“His play shan’t ask your leave to live”:
FOLLOWING THE GHOSTS OF TRANS EMBODIMENT IN RESTORATION DRAMA

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“HIS PLAY SHAN’T ASK YOUR LEAVE TO LIVE”
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between contemporary queer theory and contemporary transgender studies is a complex one, many of whose tensions cohere around questions about the embodiment of gender. This project explores these tensions by tracing the Derridian ghost of the trans body into the Restoration drama of the late seventeenth century. Through a reading of William Wycherley’s 1675 play *The Country Wife* that evaluates the play’s relationship between language and the body, and through a reading of Aphra Behn’s 1677 play *The Rover* that brings costumes and the masquerade to seventeenth-century questions about the gendered body, this project builds a way of reading trans bodies in seventeenth-century expressive cultural production. Ultimately, I argue that both *The Country Wife* and *The Rover*, although they handle issues of language and of gender in slightly and productively different ways, give us carefully staged and meta-theatrical glimpses into the ways in which seventeenth-century people were thinking, talking, and writing about gender and embodiment. In this project, I bring our present tensions and questions about gendered embodiment into productive contact with the tensions and questions produced in *The Country Wife* and *The Rover*, and I explore how such contact speaks to the possibility of spectral trans bodies in these texts. Because these texts, unlike contemporary queer theory and contemporary transgender studies, each find a way to allow for the importance of bodies that are simultaneously real, physical, present, and linguistic, performative, theorized. It is only by acknowledging these bodies in Restoration dramas and bringing them into contact
with our more contemporary tensions and concerns that we can build a method for ethically reading trans in expressive cultural production.
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INTRODUCTION

TRANSPECTRALITY: A GHOST STORY

Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future.

-Avery Gordon, Ghostly Matters

This is a ghost story. It is a story of the haunted and haunting nature of transgender, a story that seeks to explore the traces of trans\(^1\) that haunt the ways in which scholars read and do not read. It is the story of those haunted scholars, who exist within, across, alongside, and/or outside of queer theory and transgender studies, two avowedly interdisciplinary fields that developed in the early 1990s, not quite independently of one another, often at odds with each other, but never without an undeniable transpectrality—a haunting across. And it is the story,

\(^1\) Although the complexities behind any definition of “trans” are part of what is under examination in this paper, my use of the term “trans” throughout the paper borrows from Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore’s introduction to the Fall/Winter 2008 Trans- issue of Women’s Studies Quarterly. Their article, “Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” adds a hyphen to “trans” because they want it to remain “open-ended and resists premature foreclosure by attachment to any single suffix” (11). I do not use the hyphen, because I am exploring the current state of trans rather than proposing a new definition altogether. My thinking is, however, shaped by their aim to “resist applications of ‘trans’ as a gender category that is necessarily distinct from more established categories such as ‘woman’ or ‘man’” (12).
most importantly, of the ghosts that haunt these scholars and the work that they do. The ghosts I will follow here, then, are multiple but infinitely reincarnate; they are the ghosts that appear as troublesome but productive wrinkles in the contemporary relationship between queer theory and transgender studies, but also within centuries of literature and other expressive cultural production. In following these ghosts through both contemporary scholarship and cultural production—specifically late seventeenth-century drama—I seek to build for them a queer history, to force a contact between the seventeenth century and the twenty-first, a contact that conjures new and more ethically spectral ways to read trans.

The relationship between contemporary queer theory and contemporary transgender studies is a complex one, many of whose tensions cohere around questions about the embodiment of gender. In queer theory, a field whose very definition depends upon its indefinability, the lived embodiment of trans is often nothing more than a spectral presence. Queer theory is generally simply uninterested in the solid, physical, definable bodies of queer people. Often, queer theory handles trans issues by ignoring them altogether, but when it does grapple with trans, the results are generally an imagined identity category that tends to ignore or erase the physical body of trans individuals. In a 1998 article for *The Radical History Review*, trans theorist Susan Stryker categorizes this false identity creation as a form of homonormativity, which in this case, “lies in misconstruing trans as either a gender or a sexual orientation” (148). When imagined as yet another letter making up the LGBT umbrella, trans becomes its own separate category, seen as either a third gender or another sexual orientation, neither of which requires embodiment. Even Judith Halberstam begins *In a Queer Time and Place*—a book that has the phrase “transgender bodies” in its subtitle—with the comment that, “not all gay, lesbian,
and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts” (1). Here “transgender” is a category aligned with “gay” and “lesbian,” and diametrically opposed to “heterosexual.” Because these categories, according to Vivian K. Namaste, are built upon and around an “absolute neglect of everyday life for transgendered people,” most trans people just do not fit within their boundaries (9). Categorizing trans in this way therefore simultaneously names and erases it, turning the trans body into a ghostly absence whose presence haunts queer theory’s notions of trans.  

Queer theory, with its highly theoretical commitment to indefinability and antinormativity, thus maintains a sort of intellectual distance from trans bodies, a paradoxical distance that both defines and categorizes them problematically. Transgender studies, on the other hand, has developed not from a theoretical perspective, but largely in response to the very real danger faced by physical queer bodies as they move through spaces that have long been battlefields for the uncategorized. This necessary and important trans activism has, however, contributed to a practice/theory tension in what Jeanne Vaccaro, insightfully calls, “a field cautiously balancing its intellectual and activist investments” (221). Making safe space for non-normative bodies within the medical and legal fields has required labels and categories that constrict and oppress even as they protect. Such activism is urgent, agrees Vaccaro; indeed, “it is relevant to ask difficult questions about language and access,” but as the field of transgender studies becomes more and more interested in questions of embodiment, “it is also necessary to mark and unsettle the forces by which transgender bodies become transgender identities” (Vaccaro 221). To “mark” these forces is to recognize that the trans body that haunts queer

\[ ^{3} \text{What happens, then, is that queer theory becomes caught in an inescapable double bind. As Bobby Noble notes: “curiously, under these terms, what emerges is a queer studies now that cannot think trans while its own queer futures necessitates deconstructing the structural homonormativities embedded deeply within its antifoundational foundations” (265).} \]
theory is itself haunted by the complexities that activist urgency leaves behind; to “unsettle” these forces is to follow the transpectral ghosts into a contact that will ultimately help guide an ethical way to read trans.

Because indeed, reading is itself a transpectral ghost whose absence haunts transgender theory and, in a sense, queer theory. In a brilliant 2011 retrospective discussion of transgender studies, Bobby Noble locates within the field “a decidedly noisy lack of engagement with cultural production—narrative film, documentary and/or experimental film, poetry and mixed-media performance work, literary texts, and so on” (268). This failure to read itself in expressive cultural production is “worrisome in a field claiming interdisciplinarity” (Noble 268). And a look at some of the journals that have published trans studies issues within the past two decades—GLQ (1998), Women’s Studies Quarterly (2008), Radical History Review (2008), Women & Performance (2010), Feminist Studies (2011)—confirms both interdisciplinarity and a lack thereof. The journals discussing transgender concerns come from multiple disciplines across the humanities, but although many of these publications regularly include criticism of the kinds of cultural production Noble lists, such criticism is conspicuously absent from the transgender-focused issues. Transgender studies, it seems then, does not read, or at least does not read the centuries of literary texts, art, and film whose analysis is critical—even foundation-building—within every other interdisciplinary field with roots in English studies. So the interdisciplinary fields that are reading gender in cultural production are the very ones that erase and are haunted by the trans body, and ultimately, we are left with a very present, “noisy,” and pernicious failure to read trans ethically.

