

JEALOUSY AND MALE ANXIETY: ARTICULATIONS OF GENDER IN “THE CURIOUS IMPERTINENT” AND *THE AMOROUS PRINCE*

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Abstract

The subplot of Aphra Behn’s play *The Amorous Prince* is a rewriting of “The Impertinent Curious,” an interpolated tale in *Don Quixote* that depicts a pathologically jealous husband. All-pervasive in both Golden Age Spain and Restoration England, the discourse of jealousy was deployed to explore cultural issues involving identity and power. While contributing to validate the established relations of power, the hegemonic notions of manhood prevailing in each context were contradictory, and hence were subject to subversion and resistance. Sexual jealousy is analysed as a consequence of the paradoxes underlying the culturally specific dominant constructions of gender, which was at the same time an enabling condition of hegemony and a source of male anxiety. My analysis is aimed at determining how this ideological contradiction is managed in each text.

Keywords: early modern, masculinity, sexual jealousy, Cervantes, Aphra Behn, “The Curious Impertinent”.

Resumen

La trama secundaria de *The Amorous Prince*, una obra teatral de Aphra Behn, es una reescritura de “El Curioso Impertinente”, un relato intercalado del *Quijote* que describe a un marido patológicamente celoso. Ubicuo en la España del Siglo de Oro y la Inglaterra de la Restauración, el discurso de los celos se empleaba para explorar cuestiones relacionadas con la identidad y el poder. Además de contribuir a validar las relaciones de poder establecidas, las nociones hegemónicas de masculinidad vigentes en cada contexto resultaban contradictorias, y por tanto estaban expuestas a la subversión y la resistencia. Los celos sexuales se analizan como consecuencia de las paradojas subyacentes a las construcciones dominantes de género culturalmente específicas, que eran a la vez una condición que hacía posible la hegemonía y una fuente de ansiedad masculina. Mi análisis pretende determinar cómo se maneja esta contradicción ideológica en cada texto.

Palabras clave: premoderno, masculinidad, celos sexuales, Cervantes, Aphra Behn. “El Curioso Impertinente”.

Barely two years after its publication, *Don Quixote* began to exert a profound influence on the English literary panorama, becoming the source of a wide range of rewritings and emulations. The emblematic knight-errant and his squire became vividly ingrained in the collective imagination, together with other characters whose popularity was already noteworthy. Among the latter are the protagonists of “The Curious Impertinent,” who inspired no less than six surviving adaptations to the seventeenth-century stage.¹ A narrative interlude interpolated in *Don Quixote*, “The Curious Impertinent” is the story of a husband’s obsession to test his wife’s virtue and of the tragic consequences derived from his insane desire. Increasingly anxious about Camila’s chastity, Anselmo persuades his closest friend to attempt the seduction of his own wife. Lotario’s feigned advances turn into an actual liaison which culminates in the death of the three main characters.

In 1671, Aphra Behn adapted Cervantes’s tale for the subplot of a play entitled *The Amorous Prince*. Although the plots of both works bear great resemblance, the English dramatist rewrote the original tragedy into a tragicomedy with a happy ending. The emphasis on female agency accounts for this all-important change: in Behn’s version, the two male friends, Antonio and Alberto, are deceived by two witty women who become active agents in the intrigue. Clarina, Antonio’s wife, avoids succumbing to temptation because she is replaced by her sister-in-law, Ismena, throughout the courtship.

In order to understand the centrality of sexual jealousy to early modern representations of masculinity, it is important to analyse the culturally specific operations of patriarchy. It is only in the light of the normative articulations of gender that each text’s approach to the hegemonic sexual hierarchy can be revealed.

In early modern Europe, an intense preoccupation with female chastity and sexuality was widely spread among the guardians of social orthodoxy. One of the most recurrent manifestations of this all-pervading obsession was male heterosexual jealousy, which, labelled by Mark Breitenberg as the “most dreadful exhibition of anxious masculinity” (*Anxious Masculinity* 175), became unprecedentedly common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The period’s operations of patriarchy, built upon essentialised constructions of gender, explain the all-pervasiveness of male sexual jealousy. Whereas the one-sex model of the body and the theory of humours constructed females as physically weaker and less perfect than their male counterparts, the Bible portrayed Eve as naturally evil and morally fallible. Physical weakness was effectively linked to moral frailty in the overall representation of the females as naturally imperfect and subservient.

