, pulls down a little one.*”

(Act 2 Scene 1; MacMillin, 189)

In this act of iconoclasm, Willmore removes the idolatrous image of Angellica Bianca, or ‘white angel,’ a name at once ironic given her sexual trade as a prostitute and indicative of the heavenly status she seeks to attain and affirm by “gazing on her spectators” (Diamond, 529) as if from higher (divine) status and causing them to worship her image. Even as Willmore appropriates Angellica’s image he destroys it in the material sense (it disappears from stage; it has been taken down) and affirms its power by worshipping it in place of Angellica’s body, ‘the fair substance.’

Willmore’s appropriation of first Angellica’s image, and then her substance (which he later rejects perhaps as a ‘shadow of the fair substance’ that is Hellena), seems to defy many critical readings of *The Rover* and is perhaps better explained through the lens of sexual iconoclasm. Echoing the appropriation of Angellica’s little picture is her removal of her image from sellable commodity once she falls in love with Willmore; yet it becomes clear he continues to see her in the terms of idolatry, adoration of a ‘flat image.’ When Willmore leaves Angellica’s lodgings at the start of Act 3, Belvile specifically defines Angellica in terms of iconoclasm and idolatry, blending the religious and the sexual:

BELVILE     And how and how, dear lad, has fortune smiled? Are we to break  
her windows, or raise up altars to her, hah?

(Act 3 Scene 1; MacMillin, 198)

Belvile is equating Angellica both to a church or potential saint, as though she were either a false image or a heavenly conquest, and Willmore makes the answer clear by his response:

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by the audience, asserting that “Angellica’s simulacra, not Angellica, preoccupy her male audience” (531) which Behn uses to problematize the “fetish/commodity status of the female performer” (524). I argue that Willmore’s distraction by Angellica’s picture – and subsequent removal thereof - is not unlike the improper worship of religious images that is classified as idolatry.

WILLMORE Hark'ee, where didst thou purchase that rich Canary we drank today? Tell me, that I may adore the spigot and sacrifice to the butt. The juice was divine; into which I must dip my rosary, and then bless all things that I would have bold or fortunate.

(Act 3 Scene 1; MacMillin, 198)

He forgoes referring to Angellica directly and seems to mock the rituals of Catholicism that Charles II would have upheld, perhaps indicating Behn's attitude toward the religious debates that were still (if not especially) contentious during and immediately after the interregnum. By 'that rich Canary' Willmore could simply be referring to wine, but the context seems to imply a double entendre in which he is equating the 'purchase of that rich Canary' to Angellica Bianca as well as Catholic rituals that involved sacramental wine. His desire to 'adore the spigot' and 'sacrifice to the butt' intermingle the sexual with the religious, as does his assertion that 'the juice was *divine*' and his desire to 'dip his rosary' and then 'bless all things' – a blatant conflation of religious and phallic imagery. Willmore's use of the language of Catholic tradition (e.g. sacramental wine, rosary beads, blessings, sacrifices) to characterize his encounter with Angellica undermines them both; the courtesan is reduced to religious iconography and both are mocked on stage.

Willmore's rejection of Angellica for the beautiful, witty, *virgin* Hellena and the parody of religious ceremony are continued in the same scene where he and Hellena perform a mock marriage:

WILLMORE I do, never to think, to see, to love, nor lie, with any but thyself.

HELLENA Kiss the book.

WILLMORE Oh, most religiously.

*Kisses her hand.*

(Act 3, Scene 1; MacMillin, 202)

Hellena's hand, a part of her physical body, simultaneously replaces the worshipped image of Angellica Bianca and the 'book' – presumably the bible – held by priests. Willmore swears constancy to Hellena (her hand, as in marriage) by kneeling before her and 'religiously' kissing her hand, which makes Hellena a priest or saint-like figure – appropriate given that she is a nun but ironic given the context of her debauchery through masquerading. The female's hands – perhaps significantly given Behn's identity as a female playwright – seem to figure as metonyms for virginity (read: sexual power). It is traditionally the males, such as Florinda and Hellena's brother Don Pedro (through their absent father), who have this power. Hellena stepping into the role of priest allows her to appropriate power by calling attention to her conflicting identities of pious nun, masquerading gypsy, commodifiable virgin, and "inconstant" lover, the conglomeration of which vehemently thwart the intentions of oppressive patriarchy (including religious devotion, which Willmore seeks to divert). Diamond calls our attention to the importance of reading the female body in *The Rover*: "In Behn's texts, the painful bisexuality of authorship, the conflict between (as she puts it) her "defenceless" woman's body and her "masculine part," is *staged* in her insistence, in play after play, on the equation between female body and fetish, fetish and commodity – the body in the "scenes." (535). In the mock-marriage scene with Hellena and Willmore, the female body is equated to religious imagery in a way that defies the very commodification Behn seeks to problematize; Hellena controls how her body is interpreted through various disguises. She has agency because of her power over her image.