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4 More transgender-focused issues can be found in law, science, psychology, medicine, and political science journals.
5 There is one especially notable exception to the claim that transgender studies scholars do not read cultural production: transgender studies scholars do read the objects produced about Brandon.
Although he is writing about Marxism, in Specters of Marx, Jacques Derrida challenges scholars who, like these queer and trans theorists, cannot or will not read across. Describing Horatio and Marcellus’s contact with the ghost of Hamlet’s father, he quotes Marcellus’s command to Horatio: “Thou art a Scholler—speake to it, Horatio” (12). What Marcellus does not realize, argues Derrida, is that there is, for “the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought” (13). Horatio cannot follow Marcellus’s order because “scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the specter” (Derrida 11). Horatio charges the specter to speak, but because he is a scholar, it is impossible for him “to speak to the specter, to speak with it, therefore especially to make or to let [it] speak” (Derrida 11). But to read the transpectral ghost of embodied trans identity that haunts queer theory and transgender studies, we must be the scholar that, according to Derrida, Marcellus believed he was addressing. That is, we must be the scholar who is finally “capable, beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility” (Derrida 13).

Queer theory and transgender studies cannot speak to the specter because they refuse to acknowledge the specter as specter. They want, like Horatio, “to inspect, to stabilize, arrest the specter” in one way or another (Derrida 13). But to speak to the ghost is not to interpret it, not to

Teena. Judith Halberstam’s In a Queer Time and Place, although it does discuss visual art, is unquestionably a book about Brandon Teena and the youth’s cultural memory. Carla Freccero, in her book Queer/Early/Modern also analyzes at length the story of Brandon Teena and the cultural power it has gained. Yet their analysis of the literature, films, and art produced about Brandon Teena merely confirm their inability to read an ethical trans history. As C. Jacob Hale says of the reading of Brandon Teena: “in a necrophagic feeding frenzy, the living have sliced this corpse into at least five different pieces: cross-dresser, transvestite, transgender, transsexual, and butch lesbian. The living likewise bury any aspects of the embodied self this youth constructed that do not fit their own constructions” (318). When theorists do read a trans history, then, they do so violently and still without letting go of categorization.
interpellate it, not to interrogate it; to speak to the ghost is to ask of it nothing but its possibility. Despite its commitment to indefinability, queer theory is often implicitly and oddly phallic in its methods, digging into texts, penetrating their assumed façade, and pinning down identities that remain fluid on the text’s surface. The trans body thus becomes yet another façade whose surface must be bypassed in order to explain and categorize what lies beneath. Yet transgender scholarship also arrests the specter by ascribing a trans meta-narrative onto that body, a single trajectory towards a safe future for currently endangered bodies. So queer theory cannot speak to the specter because “there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh… For there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body” (Derrida 157). Trans studies returns to the body—if indeed it ever left the body—but it cannot speak to the specter either, because the body with which it is concerned does not exist in the necessary “space of invisible visibility, like the dis-appearing of an apparition” (Derrida 157). To speak to the specter, to make a contact that changes, to read trans ethically, we must return to the body, “but to a body that is more abstract than ever” (Derrida 157).

Given the tense and complex relationship between queer theory and transgender studies, how can we read expressive cultural production in a way that acknowledges—that speaks to—the specter of the transgender body? This project seeks to answer that question, to begin to develop a way of reading that locates but does not arrest the specter of transgender that haunts, I will argue, literature of the late seventeenth century in productively complicated ways. The method of reading I seek to build brings our contemporaneity into contact with the literary past, here the late seventeenth century. Such erasure of historical boundaries is a method made popular in recent queer theoretical work by scholars like Elizabeth Freeman, Madhavi Menon, and Jonathan Goldberg, who argue that periodization of time is teleological and therefore
heteronormative. Freeman, who calls her method of reading “erotohistoriography,” speaks specifically to the need for embodied engagement with historical materials, an engagement that allows for the dissolution of that which separates then from now. Erotohistoriography encounters history “already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter” (96, emphasis mine). This way of reading: admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations. (96) For Freeman, then, to read history from a queer perspective is to abandon teleology, and to see the past as the present and vise versa.

Freeman’s embodied way of reading, however, is strangely and inescapably penetrative. By removing any and all boundaries and distinctions between the theoretical present and the literary past, Freeman inserts the present into the past, making the embodiment of her method an unavoidably phallic one. Jacob Hale calls attention to such phallocentrism in the dangerous master narrative of trans identity. In trans discourses, he notes, “sexed embodiment is often reduced to the presence or absence of a penis” (328). Freeman’s problem is the problem with much of queer theory’s engagement with the past; its reading of gender is implicitly phallic. An ethical reading of trans that sees body as method must disturb this link between trans sexed embodiment and the phallus. Rather than a penetrative reading of historical representations of gender, then, this project seeks to perform a fricative one, a reading that brings the past and the present together productively while still allowing them to maintain their necessary alterity.
To bring the complex surface of a trans sexed embodiment into fricative and non-penetrative contact with the complex surface of historic cultural production would be to read gender outside of the established and problematic penis-having/penis-lacking binary.

This way of reading that brings the present and the past together acknowledges that, despite the necessary alterity of these distinct moments in history, the transpectral tensions between contemporary trans studies and queer theory are the ghosts of trans that appear in seventeenth-century drama; they are the questions and struggles about language and the body that at least begin to encompass what it means to exist as a trans individual on a day-to-day basis. This project will speak to the ghosts of trans by locating them in the dramas of the late seventeenth century, by showing that the Restoration stage and the plays produced upon it were teeming with the ghosts of trans in their preoccupation with questions of language and its relationship to reality, gender, and the body.

I create this new method of reading around Restoration drama because the plays of the Restoration are not only radical in so many ways, but they are also very aware of their radical aspects, making them excellent sites of meta-analysis about language. Because many of these plays are also interested in gender, their questions about language become entangled with and inextricable from their questions about gender and embodiment. Ultimately, I want to call attention to these questions and their relationships to one another, to note their irreconcilable complexities, and to show that they are the same ghosts of trans embodiment that haunt contemporary queer theory and transgender studies. I seek not to answer these questions or even to stabilize them, but simply to speak to them, to acknowledge them as specter and as possibility, and finally to allow them to brush against one another and against the questions that now create productive tension between contemporary queer theory and contemporary transgender studies.
The past with which I want to bring our present tensions into contact begins at the restoration of Charles II to the English throne in 1660. Post-1660 drama has a reputation for its bawdiness and little else, causing scholars and students alike to ignore other radical aspects of Restoration drama as a genre. And while many of the intriguing references to gender lie within that very bawdiness, it is those references to gender in combination with the other new technologies of the stage that fill the Restoration with its transpectral ghosts. Indeed, readers of Restoration drama do not always realize just how new and different these plays seemed to their spectators. They were, in fact, being consumed by people who had not seen a publicly produced play in eighteen years. In 1642, the newly-instated Puritans banned the public performance of plays, leading to the closing and ultimate demolition of the Globe. It was not until the 1660 Restoration of the monarchy and the beginning of the reign of Charles II that the theatres were again legally opened. The plays that ushered in the return of public theater certainly are bawdy, licentious, and often rather rude, but they are also obsessed with their own “play-ness;” in other words, they demonstrate an incredible preoccupation with their own artistic and linguistic representations of reality, both political and otherwise. After feeling the nearly two-decades-long loss of the theater as a public discursive gathering space, those involved in the return of the

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6 The English Civil war refers to a series of wars that took place in England between 1642 and 1651. Tensions rose between King Charles I and parliament because the King needed money for a foreign campaign in Scotland, and parliament refused. After a failed attempt by Charles I to arrest the Parliamentarians he took issue with, civil war broke out. Over the next ten years, the tension between parliament and the crown continued. As is often the case in civil wars, the precise tensions are difficult to pinpoint, but the tensions mainly concerned the question of monarchical sovereignty, and issues of the reform of the Anglican Church. The parliamentarians were, in general, Puritans who opposed what they saw as the increasing Roman Catholic influence on the Anglican church. Although the parliamentarians, led by Oliver Cromwell, won complete power in 1651, they had taken control of London in the early stages of the war, and had shut down the theaters in 1642. It was not until the restoration the monarchy and of Charles II in 1660, that the theaters were finally opened again (“English Civil Wars”).
theater were clearly considering what it means to recreate reality—specifically the body—in a public, linguistic, and theatrical way.