Manhood was not an innate and stable condition of the human being, but a culturally specific asset constantly in circulation that needed to be earned. Hence,

¹ Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Coxcomb*, an anonymous play entitled *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*, Nathan Field’s *Amends for Ladies*, Aphra Behn’s *The Amorous Prince*, Thomas Southerne’s *The Disappointment* and John Crowne’s *The Married Beau*.

attention should be paid to the particular circumstances that called for the – anxious– prescription of a distinct code of manhood in each context. When Cervantes published his masterpiece, Spain had begun its decline from prominence as a world’s leading power, due to a series of military, political and financial crises. This fall from hegemony was discursively articulated as the result of the perceived effeminacy of many males who had been lulled into a reproachable life of excess and idleness. In this context, a discourse of masculinity emerged that attempted to provide a “self-conscious ... dynamic response to Spain’s experience of decline” (Lehfeldt 466). In this discourse, noble manhood was defined as encompassing valued characteristics such as military deftness, virtue, strength and control. These gendered qualities were intended as a solution to the decay of a country weakened by war defeats, unproductive leisure and frivolous indulgence.

In early modern Spain, honourable manhood was an asset men could obtain by performing the socially condoned construction of maleness in the public world. They were required to exhibit ‘manly’ strength and prowess by displaying certain valuable virtues, among them the ability to control the sexual behaviour of their wives. In this context, female adultery was regarded as an abominable act of insubordination that irrevocably shamed a husband who had utterly failed to control his spouse. In turn, a man’s failure to rule the microcosm of the household signalled his inability to exert power in the public domain. To make matters more complicated, female chastity could on no grounds be guaranteed. Paradoxically, men constructed their own masculinity as dependent on the chastity of the “weaker vessel,” whom they fashioned as naturally inclined to lust and infidelity.²

Manhood in Restoration England was shaped by the ideology of libertinism, which defined sexual prowess as a signal of normative masculinity and heterosexuality. At the core of this ideology lied a double sexual standard: the patrilineal system of inheritance that aristocrats were eager to preserve was contingent upon women’s chastity, while men’s indulgence in sexual activity was imagined as inherent to the male experience. Consequently, the sociopolitical order that was implemented after Charles II’s accession was categorically dependent on and especially anxious about the regulation of female sexuality.

Both Cervantes’s and Behn’s works reflect and manage the audience/reader’s anxiety about female sexuality. The discussion that follows provides an analysis of the specific operations deployed by the hegemonic discourse in order to construct and naturalise normative gender subjectivities in each text. These identities uphold culturally specific conceptions of patriarchy,

² Honourable manhood went beyond the control of women’s sexuality to include other cherished skills, mainly “competence in one’s trade or office, the management of one’s credit and debt relationships and one’s performance in the aggressive, competitive play that composed much of male sociability” (Taylor 9). This paper pays attention to female chastity in order to analyse how the paradox underlying hegemonic gender is managed in each work.

which are instilled with discursively naturalised ideologies about gender, power and sexual desire and at whose core lies male heterosexual jealousy. The exceptionally strong hold that this phenomenon had on the contexts analysed derives from contradictions and inconsistencies inherent to each culture's dominant constructions of gender. My analysis of these literary works is aimed at determining how these ideological paradoxes are managed in each case.

"The Curious Impertinent" opens with the story of Anselmo and Lotario, "dos caballeros ... tan amigos, que, por excelencia y antonomasia, ... 'los dos amigos' eran llamados" (327). Male bonding is introduced as the exclusive defining feature of the masculine protagonists and their social relations. During the Renaissance, a large number of texts circulated that eulogised male friendship. Montaigne extols this bond above any other and defines true friendship as a state where "souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together" (7).

In early modern Europe, male friends played a pivotal role in a single man's social life. Significantly, it is Lotario who arranges the marriage between Anselmo and Camila, an arrangement to which the narrator conveniently refers as "negocio" (328). Lotario's active role in the affair comes as no surprise in a context where the personal value of a woman – an asset always in circulation – was negotiated in the 'male' public world, and had a determining influence on men's reputation. This public dimension of personal worth is reflected and produced in Lotario's claim that "Camila es finísimo diamante, así en tu estimación como en la ajena" (336).

As shown in the above quotation, the heroine's value is articulated in economic, even alchemical, metaphors. In fact, the rhetoric of the marketplace pervades the men's verbal exchanges. Anselmo admits that he has contrived the test to reveal "los quilates de su bondad, así como el fuego muestra los del oro" (331) and wishes that his wife "se acrisole y quilate en el fuego de verse requerida y solicitada" (331). Only if she overcomes the fire of temptation will the gold of Camila's fidelity be valuable in her husband's eyes.