Florinda's power is also staged through her body when she writes the letter (by seizing the pen, a symbol of phallic / male status) to Belvile that sets her defiance of arranged marriage

into motion. After handing him the letter in disguise and departing, Frederick asks Belvile, “Do you know the hand?” to which Belvile replies, “’Tis Florinda’s. All blessings fall upon the virtuous maid.” Frederick then says, “Nay, no idolatry; a sober sacrifice I’ll allow you.” (Act 1 Scene 2; RECC 182). This reference to idolatry comes as early as Scene 2 of *The Rover*, and it seems Frederick is referring to Belvile’s statement (prayer?) that ‘all blessings fall upon the virtuous maid’ (virgin), urging Belvile to remain sober in matters of love and sex rather than get drunk on the idolatry and reactionary iconoclasm / fetishization Willmore (the brash alazon character) exhibits in Act 2 in response to Angellica’s picture. Unlike Angellica, Florinda has power over the pen, staged through the letter written in her hand which simultaneously represents her status as empowered ‘virtuous maid,’ and she also has power over who possesses her image. Again interacting with Belvile in disguise, Florinda tests his constancy and finds him loyal, so she “*Gives him the jewel, which is her picture, and exit. He gazes after her.*” (Act 3, Scene 1; MacMillin, 203). Behn stages Belvile’s appropriation of Florinda’s image concurrently with Willmore and Hellena’s mock marriage, and is thereby simultaneously staging Willmore’s devotion / worship of Hellena’s hand and Florinda giving her image to Belvile, intending to inspire idolatry. Belvile, true to his role as the play’s successful ‘eiron’ character, is handed an image but ‘gazes after her,’ the true, substantive Florinda.

Both Hellena and Florinda are sexually if not religiously (patriarchally) pious; they control their hymen (although Florinda’s is repeatedly threatened) and defy conscription within either of their terrible fates (as Behn implies both marriages and nunneries are). These women can be read as substantive bodies, whereas Angellica, who allows herself to be appropriated and her sexuality commodified by patriarchy and religion, meets the fate of sexual iconoclasm:

Oh, how I fell, like a long-worshiped idol,

Discovering all the cheat.

Would not the incense and rich sacrifice

Which blind devotion offered at my altars

Have fallen to thee? (Act 5 Scene 1; MacMillin, 239)

At the end of the play, Angellica seems to finally be revealing herself as the false image she is, also revealing how she exploits that status to gain power – rich sacrifice and blind devotion - over men. Even in chastising Willmore Angellica reduces herself to the altar from which Willmore could have collected the benefits of her selling her sexuality; much as Diamond argues that Behn “revives the problematic of the masquerade” (“that whores are indistinguishable from moral women”) casting doubt on the connection/separation of sign and referent,” (529), Angellica is exploiting the religious implications of idolatry by ‘covering up’ her status as inherently sexually commodified with the beauty and idolatry her picture inspires. Like Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, she is in many ways a false image.

Willmore first steals Angellica’s *image*, and then her substance, but he rejects her for the ‘fair substance’ of Hellena, who is both sexually liberated and decidedly *not* commodified at the end of *The Rover*. Similarly, Belvile receives first the written words, then the image, then the substance of Florinda; Hellena reveals first her wit (depth and substance), her face (image), then her name (social status); each is a complex, interwoven plot of masking and revealing that rely on sexual imagery and religious ideology. By dramatizing Angellica Bianca’s dependence on her physical image and Willmore’s appropriation, and subsequent rejection of her image (and her body), Aphra Behn is undeniably staging the logic of iconoclasm - a desire for character substance and liberation (Hellena and Florinda) rather than sexual commodification and submission (Angellica Bianca).

## Part V: Conclusion

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594), Middleton & Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622), and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677) are three illuminating examples of how religious and sexual discourse intersect in a broad range of early modern drama. They elicit the cultural anxiety over representation and image worship that was so divisive during vexed periods of Reformation and Restoration in England. The way in which sexual iconoclasm is used to read the iconoclastic logic and sexual politics of these plays necessarily varies by play, which is what makes it useful in identifying patterns and fluctuations in image portrayal and destruction, both religious and sexual.

What emerges from these plays, and begins to inform the potential *purpose* of sexual iconoclasm, is that there is a certain parallel between idolatry and patriarchy that objectifies women and necessitates their iconoclasm. Simon Hardy writes that "feminist iconoclasm needs to be treated as an historical phenomenon, that is to say, as both a product of the millennial struggle for sexual equality and as a force which may influence, for good or ill, the outcome of that struggle." (80). Hardy's argument for the usefulness of 'feminist iconoclasm' is manifest in the appropriation and oppression of womens' images in *Titus Andronicus*, *The Changeling*, and *The Rover*, as is James Simpson's assertion that "the history of Liberty turns out, in part, to involve histories of 'idol' destruction...At different moments in that long period of iconophobia, religious images were felt to enervate the impulse to liberty." (155). Therefore, even as images are feared and destroyed, the 'necessity' for their oppression is simultaneously a testament to how powerful the image is. By combining these often-dichotomized discourses of sexual politics and religious idolatry, sexual iconoclasm will prove to be a useful theoretical lens through which

to analyze a culture's literary and dramatic works, creating exciting new avenues for critical insight and exploration.

In conclusion I would offer a final, optimistic reading of these three plays through this new discourse of sexual iconoclasm: that the progression from Shakespeare to Middleton & Rowley to Aphra Behn is respectively one in which the female character goes from misread, to (self)-misrepresented, to self-represented, in what can be interpreted as the dramatization of an increasing bid for women's agency. Despite patriarchal attempts at oppressing this agency, modern iconoclastic discourse (e.g. James Simpson, Simon Hardy) informs us that such destruction is only to recognize the temptation and power – and the lasting, dramatic presence – of that which evokes anxiety, such as representations of women on the early modern stage. Therefore, as attention is called to their destruction or appropriation, Lavinia, Beatrice-Joanna, and the female characters of *The Rover* are undeniably empowered.

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