One of the ways in which Restoration dramas were exploring this question of language and theatricality was through the development of new customs of theater, through the asking, in other words, of the question: how should playgoers actually experience these re-presentations of some sort of reality? So while we talk often of the new lewd quality of Restoration comedies, what we commonly fail to explore is the advent of new theatrical spaces that became important to drama of the 1660s. As Edward A. Langhans notes, it was a “period of reinvention and a transition from old to the modern theatre” (4). It was in the Restoration era that much of what we now associate with the theater became common. Not only were there women on the stage for the first time, but late seventeenth-century drama also saw the advent of “relatively small, roofed theatres, scenery, artificial lighting, actresses, small scale drama” (3). Especially crucial in the framing of my discussion of the self-reflectivity of Restoration drama are the technologies of staging that began to emerge in the 1660s.

Pulling from Restoration-era sources like play reviews and the diaries of Samuel Pepys, Langhans suggests that ultimate goal of the 1660s stage manager was verisimilitude. Scenery consisted of canvas panels painted by artists skilled in optical illusions, moved and changed with a complex system of pulleys. “It was,” says Langhans, “all a trick, capable of deceiving audiences partly because of the painters’ skill and partly because the scenery was lit only by candlelight, so its deceptions and imperfections could not be noticed from the auditorium” (5-6). While drama before the English Civil War relied far more upon the audience’s suspension of disbelief, then, the staging of Restoration drama aimed to close the gap between what the audience saw and what the audience was expected to believe.
Yet in spite of, and often because of these new technologies, complete verisimilitude was never achievable on the Restoration stage. Although the painted scenery was impressively detailed, and the machinery powerfully intricate, it could not help but call attention to itself as just that, as scenery and as machinery. As Langhans reminds us, the scenery changes, although generally smooth and rapid, could not be seamless. “A whistle,” he tells us, “signaled stagehands to move a complete setting on or off, and the change, almost always done in full view of the awed audience, would take about five seconds” (6). Similarly, trap doors and flying apparatuses were new and exciting, but always clearly recognizable for what they were. Those Londoners who had gone without theater for eighteen years came to these new plays because of their bawdy and entertaining content, certainly, but the innovative and always at least somewhat transparent staging technologies must also have drawn crowds.

So what does it mean that all of this was done, as Langhans notes, “to fool the audience into believing that what they were seeing was real, even though they knew all along, as we do, that theatre is a fiction for which we willingly suspend our disbelief--if the play and the performers can persuade us to do so”? (6-7). I suggest it means that not only were late seventeenth-century playwrights, actors, and stage managers constantly considering what it meant to reproduce reality upon the stage, but also that their audiences were continually being carried into a space of truly suspended disbelief, only to be repeatedly shocked out of that space by the mechanical reminder that everything they were watching was indeed contrived. This continual creation and repeated sudden suspension of a stage reality forced playwrights, producers, actors, and, most importantly, spectators to consider constantly the relationship upon the stage between reality, language, and ultimately bodies.
Heightening such awareness even further was introduction of female bodies to the Restoration stage. While many scholars argue that the advent of women on the stage was due to the proclivities of a debauched King Charles II, Deborah Payne Fisk suggests the demand for actresses actually came from within the theater companies, driven by the same practical and artistic concerns behind the other new technologies of the theater. Fisk, like Langhans, points to the changes in the physical spaces of post-Restoration theaters, noting that their size—“in the early years roughly the same size as a modern tennis court”—made the casting of boys in women’s roles less successful than it would have been in the much larger theaters of the early seventeenth century (74). On the Jacobean stage, due both to the distance between audience and stage that made the individual bodies of the actors harder to see and discern, and to the conventions of early seventeenth-century theater, plays allowed for a certain representative and stylized stage portrayal of femininity, one that relied little upon the physical bodies of the actors beneath the dresses and petticoats. But Fisk, like Langhans, argues that “Restoration theatre, by contrast, habitually emphasizes a social specificity that invokes everyday life and manners” (Fisk 75). In other words, the not only were the actors closer and more visible to the audience, the “new commercial theatre of social specificity demanded a certain level of naturalism that rendered boy actors obsolete” (75).

Restoration playwrights and playgoers were thus acutely aware not only of the new theatrical technologies, but also of the new types of bodies that were appearing on the stage. Those in support of the theater were not the only ones who noticed the innovations, however. Indeed, as Jonas Barish chronicles, although they had lost power at the Restoration of Charles II, the anti-theatrical Puritans continued to make publicly clear their disapproval of theatrical

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7 See J.L. Styan’s *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, John Harold Watson’s *Court Satires of the Restoration*, and Kristen Pullen’s *Actresses and Whores*. 
customs, and it was often the potential verisimilitude created by the new technologies of the stage that Puritan writers contested. For these seventeenth-century moralists, Barish notes, “any traffic with the theater…must enroll a man in the legions of the damned,” because “it requires a sustained imaginative collusion with the events portrayed by the actors” (81). Such imaginative participation in the generally sinful acts portrayed on the stage was, as far as the Puritan moralists were concerned, a moral agreement with or approval of such sinful acts. Thus anything that erases boundaries between reality and illusions on the stage is dangerous because it makes the imaginative collusion between the playgoer and the events of the stage easier. Fisk, who also engages with Barish, further links this to the Puritan disavowal of anything that “shatters the necessary correspondence between inner essence and outward manifestation” (71). As Fisk notes, the theater was dangerous because:

Actresses played queens, noblewomen and gentlewomen; they overreached social origins, transforming themselves on stage as they never could in real life. Actresses also used this protean ability to represent boys; and by violating the concept of absolute identity, they once again contravened the desired equivalency between inner self and outer manifestation. (71)

Ultimately, then, Restoration theaters were highly problematic to these Puritan pamphleteers because they encouraged imaginative association with sinful and false representations of reality, and especially dangerous representations of bodies. Puritans believed that outer manifestations should always and necessarily represent purely the inner self, so the theater, where lines between inside and outside existed only to be repeatedly blurred, was inherently sinful and treacherous.

Puritan anti-theatrical writers, as Fisk’s argument demonstrates, take issue with theatrical representations on the whole, but they seem especially concerned with the presence of women on
the stage and the ways in which actresses disturbed traditional and biologically linked representations of gender. For the Puritan critics, women on the stage were scandalous because they assumed roles above their social class and because they often either played boys or played cross-dressing women. If the inner self should be always and purely represented by outward presentations, female-bodied actresses presenting on stage as male characters are not only representing themselves falsely, they are also bringing the spectators of the play into their immoral deceit. And, as many scholars have discussed, these cross-dressing roles often involve romantic plots, adding a still more dangerous trace of potential female-female desire to the list of sins committed by the theater.

This project, however, is interested less in desire than in the late seventeenth century’s fascination with the body and its stage representations. Because clearly the relationships between the stage and reality, and between words and the body were not only a major concern of playwrights and producers, they were also among the primary reproaches leveled against Restoration plays by their Puritan critics. So everything about the Restoration drama, from its new stage technologies to its actresses, to the publications of its very naysayers is inextricably entangled in the troubled relationship between words and the body. For the first time in eighteen years, people gather together to watch bodies become transformed upon the stage, to become someone else in another time and place while constantly becoming again an actor upon a stage in London in 1660. For the first time, some of these bodies are female and while often they become upon the stage simply females of another class or period, sometimes they become female-bodied boys or men. For the first time, gender and how it is embodied become artistic concerns rather than issues of convention. And due to the new customs of the theater, the self-consciousness of

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8 See Terry Castle’s *The Female Thermometer* and Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity*. 
these dramas, the only partially successful verisimilitude on the stage, and the barrage of anti-
theatrical publications during the period, no Restoration play can be separated from the questions
it asks, both in its content and in its very existence, about the relationships between language, the
body, and gender.