Lotario casts his arguments against the fidelity test in the same –economic– terms. First, he states that his friend is "señor y legítimo poseedor de un finísimo diamante" (336) and defines Camila's 'market value' as residing in the jewel of her chastity: "no hay joya en el mundo que tanto valga como la mujer casta y honrada" (336). Even the "emphatically male" (Pérez 95) voice of the narrator inscribes Camila within this marketplace rhetoric, reinforcing Lotario's belief that it is both purposeless and risky to test the fidelity of a woman: "Si la mina de su honor, hermosura, honestidad y recogimiento te da sin ningún trabajo toda la riqueza que tiene y tú puedes desear, ¿para qué quieres ahondar la tierra y buscar nuevas vetas de nuevo y nunca visto tesoro?" (344)

The hegemonic discourse constructs women's personal value as dependent on their sexuality. Beauty, virtue, wealth and social status were among the assets which, together with chastity, enhanced females' value in the marriage marketplace. Camila's initial high 'market' value turns Lotario's arrangement

into a worthy “negocio” and Anselmo’s matrimony into a profitable economic and sexual exchange. Nevertheless, she comes to be regarded by her husband as an intruder in his friendship with Lotario, to whom Anselmo complains that “si él supiera que el casarse había de ser parte para no comunicalle como solía, que jamás lo hubiera hecho” (328).

Marriage gave entry to a world of sexual politics where men became rivals in a power struggle for maleness, honour and reputation. The widely-spread discourse that exalted “philia” over “eros” clashed with a conflicting ideology based upon the concepts of honour, rivalry and even violence. In this context, male friendships became codified sets of rules and regulations governing behaviour. These rules account for Lotario’s decision – which is judged sensible by the narrator – to “descuidarse con cuidado de las idas en casa de Anselmo, por parecerle a él (como es razón que parezca a todos los que fueren discretos) que no se han de visitar ni continuar las casas de los amigos casados”(328).

As Foyster points out, “marriage provided the setting in which male friendships could be construed as ‘unnatural’ and even branded as ‘sodomitical’” (127). Alan Bray challenges the apparently clear-cut difference between the sodomite and the male friend in early seventeenth-century England, arguing that the distinction between these categories “was neither as sharp nor as clearly marked as the Elizabethans would have us believe” (8). Even though homoeroticism was more effaced in Golden Age Spain, critics have also highlighted Spanish representations of male friendships ‘trespassing’ into the ‘perverse’ territory of the sodomitical. For instance, in their reading of Lope de Vega’s *La boda entre dos maridos*, “Bradbury, Vélez-Quiñones and Heiple ... point towards the existence of a homoerotic discourse codified in the (relatively safe due to the cultural prestige of its rich classical tradition) subject of the ideal masculine friendship” (González-Ruiz 59-60).³ In this context, the institution of matrimony required that a new system of male bonding be negotiated. As shown in Diana de Armas’s analysis of the ‘dos amigos’ literary tradition, males were often “rebonded” together “through the conduit of a woman’s body that they must shame ..., or test ..., or erase ...” (18-19). In the case of Cervantes’s tale, Anselmo’s attempt to renegotiate his bond with Lotario is carried out through the conduit of Camila’s body.

In *The Amorous Prince*, the male characters also treat women as currency to be exchanged in the marriage marketplace and define the assets that enhance their personal value. When, at the end of the play, Antonio learns that Alberto covets his wife, he turns Ismena into a fungible good to be traded with his friend for mutual gain: “I have a Sister, Friend, a handsom Virgin, / Rich, witty, and I think she’s vertuous too; Return’d last week from St. *Teretias* Monastery” (V.ii.394). The qualities that raise Clarina’s value as a marriageable commodity are very similar to those that were thought to increase Camila’s worth – mainly

³ “Bradbury, Vélez Quiñones y Heiple... apuntan la existencia de un discurso homoerótico codificado en el tema (relativamente seguro por el prestigio cultural de su rica tradición clásica) de la perfecta amistad masculina”. Author’s translation.

beauty, chastity, virtue and wealth. Through this transaction, Alberto is expected to benefit from Ismena's value and Antonio intends to keep his honour untainted. Nevertheless, Behn's male characters are unaware of the fact that it is actually the females who are taking advantage of the situation.