These questions are the ghosts of transgender to whom this project speaks. Scholarship of
the Restoration, as it stands, and as this project will demonstrate, has been interested only in
finding stable bodies in Restoration texts and upon the Restoration stage. It has read bodies in
these texts by arresting their gender, inspecting and removing their veils, interrogating and
explaining their motives, and ultimately making these bodies so stable that they can be dismissed
entirely from the identities that critics and scholars build for them. In the chapters that follow, I
will return to these Restoration dramas in order to disturb the stability that criticism has falsely
instilled in the bodies and identities the plays create. I will locate the specters of transgender not
to arrest, interpret, interpellate, or interrogate them but simply to speak to them, to acknowledge
their possibilities. For it is only in such an acknowledgement that we can begin to read trans
ethically.

To speak to the specters of trans in Restoration dramas I will find the questions that the
texts themselves ask about the body, about gender, and about the relationships between them. I
will locate these questions in their historical moment of their contemporary theatrical
technologies and of spiritual and literary questions about the body, but I will not leave them
there, because indeed, these are the same questions plaguing contemporary queer theory and
transgender studies. Ultimately, I will find in these dramas that all trans bodies are specters,
ghosts, sets of complex and necessarily irreconcilable questions about gender, the body, and
language. To read trans ethically, then, is not simply to locate transgendered or ambiguously-

gendered bodies or identities in the centuries of cultural production that transgender studies has ignored thus far, but it is instead to build an atemporal history of the ghost of trans in those cultural productions. To find not the answers to questions about gender, but simply to locate those question themselves, and finally to speak to them, to acknowledge their possibilities. It is, ultimately, to allow the questions of our present to interact with the expressive cultural production of our past, and to do so in a way that acknowledges non-phallicentric embodiments of gender.

This project seeks to explore the fricative interactions specifically between contemporary theoretical tensions and two Restoration dramas, William Wycherley’s 1675 play, *The Country Wife*, and Aphra Behn’s 1677 play, *The Rover*. In my first chapter, which concerns *The Country Wife*, I examine the play’s fascination with the meaning-making power of language, and its interaction in the debates about language that were happening at the end of the seventeenth century. I argue that the play’s central interest lies in relationship between words and the body, and that it uses its characters and plots to ask how language is or is not involved in the creation, identification, and alteration of bodies. If, as I have claimed, the tensions between contemporary queer theory and contemporary transgender studies arise, in large part, from an inability to locate gender identity as either fully intellectual or fully embodied aspects of identity, then this late-seventeenth-century drama performs similar tensions. Yet unlike queer theory and transgender studies, *The Country Wife* has no interest in making a case for gender as linguistic or gender as embodied; instead, it wants only to explore the linguistic and embodied aspects of gender and the relationship between the two. In this exploration—in the set of questions that *The Country Wife* asks about language and the body—we can begin to trace the ghosts of non-normative bodies in the text.
While *The Country Wife* uses gender to ask questions about the relationship between language and the body, *The Rover*’s interest in gender is far more primary, and it explores gender through examining the embodiment of performed gender. In my second chapter, I suggest that *The Rover* is not merely a traditional Restoration drama, but that it is also an early version of the public masquerades that would become so popular in the early decades of the eighteenth century. I use Terry Castle’s theories about the masquerade and eighteenth-century culture to look at the ways in which the masquerades, and therefore *The Rover*, create spaces between bodies and their costumes—their performed identities. I explore what I call the “sartorial semiotics” that links the play’s use of costume to Wycherley’s questions about language, and I argue that because the space created between costume and body is always shifting and never fully definable, we can locate within it the ghosts of the trans body without arresting them. And *The Rover*, even more than *The Country Wife*, takes gender up as a central concern, making it an ideal text for an ethically trans reading of the body.

Ultimately, both *The Country Wife* and *The Rover*, although they handle issues of language and of gender in slightly and productively different ways, give us carefully staged and meta-theatrical glimpses into the ways in which seventeenth-century people were thinking, talking, and writing about gender and embodiment. In this project, I hope to bring our present tensions and questions about gendered embodiment into productive contact with the tensions and questions produced in *The Country Wife* and *The Rover*, and to explore how such contact speaks to the possibility of spectral trans bodies in these texts. Because these texts, unlike contemporary queer theory and contemporary transgender studies, each find a way to allow for the importance of bodies that are simultaneously real, physical, present, and linguistic, performative, theorized. It is only by acknowledging these bodies in Restoration dramas and bringing them into contact
with our more contemporary tensions and concerns that we can build a method for ethically reading trans in expressive cultural production.
CHAPTER ONE

“THEIR BAWDY UPON THE STAGE”:

THE EMBODIMENT OF LANGUAGE IN THE COUNTRY WIFE

In the first act of William Wycherley’s 1675 play, *The Country Wife*, Sparkish tells his friends a story in which he was talking to a group of ladies, and as soon as the conversation turned to Horner and his rumored impotence—“he’s a sign of a Man,” Sparkish says to the ladies—the ladies “all fell a laughing till they bepissed themselves.” Even Sparkish cannot resist laughing as he tells of the ladies’ mirth; “ha ha ha,” he interjects gleefully and repeatedly, “heh, hah, he!” This laughter makes up only a small fraction of the vocally expressed amusement throughout the play. And all of that laughter is not for nothing; the play absolutely is incredibly funny, both by Restoration and contemporary standards.¹ This scene in which Sparkish tells of his conversation with the ladies is an especially important one, however, because it epitomizes the ways in which *The Country Wife* creates humor: through play with language, jokes about bodies, and the combination of the two. Sparkish’s comment that Horner, now believed to be a eunuch, is “a sign of a Man,” invokes laughter because it questions the physicality of the meaning of the word “man.” Sparkish’s exaggeration of the ladies’ reaction calls upon body

¹ According to James Ogden, while *The Country Wife* was not wildly popular in its time, it was fairly successful. It was also revived in 1683, 1688, 1694 and “during the first forty years of the eighteenth century *The Country Wife* was a stock piece…especially successful from 1725 to 1742, when there were often rival performances by the two patent companies, employing the best actors and actresses” (xxxii). The play has been revived as recently as 2012, and a September 22, 2012 review by Clare Brennan for *The Guardian* speaks to its contemporary appeal. Brennan writes of two modern performances of *The Country Wife*: a 1977 BBC production starring Helen Mirren which, at the time, “seemed witty, bawdy, and very funny,” and the 2012 Polly Findlay production, which she calls “every bit as punchy” (Brennan).
humor: the idea of a group of ladies “bepissing” themselves is certainly amusing. And both jokes rely upon a relationship between language and the body for their humor.

Yet despite the overt humor of The Country Wife, its obsession with the relationship between words and the body does far more than produce laughter. Indeed, The Country Wife uses that humor as a vehicle to engage in seventeenth-century debates about the ethics of language in a way that ultimately fills the play’s spaces between words and the body with the ghosts of the abstract bodies that this project seeks to locate. A “controversial” play that, as James Ogden notes, “has been admired as a satire or farce, condemned as an immoral or frivolous play, and admired again as a serious work of dramatic art,” The Country Wife details three intertwined plots: the results of Harry Horner’s pretended impotence, the marriage of naive Margery to her jealous husband Pinchwife, and rakish Harcourt’s wooing of Margery’s sister, Alithea, away from her betrothed (xiii). “Modern critics,” claims Ogden, in an attempt to prove the play’s merit through its unity, “have identified central themes” like “female hypocrisy, true and false masculinity,” and “human folly in general,” but while “such themes are all present…none is absolutely central” (xiii). The Country Wife does, however, cohere—or perhaps more accurately, productively fail to cohere—around the body and its relationship to the language used to produce and describe it.