As opposed to Camila, Clarina knows of her husband's intention to test her fidelity from the beginning of the play. Such knowledge prevents her from succumbing to temptation and empowers her to take revenge on her jealous spouse, an act that Antonio himself cannot but describe as fair: "I must confess it is but just in her / To punish thus the errors of my fear" (V.ii.393). As regards Ismena, she obtains the highest personal profit from the courtship test, since she manages to gain the husband of her choice. In impersonating Clarina, Antonio's sister manipulates Alberto into loving her. Significantly, Isabella – Clarina's maid – subversively appropriates the marketplace rhetoric through which Cervantes's male characters articulate the value of women in order to define the worth of men: "Yes wondrous well, since I am sure he Loves you, / And that indeed raises a mans value" (II.ii.353).

In using their knowledge of the fidelity test for their own advantage, Behn's heroines resist being used as objects of exchange, something which Cervantes places out of Camila's reach making her blind to her husband's designs. Therefore, the men's attempt to renegotiate their initial bond through the conduit of the female body is effectively frustrated.

The representation of women and their bodies as fungible commodities – and the inevitable connotations of prostitution – is, in fact, at the core of *The Amorous Prince*. In the last scene of the play, the leading female characters perform a masque disguised as silent prostitutes and approach some of the men, who take them for strangers. Snider considers that the purpose of such masquerade is that of exposing "the economic logic that effectively makes all women – sisters and wives included – whores" (324). Interestingly, it is precisely the role of the whore that Camila will be forced to play." As Yvonne Jehenson observes, "if Camila relents and is seduced by Lotario, she is a whore, the very position the scenario is testing. ... If she resists and is chaste, she becomes an irresistible sexual object whose resistance the men must overcome" (40). In her rewriting, Aphra Behn identifies the patriarchal logic that confines women into this role and, in having Clarina successfully overcome the fidelity test, subverts it.

The constructions of gender articulated by the male characters are very similar in both texts, since they serve the same ideological purpose: to validate and naturalise their position of dominance within the established power hierarchy. In Cervantes's tale, the masculine characters stress women's natural weakness. Lotario's discourse, grounded in the 'male' authority of science and logic, gives an emphatically essentialist view of women. In stating that "la mujeres animal imperfecto ... que no tiene tanta virtud y fuerza natural" (336-337), he reinforces the gender hierarchy prescribed by the dominant medical

doctrine, which considered women to be “but variations of the male form, the same but lower on the scale of being and perfection” (Laqueur 4).

Anselmo’s intense jealousy and urge to test Camila’s fidelity proves that he has equally internalised the dominant gender ideology. In fact, he also reinforces the hegemonic, essentialising gender discourse, arguing that “si ella sale, como creo que saldrá, con la palma de esta batalla ... diré que me cupo en suerte la mujer fuerte, de quien el Sabio dice que ‘¿quién la hallará?’” (331). Lotario appeals to the authority of Solomon to define any strong woman as an exception from the female norm and hence reinforces the patriarchal understanding of women as the weaker vessels. In *The Amorous Prince*, Antonio makes a similar declaration:

Oh were *Clarina* chaste, as on my Soul
I cannot doubt, more than I believe
All woman kind may be sedu’d from Vertue;
I were the man of all the world most blest,
In such a Wife, and such a Friend as thou. (I.iv.346)

While legitimating female subordination to male authority, women’s alleged natural inclination to lust and infidelity engendered intense anxiety in the early modern imagination. This anxiety has been described by Mark Breitenberg as “both constitutive and symptomatic” of “a patriarchal economy that constructs masculine identity as dependent on the coercive and symbolic regulation of women’s sexuality” (*Sexual Jealousy* 377).

As it has already been mentioned, Spain’s experience of decline called for a distinct code of manhood to combat the perceived weakness and effeminacy that threatened the nation’s hegemony in the world. In this model of ideal masculinity, chastity acquired a prominent position, as it evinced strength, self-control and judicious behaviour. ‘Manly’ reason and strength had to be publicly demonstrated by exhibiting, among other skills, the ability to control women’s sexuality. The construction of females as essentially frailer and inferior was a source of anxiety for those willing to enact manhood as prescribed by the dominant discourse. Other sociocultural specificities of Golden age Spain made this feeling especially intense. As argued by Christina Lee, the dominant Spaniards of Cervantes’s age –those of highborn or Old blood exhibited an acute anxiety about the lower classes and the religious or ethnic outsiders –particularly the Moriscos and the Conversos–, as they could impersonate their identity and challenge the fixity of subjectivity, and hence their innate superiority. “It is an anxiety that takes the form of an obsession with identity fraud and, more specifically, genealogical fraud” (Lee 4). Given the construction of women as the weaker vessels, the perpetuation of the dominant lineages that caused such intense anxiety could never be ascertained.

Attention has also been paid to the definition of masculinity that was gaining prominence in Restoration England, which was not based on self-control or restraint, but on sexual assertiveness and prowess. In this context, the weaker vessel became the only and sole responsible for the preservation of the legitimate

bloodlines. It could be argued, therefore, that the anxiety manifested by both Lotario and Alberto is symptomatic of the specific operations of patriarchy within their respective societies.

Men's reputation was contingent on the opinion of the other males. If women failed to preserve their virtue, their husbands were publicly exposed and turned into objects of derision. The term "cuckold", both in England and in Spain, emphasised a man's inability to uphold the dominant gender hierarchy by controlling their wives sexually. Cervantes's text reflects the humiliation that a cuckold had to face in Early Modern Spain: "el marido de la mujer adúltera... le llaman y le nombran con nombre de vituperio y bajo, y en cierta manera le miran los que la maldad de su mujer saben con ojos de menosprecio" (338).

In this masculine world of honour and shame, Anselmo and Antonio attempt to ease their anxiety by resorting to their best friends. They regard their loyalty as a guarantee that their friends will never succumb to temptation or disclose their wives' disgrace, and so their manhood will not be publicly scrutinised. Anselmo confesses to Lotario that "muéveme, entre otras cosas, a fiar de ti esta tan ardua empresa el ver que si de ti es vencida Camila, no ha de llegar el vencimiento a todo trance y rigor, ... y, así, no quedaré yo ofendido más de con el deseo, y mi injuria quedará escondida en la virtud de tu silencio" (332). Similarly, Antonio admits to his best friend that "With thee my Wife and Honour too are safe; / For should she yield, and I by that were lost, / 'Twere yet some ease, That none but thou wer't a witness to't" (I. Iv.346).

So far, attention has been paid to how the hegemonic gender ideology is represented in these works. In both texts, the dominant discourse defines females as fundamentally weak and prone to infidelity. Paradoxically, these essentialised constructions of femininity were at once empowering and constraining to men. While legitimating the dominant power hierarchy, female moral frailty posed a huge threat to honourable maleness, an asset largely predicated upon the chastity of the weaker vessels. Such paradox explains Anselmo's and Antonio's apparently groundless anxiety.

Even though the jealous husbands' anxiety is symptomatic of the culturally specific operations of patriarchy, there is a difference in each text's approach to the identity categories that sustain the dominant social order. In "The Curious Impertinent," the masculine characters force Camila to enact the construction of femininity articulated in their –and the narrator's– speeches. Camila's initial resistance only increases her value in Lotario's eyes, leaving her with no choice but to play the prostitute in the end.

Aphra Behn subverts the ideology of gender that substantiated the patriarchal system. First, she undermines the double sexual standard that ensured the continuity of patrilineage by condoning the rake's sexual profligacy while requiring chastity from women. Significantly, it is Lorenzo – "the most notorious Pimp, and Rascal in Italy" (I.iii.343) – that utters the following subversive words:

And why the Devil should I expect my Sister should
 Have more vertue than my self?
 She's the same flesh and blood; or why, because
 She's the weaker Vessel,
 Should all the unreasonable burthen of the honour
 Of our House, as they call it,
 Be laid on her shoulders, whilst we may commit
 A thousand villanies. (V.i.391)

Given the crucial role that female sexuality played in the reputation of the household, orthodoxy dictated that women should be constantly controlled and kept within the boundaries of propriety: “the surveillance of women concentrated upon these specific areas: the mouth, chastity, and the threshold of the house” (Stallybrass 126). Stallybrass keeps on arguing that the legal discourse and the prescriptive literature of the period established a connection between speaking and wantonness, being the admonition to silence a commonplace in the period's conduct manuals for women. In this context, “silence, the close mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman's enclosure within the house” (126-127).