In the 1590s, almost a century before The Country Wife was written, another popular play, Arden of Faversham, appeared on the British stage. The play of unknown authorship—although it has often been attributed in part, at least, to Shakespeare—has little in common with Wycherley’s Restoration drama. Based on the true story of the mid-sixteenth-century murder of Thomas Arden of Kent by his wife and her various minions and co-conspirators, Arden of Faversham is a complex and intricate domestic tragedy whose twists, secrets, and intrigues must
have captivated its Elizabethan audiences. Why mention this play that probably did not become publicly known again until the eighteenth-century?² Because the play contains two passing references to the linguistic nature of marriage, references that reveal the huge changes in ideas about language taking place between the writing of Arden in the sixteenth century, and the writing of The Country Wife in the seventeenth century. In the earlier play, Alice Arden, considering her marriage to the man she plans to kill, states: “I am tied to him by marriage. / Love is a god, and marriage is but words” (I.100-1). And again, later, she says: “Oaths are words, and words is wind. / And wind is mutable. Then I conclude / ‘Tis childishness to stand upon an oath” (I.436-8). For Alice, then, words are mutable. They are merely signifiers, with no inherent relation to the things or ideas that they attempt to represent. Words are nothing more than wind, and it is not marriage—a ceremony made of nothing but words—that stands true and immutable, but objects and feelings like love.

Alice Arden’s lines from Scene I of Arden of Faversham are remarkable in their own right, but they are useful here because Alice’s bold assertion of the powerlessness of words in the face of real feeling has clear echoes in lines spoken by Mr. Pinchwife in The Country Wife. “Well,” says Mr. Pinchwife, “wife and sister are names which make us expect love and duty, pleasure and comfort, but we find 'em plagues and torments” (V.i.105-8). Marriage, for Alice Arden, consists of nothing but meaningless words, a sentiment with which Mr. Pinchwife’s lament about the emptiness of the words “wife” and “sister” seems to align. The word “wife,” Mr. Pinchwife realizes sadly, is not as inextricably linked to a wifely demeanor as he seems to think it should be. But there exists a difference between Alice’s comments and Mr. Pinchwife’s

² In his introduction to the 1997 New Mermaids edition of Arden of Faversham, Tom Lockwood notes that we have no records of the play being produced during the seventeenth century, but we do know that George Lillo and John Hoadley rewrote the story of Arden, representing a “radical…reshaping of the play’s narrative materials, but one consistent with a hope that such ‘A dreadful story of domestic woes’…could have continued commercial success” (xxiii).
quip about wives that speaks to *The Country Wife*’s particular interest in not just language, but in language’s specific relationship to the body. When Alice Arden dismisses marriage as a mere oath, she places a great deal of emphasis on the lack of embodiment and materiality that the oath has. “Oaths,” she says, “are words, and words is wind. / And wind is mutable.” Thus the words of the oath lack power specifically because of their lack of material embodiment. So although both Alice Arden and Mr. Pinchwife believe relationships to be falsely represented by words associated with marriage, the earlier play stresses the powerlessness of non-embodied words while the later one, as I will show, acknowledges the inevitable embodiment—however complicated—of language. Perhaps these moments in the two plays seem minor, but in their importantly different suggestions about the relationship between words and the body, they represent a much larger debate about language that is always invoked by drama, but was, as James Thompson argues, central to Restoration drama, especially the works of William Wycherley.

In *Language in Wycherley’s Plays: Seventeenth-Century Language Theory and Drama*, Thompson claims that Restoration literature in general displays a “fascination with conversation” and its relationship to late seventeenth-century language theory, or, in other words, with “the verbal generation of meaning” (1-2). Thompson is ultimately most concerned with Wycherley’s interest in the ethical and moral correctness of words during what he calls a “uniquely transitional period, for linguistics as well as for politics and religion” (6). In the end, Thompson argues that “Wycherley’s plays explore a practice of discourse, measuring individual utterance against the rectitude of words…The dialogue of these plays reveals both the imperfection of hearts, as well as the efforts to correct them” (36). In other words, through an investigation of

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3 I do not intend here to disagree with Thompson’s conclusions about Wycherley’s interaction with Restoration debates about language. Instead, I want to use Thompson’s excellent overview of these
Wycherley’s engagement with Restoration debates about the meaning, usage, and finally, the ethics, of language, Thompson seeks to show that Wycherley adheres to the Restoration idea that “there are right and wrong ways to use words. It is not that there is but one way to express each thought, but rather that there is a right use for each word” (36).

Thompson’s final point, then, is that seventeenth-century philosophies of language were ultimately grounded in the idea that words, because they were given by God, “are ultimately uncorruptible,” and Wycherley’s work not only supports the final incorruptible nature of words, but actively advocates for a return to a world where language itself has not yet been corrupted (75). Most important here about Thompson’s argument, however, is his suggestion that in _The Country Wife_, and in more general seventeenth-century theories of language, divinely-given language does not act as a passive body of words to whose proper use we must return.
“Language,” he suggests, “is not a colorless, lifeless, impartial medium which merely transmits the speaker’s message.” Instead it is, in The Country Wife, “an almost sentient mechanism which ensures that everything works out correctly in the end” (72). In other words, although “all of the words that signify intangible qualities in this play meet with such loose and slippery use that it is often difficult to distinguish between literal and figurative language,” neither the play nor the language itself supports such free play within and among it, and nobody who plays inappropriately with language quite gets away with it in the end (80). As Thompson notes, the play itself “suggests a pattern of linguistic entropy, as words return to haunt their speakers” and ultimately, “when confronted with [Horner or Lady Fidget], both conduct and language turn out to be far more complicated than Alithea first assumes” (86; 90).

So for Thompson, the use of language in this play has everything to do with the play’s fascination with the ultimate correctness of that language, and every attempt [to subvert that correctness] generates ironic undertones that emphasize the judgmental nature of words in this play: each character’s use of a word is measured against our understanding of what that word ought to mean. The conclusions are twofold: (1) that there is a rectitude or ideal meaning embedded in the lexicon, which, synchronically, is practically unchanged by usage; and (2) that a speaker is expected to attempt this signification in order to communicate. (90)

Thompson’s argument is absolutely astute in its recognition of the importance to language in The Country Wife, and the play certainly shows an interest in issues of the morality of that language and what it represents. But I want to suggest that there is more here than just an interest in the moral rectitude of language, and that while the play might ultimately argue for a return to proper,
divinely-sanctioned language, we cannot ignore the radical way in which the play opens spaces, however temporarily, within that morally-appropriate language.