The narrator of “The Curious Impertinent” reinforces the relation between silence, chastity and enclosure and validates the injunction that women should be kept at home and forbidden to engage in social relations with other females: “Decía él, y decía bien, que el casado a quien el cielo había concedido mujer hermosa tanto cuidado había de tener qué amigos llevaba a su casa como en mirar con qué amigas la mujer conversaba”(329).

Aphra Behn subverts the patriarchal logic that dictates that women should be silenced and confined within the home. As Clarina explains to Ismena, such was the prevailing custom of the day: “Had you been bred any where but in a Monastery, you would have known'tis not the custom here for Men to expose their Wives to the view of any” (I.iii.344). In fact, the play is fraught with female characters who, like Ismena, are confined by their male guardians.⁴ Nevertheless, all attempts to contain female agency through enclosure and surveillance are effectively frustrated.

Behn's heroines are able to make up for the restrictions that the hegemonic structures of power impose upon them. As Ismena's words testify, wit and intelligence are among women's best allies in this challenging endeavour: “And yet I have a thousand little stratagems / In my head, which give me as many hopes: / This unlucky restraint upon our Sex, / Makes us all cunning” (II.ii.356).

As mentioned above, among the reasons that the narrator of “The Curious Impertinent” gives for female enclosure is that of controlling women's talk,

⁴ Cloris must be raised “in obscurity” (I.ii: 339) and Laura is literally “kept a Prisoner by her Father” (IV.ii: 378).

which was often degraded to the status of gossip. Foyster (15-16) points out that gossip was persistently depicted as female and considered to hold huge destructive potential. This kind of verbal exchange empowered women to reveal the intimacy of their husbands, evaluate and compare their personal value and decide on whether they upheld the established standards of honourable conduct.

The gendering of gossip as feminine reveals male anxiety about female bonding. Significantly, women had been represented as incapable of true friendship for centuries. This view survived into the seventeenth century, where the hegemonic discourse tended “to stress malice and hypocrisy in women’s relations with each other” (Pearson 82) and to portray female friendships as easily “disrupted by pride or jealousy, especially over men” (Pearson 81). *The Amorous Prince* subverts this gender ideology. Significantly, Aphra Behn chose a story on male bonding as the object of her rewriting and made the happy ending dependent on the alliance between Clarina, Ismena and Isabella. What is more, the playwright went a step further and proved the disastrous consequences that male friendships could have when negotiated through the conduit of the female body. Even though Antonio’s anxiety and Alberto’s moral struggle are imaginary, Behn decides to keep the original tale’s “dark undertow” (Hughes and Todd 87-88), emphasising the pernicious potential of their bond.

The solution that both Camila and Behn’s heroines contrive to avoid a fatal ending comes in the form of an elaborate dramatic performance. Camila and Ismena –the latter veiled to impersonate Clarina– stage a theatrical reenactment of the myth of Lucretia where they feign to kill themselves to save their husbands’ wounded honour. The characters they create and play embody the traditional ideal of femininity: chaste, virtuous and extremely unselfish, they are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to keep their spouses’ honour unblemished. Both Anselmo and Antonio identify the ideological construct convincingly incarnated by their wives and are persuaded of their innocence. Anselmo’s conviction that he is married to a paragon of chastity and virtue enables Camila to prolong her affair with Lotario for a while. Nevertheless, the newly regained state of apparent stability does not last long in Cervantes’s tale.

When Camila’s husband discovers Leonela’s affair, he becomes infuriated and threatens to kill the maid. Leonela’s desperate promise that she has wedded the man in secret does nothing to appease her master’s anger, so she persuades Anselmo to spare her life in exchange for valuable information. When Camila learns of such promise, she wrongly assumes that her maid intends to betray her and rushes into the arms of her lover. There, she narrates the story of her misfortune to a confused Lotario, to whom she requests to elope together. Nevertheless, he resolves to immure Camila in a monastery and vanishes from Florence never to come back. “Lotario’s reaction belies his professions of love – or at least nullifies their currency beyond the triangle that also includes Anselmo” (Pérez 104). The once so much coveted and fetishised prize seems worthless if it cannot be used as a conduit in Anselmo’s and Lotario’s homosocial relationship.

The ending of the tale emphasises the idea that Camila's subjectivity is but a product of a male-created discourse. She dies of a broken heart in a monastery after learning that Lotario was killed in the battlefield. Her "sudden accession to subjectivity" (De Armas²⁷) during the dagger scene is "the one action that the narrator cannot contain, but it also points to the agonizing limitation Camila experiences in a world that will never admit or recognize her as more than a performer in a male-directed drama" (Pérez¹⁰⁵). In fact, no matter how hard she tries to resist the patriarchal social and literary conventions, Camila cannot escape the drastic punishment normally inflicted upon deviant women in the period's honour-adultery plays: death.

The episode of Leonela's affair is conveniently altered in *The Amorous Prince*. Isabella devises a plan to manipulate Lorenzo into marrying her, despite her poverty and low social status. She manages to lead him into her chamber under the belief that he will meet Clarina, making sure that Antonio is informed of the event. When her master arrives, Isabella soothes his anger by promising that Lorenzo is her husband-to-be, a promise that he is finally forced to fulfil. Camila's maid shows awareness of the importance of female virtue in the hegemonic ideal of femininity and exploits this knowledge for her own profit. She turns Lorenzo into a mere object of exchange and deprives him of any agency. In this exchange, Isabella gains the husband of her choice and Antonio manages to safeguard the cherished honour of his household. Not only do Behn's heroines avoid being (ab)used as mere currency, but they use their wit to manipulate the men for their own profit. They effectively subvert a patriarchal economy where "power relations are between men, and women serve as conduits of power but not as themselves wielders of power" (Chance 144).

As argued throughout this paper, sexual jealousy was a fundamental component of the dominant economy of love, marriage and desire prevailing in each of the contexts analysed. Nevertheless, manifestations of extreme, pathological jealousy were thought to render men effeminate, depriving them of the qualities that lay at the core of the culturally specific hegemonic constructions of masculinity.

The connection between sexual jealousy and effeminacy is both reflected and produced in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. From a humoural perspective, in the normative masculine body, the four fluids that make up the human psyche are perfectly balanced and regulated. Any deviation from this male standard of perfection, brought about by an anomaly in the flow of humours, causes madness. The discourse of melancholy plays a key role in fashioning the deviant 'other' in opposition to whom the normative self is fashioned. The melancholic is consequently, by definition, feminine. Significantly, Burton portrays sexual jealousy as the most destructive of all the melancholic afflictions and defines it as "being of so great an eminent note, so furious a passion, and almost of as great extent as love itself" (213). In Spanish lands, Francisco Villalobos also stresses the agony of those enduring disease, whose soul "debe estar figurada y plasmada la imagen y hechura del infiernoespantoso y terrible" (490).

In constructing this “unspeakable torment” (217) as a type of love melancholy, Burton begins to associate sexual jealousy with femininity. This association is overtly reinforced in his claim that jealousy “is more outrageous in women, as all other melancholy is, by reason of the weakness of their sex” (219). Similarly, Villalobos addresses the ‘vicious’ lover, among whose defining characteristics is jealousy, in the following terms: “dejaste de ser hombre, y tórnastemujer” (488). Men’s anxiety to remain within the boundaries of honourable manhood, to avoid succumbing to a feminine pathology which was endemic to their own constructions of gender, must have been overwhelming.

In “The Curious Impertinent,” Anselmo’s incapacity to wholeheartedly believe in Camila’s virtue and his consequent anxiety is a logical response to the hegemonic construction of femaleness. Nevertheless, if he allows this violent passion to overwhelm his manly reason and self-control, he will find himself enacting a subordinate kind of masculinity.

The effeminising effect of Anselmo’s pathology is clearly conveyed by the text. First, the character confesses to being afflicted by “un deseo tan extraño y tan fuera de usocomún de otros” (330), which he significantly proceeds to label as “locura” (330). Through this utterance, Anselmo fashions himself as deviant from normative manhood. Such is precisely the function of the discourse of madness: to create a category wherein to confine the threatening ‘other’ and thus to reinforce dominant perception of normality.

Lotario also makes a key contribution in the fashioning of Anselmo as effeminate, since he compares his friend to the cultural ‘others’ against whom a Spanish identity was being constructed: the Moors. Significantly, one of the pivots upon which nationalism rested was, precisely, masculinity. Hence, the connection between the Moors and effeminacy, made extensive to Anselmo in Lotario’s speech, is straightforward: “Paréceme, ¡oh Anselmo!, que tienes tú ahora el ingenio como el que siempre tienen los moros..., porque el deseo que en ti ha nacido va tan descaminado y tan fuera de todo aquello que tenga sombra de razonable, que me parece que ha de ser tiempo gastado el que ocupare en darte a entender tu simplicidad” (333-334). According to the hierarchical understanding of gender difference that prevailed at the time, reason was a fundamentally masculine trait, which stood in opposition to the essentially feminine inclination to excess, emotion and irrationality.