Thompson acknowledges the play’s method of opening these spaces—it makes language into an “almost sentient mechanism”—but he does not linger on this fascinating personification of language within the play. Indeed, the play does make language “sentient” in a way, but I contend that the play turns language into almost more of a being than a “mechanism.” And in doing so, the play ultimately stages a series of questions about the relationship between language and the body, or about the potentially embodied nature of the being that is language. Because although critics writing about *The Country Wife* often seem most interested in how the play presents Restoration society and its ideas about class and sexuality, even critics who do not seem interested in the play’s unusual use of language tend to comment, whether intentionally or not, at least obliquely on the strangely embodied ways in which the play uses language. Writes Robert Markley in his analysis of wit on the Restoration stage: “Horner in *The Country Wife* is…a kind of walking pun: the cuckold-maker, a standard of masculine sexuality…He is, at once, a foil to expose the impotence and stupidity of failed exemplars of masculine sexuality, notably Sir Jasper Fidget and Pinchwife, and a deceptive ironist who verges on becoming the butt of his own joke” (Markley 333-4). Markley’s ostensible commentary on masculine sexuality in *The Country Wife* is full of strangely embodied comments on the play’s language itself. Horner, according to Markley, is “a walking pun.” In other words, for Markley, Horner is himself a figure of speech, a group of words that has been given a living, breathing, walking body. Furthermore, Markley states that Horner also comes quite close to becoming the “butt of his own joke.” Again, words of language and words of embodiment are joined here, in a common phrase, as Horner risks becoming part of the body of his joke or his impotence plot.
Because indeed, despite the seemingly radical nature of Alice Arden’s statement about marriage and words in the earlier *Arden of Faversham*, these seemingly similar moments in the two plays do say something very different about language and bodies. While Alice Arden’s words dismiss the importance of materiality to language, for Mr. Pinchwife, in his Restoration context of language, the connection between words and the bodies they represent seems much harder to sever. As Thompson argues, language in Wycherley’s work is always embodied, a quality that consistently appears within the characters’ statements about language. Here, instead of using words that refer to the relationship between people, Pinchwife uses words that represent the bodies involved in these relationships. “Wife” he says, and “sister are names which make us expect love and duty, pleasure and comfort, but we find ’em plagues and torments.” While Pinchwife, like Alice Arden, questions the permanent or stable relationships between words and that which they are supposed to represent, his interest lies far more in words representative of bodies than of words representative of less tactile or tangible things like marriage or other relationships between people.

It is thus within and across *The Country Wife* that we find the body so crucial to the ghost story I am telling here. This is the body to which Derrida refers when he argues that “there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh”; this is the body to which we must return “for there to be a ghost” at all (Derrida 157). This body is not, however, uncomplicated or easy to locate in *The Country Wife*. It is not the body of Harry Horner, nor is it the body of Margery; it is not even the body of the text itself. Derrida urges us to return “to a body that is more abstract than ever,” and I claim that *The Country Wife* is always already returning to an abstract body not by positing any stable theories or suggestions of what that body might look like, but by constantly using language to build and subsequently dismantle
bodies, their materiality, and their relationship to each other and to the world around them (157). What is a body? asks *The Country Wife*. Can we speak—or write—it into being? And once it exists, how can we use words to modify or change it? And finally, and most important to the tensions between contemporary transgender studies and queer theory, can a body be made up of anything but words?

I do not intend to argue here that *The Country Wife* answers any of these complex and multifaceted questions about language and the body. Indeed, to posit such a theory would be to stabilize a text made wonderfully dynamic by its very inability to answer such complicated questions. I do contend, however, that although *The Country Wife* cannot answer any of these questions, it does ask them, and it asks them more productively than do many of the texts in the contemporary fields between which such questions cause so much tension. In *The Country Wife*, these questions about language and the body actually make up that abstract body to which Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* argues we must return. *The Country Wife* interrogates not only the idea of a body of text, but also the ways in which language and bodies interact inside of and across such texts. The play also asks what words can do to bodies, and how words can become embodied as actions, or even as statuses or identities. Ultimately, through the questions the play asks and through the language it uses to ask them, *The Country Wife* builds an abstract and finally radical body of theories about embodiment and language.

We must speak to the specter of this radical embodiment in *The Country Wife*, because so much of the current criticism dealing with non-normative bodies and identities in seventeenth-century drama is unable to quite encompass the incredible complexity of non-normative bodies in Restoration plays like Wycherley’s. Many of the critics reading these plays are interested only in the relationships between the plays’ characters and the desires driving those relationships, and
not in the linguistic representations of the bodies of those between whom such relationships form. An excellent example of this comes in what is perhaps the best-known reading of *The Country Wife*: the one Eve Sedgwick performs in her brilliant and groundbreaking 1985 book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. For Sedgwick, the play concerns primarily the “compulsory” nature of the “routing of homosocial desire [between men] through women” (49). In other words, although we see only overt relationships between men and women in this play, the real relationships in *The Country Wife* are between its male characters, as they interact with each other through the presence of the female characters. The play’s relationships are, then, what Sedgwick calls “homosocial triangles,” relationships containing two men who interact with each other through a woman, the third point on the triangle.

Sedgwick’s reading of *The Country Wife* is not only sharp and incisive; it is also an integral component to the history of reading queerness in the field of English Studies. Work like Sedgwick’s has contributed to a strong practice of reading expressive cultural practice within queer theory and, in doing so, has built an important history of queerness in that literature. Yet while Sedgwick might be an excellent reader of queerness, she, like so many queer literary theorists, fails to read trans ethically, in her work in general but more specifically in her reading of Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*. This failure to read trans does not make Sedgwick’s reading of non-normative desire any less powerful, but it is time for scholarship to acknowledge not only queer desire in these plays, but queer bodies, and to look at those queer bodies through lenses other than those long-associated with non-normative desire and homoerotic relationships. I am

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5 In the introduction to *Between Men*, Sedgwick elaborates on what she means by the term “male homosocial desire.” She refers to relationships between men that are not sexual, but are, perhaps, located on a continuum between homosocial and homosexual, “a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (1-2). Ultimately, what Sedgwick seeks to explore is the societal structure of men’s relationships with other men and, through this, to locate the source of homophobia in this kind of bonding.
not interested, then, in erasing Sedgwick’s work, or even in expanding it to make it somehow more “inclusive,” or less homonormative. Sedgwick’s readings of *The Country Wife* are—and should remain—important pieces in seventeenth-century studies and in queer theory. Instead, I want to see where else *The Country Wife* can take us in terms of building non-normative histories. I want to begin where Sedgwick begins, but to end up with a story not of non-normative desires—for that story has already been told—but with a story of bodies and their relationship with the complex language of Wycherley’s drama.

To begin where Sedgwick begins: “The given of *The Country Wife* is that cuckoldry is the main social engine of the aristocratic society depicted” (47). For Sedgwick, cuckoldry is a sexual act performed, through a woman, by one man on another man. To cuckold another man is to assert one’s power over him, to establish oneself as an actor upon the passive force of the man who is cuckolded, to reinforce the homosocial bonds necessary for the construction of masculinity in an aristocratic society like the one in *The Country Wife*. Thus cuckoldry is about power, masculinity, and desire, and, for Sedgwick, ultimately about the homosocial and homoerotic relationships men have with each other. Yet if we take a step back from power and desire, cuckoldry becomes about language. Indeed, as Sedgwick notes:

“The status of women in this transaction [between men] is determiningly a problem of the play: not their status in the general political sense, but their status within the particular ambiguity of being at the same time objects of symbolic exchange and also, at least potentially, users of symbols and subjects in themselves. (50)”

Their problem, in other words, becomes a problem of language, as women become mere representations of relationships between men.
And it is a problem gleefully taken up in *The Country Wife*. In the prologue of the play, Mr. Hart (the actor playing Horner), says to the audience that Wycherley’s play “*shan't ask your leave to live*” (18). This suggests not only that the play “lives” in some way, but also that it potentially has the ability to speak, and that it has the agency to refuse to use that ability to ask permission for its own existence. Later, this existence becomes embodied in a way by Sparkish’s commentary about attending plays. “I go to a Play as to a Country-treat,” says Sparkish. “I carry my own wine to one, and my own wit to t’other…and so become the Poets Rivals in his audience: for to tell you the truth, we hate the silly Rogues; nay, so much that we find fault even with their Bawdy upon the Stage, whilst we talk nothing else in the Pit as loud” (III.ii.94-102).

Here, although “bawdy” is spelled b-a-w-d-y, thus referring to risque humor, there is very little difference in the sound of the word “bawdy” and the word “body.” This pun links the playwright’s “Bawdy,” or his written work, with his “body,” suggesting that the playwright’s written word in some sense *is* his body.