As described by Lotario, Anselmo’s manly reason and intelligence have been lost to his impertinent desire, his “manifiesta locura” (334). Anselmo acknowledges that in not following Lotario’s wise and well-intentioned advice, “voy huyendo del bien y corriendo tras el mal” (340). Nevertheless, he attributes this impertinent behaviour to his suffering from “la enfermedad que suelen tener algunas mujeres que se les antoja comer tierra, yeso, carbón y otras cosas peores, aun asquerosas para mirarse, cuánto más para comerse” (340). Through these words, Anselmo resorts, once again, to the discourse of madness in order to fashion himself as deviant from ‘masculine’ sanity, overtly gendering his

pathology as feminine. Anselmo's self-diagnosis underscores his effeminacy, in an attempt to validate the normative construction of manhood.

In *The Amorous Prince*, Aphra Behn also reflects the masculine anxiety that was pandemic to her society. Antonio's self-consuming fear of adultery is clearly grounded in the period's contradictory constructions of gender. Fashioned by a culture that defined femininity in terms of weakness and inferiority, he cannot ascertain the chastity of the woman on whom his maleness depends. Behn shows awareness of this contradiction when she has Antonio say that "All woman kind may be sedu'd from Vertue" (I.iv.346).

Unlike Cervantes, Behn prevents the consummation of any sexual relation between Clarina and Alberto, portraying Antonio's anxiety as completely groundless, even ridiculous. In keeping the internal conflicts undergone by Cervantes's original characters, the British playwright reflects the all-pervasiveness that jealousy anxiety had acquired in her society. Nevertheless, she subverts the constructions of femininity of which this anxiety was both indicative and constitutive, undermining the whole dominant ideology of love, marriage and desire.

Departing from the understanding of human identities as cultural constructs fashioned by a period's dominant institutions, discourses and social practices, this paper provided an analysis of how gender and patriarchy were constructed in the contexts analysed. Despite any apparent commonality or logic, any institutionalised social order is fraught with internal contradictions and dissent. The article has focused on an ideological paradox that lies at the heart of the early modern constructions of gender. The fashioning of women as essentially weaker and inferior to men provided an effective tool to validate the rigid power hierarchy that governed the relations between the sexes in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, at the same time, it engendered intense anxiety, since, ironically, male honour was constructed as dependant on the chastity of the weaker vessels. In this context, jealousy anxiety is an unavoidable consequence of men having internalised their own identity as fashioned by the period's dominant discourse and social institutions.

Both Cervantes and Behn reflect in their works their culture's dominant notions of gender and the kind of social order that they contributed to sustaining. Groundlessly anxious about his wife's fidelity, Anselmo is led by "a circularity of patriarchal logic in which women necessarily enact and thus substantiate the way they have already been constructed" (Breitenberg *Anxious Masculinity* 182). Camila's subversive attempts are fruitless: she is denied any agency and forced, by Anselmo's perversely-contrived scenario, to succumb to temptation. This logic proves that "even alternative forms are tied to the hegemonic" (Jehenson 48), that subversion can be contained and co-opted by the established power. By having Camila yield to her carnal cravings and labelling his own impertinent desire as effeminate, it could be argued that Anselmo reinforces hegemonic gender. Nevertheless, in his deathbed, he exonerates his wife: "un necio e impertinente deseo me quitó la vida. Si las nuevas de mi muerte llegaren a los

oídos de Camila, sepa que yo la perdono, porque no estaba ella obligada hacer milagros, ni yo tenía necesidad de querer que ella los hiciese; y pues yo fui el fabricante de mi deshonor” (377). Anselmo’s assumption of the guilt for her wife’s human actions, prompted by a plot concocted out of an insane desire to prove her frailty and inferiority, problematizes the reading of the story as a straightforward reinforcement of women’s innate weakness and inferiority. Cervantes discloses the cultural and ideological fictions that make Anselmo (ab)use his wife and bring about his downfall.

In *The Amorous Prince*, Behn subverts the hegemonic constructions of gender and the social order erected upon them. The British playwright allows her heroines to exert agency and liberates them from the constraints of patriarchal oppression. She undermines a social order predicated upon the assumption of female weakness and inferiority, exposing the contradictions of an ideology that constructs masculinity as dependent upon an imagined weak and inferior feminine essence.

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