The relationship between words and the body is explored not only with puns like the one described above, but also within the play, in wordplay that surrounds the characters’ own bodies. In Act III, after Margery has been disguised as her brother, she goes out with her husband, Mr. Pinchwife. Margery, seeing the salesperson Clasp, tries to buy a few plays. But when he realizes what Margery is doing, Mr. Pinchwife stops his wife, saying: “No, plays are not for your reading. Come along; will you discover yourself?” (III.ii.163-4). There are two potential meanings for the word “discover” here. One, the more obvious and seemingly more content-appropriate one—a definition that the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls archaic—is “to divulge, reveal, disclose to knowledge (anything secret or unknown); to make known” (“discover” def. 4). So Pinchwife tells Margery to stop asking for plays, because in doing so, she runs the risk of
revealing her identity and ruining the disguise (he seems to believe that only a woman would become so excited by the prospect of reading plays). But discover also, and more commonly, reveals “to obtain sight or knowledge of (something previously unknown) for the first time; to come to the knowledge of; to find out” (“discover” def. 8). So Pinchwife could also be saying to Margery: you may not read plays because you might find knowledge of yourself within those plays. Since Margery wants actual Restoration dramas, and since Margery Pinchwife is a character in such a play, it is certainly possible that she would discover herself in one of the plays she wishes to read. This wordplay following the mention of plays suggests that The Country Wife is aware of itself as a play, and aware that Margery—disguise and all—is something created within that play. The reference to other real Restoration dramas, as well as the suggestion that Margery might read herself in one of those plays disrupts, but does not collapse, the separation between the action on the stage and the “real” world within which that stage is located. Such disruptions blur the boundaries between seemingly distinct categories like “written” and “real”; indeed, if a play’s character runs the risk of picking up the play and reading about herself, all such boundaries suddenly become at risk of collapsing before the play’s viewers. The layers of reality, language, and possibility here proliferate wildly: the actress Ms. Boutell, who acts the part of Mrs. Pinchwife that has been written by William Wycherley, is disguised as Mrs. Pinchwife’s brother, who is told not to read any of Clasp’s plays in order to...

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6 Of the eleven meanings listed in the OED for “to discover,” this is the only definition not labeled “rare,” “obscure,” or “archaic.”
7 As Ogden’s footnote tells us, the plays she asks for are Tarugo’s Wiles, a 1668 comedy by Sir Thomas St. Serfe, and The Slighted Maiden, a 1663 comedy by Sir Robert Stapleton (67n).
8 We know that Mrs. Pinchwife was played by the actress Mrs. Boutell because of the Restoration convention of listing actors and actresses in the Dramatis Personae of plays. As Ogden notes, The producer of The Country Wife, The King’s Company, was well known and had a number of equally well known actors and actresses, “and Wycherley must have written parts with particular actors and actresses in mind” (xxix). As for Mrs. Boutell, Ogden claims that “she often appeared in breeches roles,” so the audience would not be unfamiliar with the actress who played Mrs. Pinchwife wearing breeches.
prevent her from discovering herself within one of the plays. If this seems impossibly convoluted, it is because it is impossibly convoluted, and in this scene, language and reality examine and begin to dissolve each other upon the stage, and they do so within, upon, and across the body of Margery Pinchwife.

Yet Margery Pinchwife is not the only character whose very existence—embodied by William Wycherley’s words—continually asks about the power language has over the body and its functioning. The entire play is riddled with both extended metaphors of and fleeting references to the embodiment of words and language. One of the first lines spoken by Harcourt (the most moral man this play depicts), also makes reference to women as bodies of text. “Mistresses,” he says, “are like books; if you pore upon them too much, they doze you, and make you unfit for company; but if used discreetly, you are the fitter for conversation by ’em” (214-217). The misogyny of the metaphor aside, again we see women’s bodies become texts on this stage, and they are texts that have the avowed ability to change the men who interact with them. Spend too much time with these women/books, Harcourt says, and you become dull and boring; spend the right amount of time with them, and you become more adept at navigating linguistic hurdles like conversations. Words, then, once they become embodied, seem to gain an immense amount of power upon the stage as depicted in Wycherley’s drama.

Harcourt’s women-are-like-books simile is just one of this play’s many examples of the power of embodied words to change the structure, interactions, and outcomes of the bodies with which they come into contact. The main plot of the play, Horner’s attempt to cuckold all of the town’s men by making them believe him to be impotent, brings these questions into play from the beginning. In the play’s first lines, Horner asks his doctor, Quack: “hast thou done what I desired?” (I.i.3). And Quack, the doctor recruited by Horner to disseminate the impotence
rumor, tells Horner about his success in the spreading of that rumor. Yet he shares this news with Horner in an intriguingly complex way; Quack does not simply say that he has told the town of Horner’s false impotence. Instead, he says to Horner: “I have undone you for ever with the women, and reported you throughout the whole town as bad as an eunuch, with as much trouble as if I had made you one in earnest” (I.i.4-7 emphasis mine). Quack begins by telling Horner the result of the rumor: he has “undone” Horner “forever with the women.” Nothing seems ambiguous or figurative about this statement. According to Quack, Horner’s womanizing days are over. It is not until Quack tells Horner how he has “undone [him]” that the syntax becomes more convoluted. Quack has reported Horner “as bad as” a eunuch, which ultimately causes “as much trouble as” it would have if Quack had actually made Horner a eunuch. The simple statement of the end of Horner’s days as a womanizer is thus followed by two similes that, taken together, seem to reinforce the statement that precedes them. But do they really?

Indeed it is difficult to take anything stable away from Quack’s lines and their linguistic gymnastics. Quack’s statements advance the plot in that they make the audience aware of Horner’s scheme, but what do they say about the relationship between language and the body in *The Country Wife*? Ultimately, they both build and dismantle any stability in the relationship between words and the bodies they create, represent, and alter. Although Quack cannot actually cause physical changes to Horner’s body with mere words—his statement of Horner’s impotence clearly does not actually alter Horner’s ability to perform sexually with the women of the town—by spreading Horner’s rumor, Quack can achieve the same results with words as he might with his scalpel: he states that with the rumor, he can cause “as much trouble as if” he had actually made Horner a eunuch. So it begins to seem as if the physical body becomes subsidiary to and reflective of the words used to describe it. It does not matter whether Horner is impotent or not;
it only matters whether he is believed to be impotent by those around him, and Quack suggests that words can easily and permanently change such beliefs, with the exact same results as if the body itself had been altered. Indeed, as the sentence’s first simile suggests, Quack does not even have to claim that Horner has actually become a eunuch in order for him to gain the reputation of one; he merely reports to the town that Horner is “as bad as” a eunuch. Language here becomes so powerful that even figurative constructions of it seem to be able to change the physical nature of the body merely by association. Later in the play, Horner supports this idea by claiming that, even if he claimed the impotence rumor to be false, “no body would believe [him]; the reputation of impotency is as hardly recovered again in the World, as that of cowardice, dear Madam” (II.i.583-5). So again, Horner suggests that the condition of the physical body matters far less than its perceived condition, and that language has the power to alter the latter.

Yet this cause-and-effect relationship between Quack’s words and Horner’s body is ultimately called into question by the success of Horner’s scheme. The goal of the pretended impotence is greater access to the women of the town, to whom Horner quickly proves that he has not actually physically been made a eunuch. Thus the only non-figurative segment of Quack’s statement to Horner—“I have undone you for ever with the women”—is in the end the least stable because the impotence rumor has the exact opposite result with the women. By pretending to be a eunuch, Horner gains sexual access to otherwise off-limits women of the town: because the men believe that he is impotent, they trust Horner with their wives, but because he is not actually impotent, such access allows him to have sex with the women and cuckold their husbands. Although the lines between eunuch/non-eunuch, impotent/not impotent may seem fairly clear throughout the play, then, The Country Wife is not ultimately a play about opposites, so these boundaries can never be as stable as they seem. As Horner states, “impotency
is as hardly recovered again in the World,” and neither the townswomen’s trysts with Horner, nor the audience’s knowledge of these trysts can entirely erase his impotence. Were it entirely a matter of a surgeon’s scalpel, we might be able to categorize Horner’s body as impotent or not impotent, but because Horner’s body has been altered by words, such categorization becomes difficult, if not impossible.

This leaves us with a character whose altered body cannot ultimately be contained within the very language that altered it. Horner must be a eunuch because only a eunuch would be able to go where Horner goes, but he simultaneously cannot be a eunuch, because a eunuch would never be able to do what Horner does. We have no words for Horner’s body, and yet Horner’s body is made up entirely of words. Horner is impossible, and from the tense impossibility of Horner come the play’s powerful questions about language and the body. Quack’s words about Horner, then, become a sort of shadowy embodiment; they act as a not-quite scalpel that turns Horner into a not-quite eunuch. And Quack’s slippery words at its very beginning are an early example of the play’s obsession with words that become and represent such not-quite actions and their effects on not-quite bodies. Indeed, the play itself becomes one of these not-quite bodies, as it continually states and then questions its own existence as a body of text.

The plot of Horner’s impotence centers, of course, around ideas of masculinity. This is not, however, a clear or forceful masculinity represented, as Sedgwick argues, by desire and homosocial bonding. It is instead a set of questions about masculinity, a set of questions that, like the rest of the play, asks about words and the body, in this case, how language creates and alters embodied masculinity. Laura J. Rosenthal claims that “Restoration drama documents a small
revolution in what it meant to be a man” during the late seventeenth century (92). While Rosenthal’s argument most concerns what she sees as the changing social positioning of men as a group at the end of the seventeenth century, The Country Wife and other plays show that questions about masculinity could never not be, at least in some part, about what masculine embodiment looks like. And in the Restoration, questions about masculine embodiment were always and inextricably linked to the concept of libertinism. What Rosenthal describes as a “small revolution” in late-seventeenth-century understandings of masculinity is closely tied to the rise of libertinism as an increasingly popular and ostentatious way of performing upper-class masculinity. Wycherley’s Horner, one of the most famous literary libertines, acts within a traditional libertine code of conduct. Maximillian E. Novak notes that for the followers of such code of conduct, libertinism meant accepting that “society was merely an artificial construct” and “its laws were not to be taken seriously by those who understood that human beings had been tricked into accepting them” (55). The most important tenet of libertinism, however, concerned the body: “Life was to be experienced as much through the senses as through the mind, and the pleasures of the body taught far more truths than the learning promulgated by the universities” (55).

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9 As I noted in the introduction, the Restoration also marked the advent of women on the stage in England, which, Rosenthal agrees, made the changes in the understandings of masculinity in drama even more important and obvious.

10 Rosenthal goes on to detail the social positioning of masculinity at the end of the seventeenth century, but she does mention Thomas Laqueur in her suggestion that “masculinity changed…more radically” than we might be aware during the seventeenth century. Where many contemporary queer theorists are interested in gender and the way we understand it, Laqueur’s 1990 book, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud, is, as its title suggests, interested in the ways in which we understand the body. In the introduction to Making Sex, Laqueur says of his project: “I want to propose instead that in these pre-enlightenment texts, and even some later ones, sex, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while gender, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or ‘real,’” (8). In other words, Laqueur argues that before the seventeenth century, sex “was still a sociological and not an ontological category,” so all of the questions being raised about gender and the body in The Country Wife are being asked in the wake of the very recent development of sex as bodily and ontological (8).
Examining the questions asked by Restoration drama about what masculine embodiment looks like, then, requires an understanding that libertine masculinity was an always already embodied one. Yet despite Horner’s clear roots in libertinism, embodied masculinity in *The Country Wife* is still something difficult to arrest and to define. Because the play forces again and again the questions: is Horner a man? and what does Horner’s body mean for our understanding of masculinity? In the play’s first scene, Sparkish tells the ladies that Horner is “a sign of a Man,” suggesting that due to his rumored impotence, Horner is a man in name alone. Linguistically, he may still be a man, but physically he is not. Yet as I have argued, we can more appropriately class Horner as a “not-quite eunuch” than as a eunuch or as a non-impotent man. So the play questions the word “man” and its relationship to the physical body in the same way that it questions the word “eunuch,” and in doing so, it opens a space between the linguistic representation of masculinity and the actual embodiment of that masculinity.

By refusing, however, to categorize or stabilize that space, *The Country Wife* allows room for the ghosts of abstract embodiment to which Derrida urges us to speak. The play, while it seems far more interested in language and in using issues of gender as a means of analysis for language, ultimately argues for neither the fully performative notion of gender so entrenched in contemporary queer theory nor the fully embodied one found in much of the existing transgender scholarship and activism. It refuses to argue, in fact, for any relationship between the body and our linguistic representations of it that is not constantly being undermined, questioned, and revised. It acknowledges that identities are an ever-changing combination of language and embodiment, and that all bodies are always already abstract. And we begin to see here where the ghosts of trans embodiment lie in this play, because to be trans is to be constantly confronted with the abstractness of bodies and their complex relationships with linguistic representation.
Trans embodiment is itself a set of questions about what embodiment means, and how it becomes manifest through words. *The Country Wife*, finally, as I have argued, is nothing if not a dramatic interpretation of these sets of questions, of these potential locations of trans embodiment. And *these* are the ghosts to whom I speak.
CHAPTER TWO

BE(H)N JO(H)NSON’S BREECHES:
THE SARTORIAL SEMIOTICS OF MASQUERADE IN THE ROVER

I begin this chapter with an anecdote, which, like so many legends we have about celebrated historical figures, is probably embellished, if not entirely fictional. Yet it is illustrative nonetheless. Although we now know with some confidence that the Restoration’s best-known female writer became Aphra Behn because of marriage, no information whatsoever about the mysterious Mr. Behn has survived.¹ This lost detail, like the rest of the general lack of specific knowledge about Behn, has opened centuries of speculation, leaving some to suggest that Behn may even have obtained the name she wrote under by making a witty play of upon her own maiden name—Johnson—moving the “h” into the first name of the great Ben Jonson, who died a mere three years before Behn’s birth.² Although we have no way of knowing if this is how Behn obtained her writing name, or even whether she was ever conscious of the single shifted letter that separated her from her hyper-canonical predecessor, critics and even one of her earliest

¹ Bolam notes that Behn “may have married a London merchant of ‘Dutch extraction’, as the Life and Memoirs [by One of the Fair Sex] states, or the German (‘ffranck’) Johan Behn, who sailed in the West Indies, possibly on the boat which brought the Johnsons back from Surinam, as [Jane] Jones plausibly argues” (xiii). There are a number of theories like this about Behn’s potential husband, but no definitive information about the elusive Mr. Behn exists.
² This is a suggestion made by Bolam, who says: “it might be that, as a prelude to earning an independent living in the theatre, Aphra looked for inspiration to a great dramatist who died three years before she was born—adding the “h” in her maiden name to his forename, and wittily making herself ‘Behn Johnson’” (xiii).
biographers commented on the connection,\(^3\) and it is not absurd to suggest that a wordsmith like Behn might at least have noticed the pun.

Unfortunately, unless further biographical evidence surfaces, the veracity of this rather appealing authorial origin story will remain uncertain, but regardless of whether or not the notably female playwright was attempting to allude to or channel her male forerunner, Ben Jonson, her work clearly takes an interest in the complex gendering of writing and written bodies. Nowhere does this concern have more prominence than in Behn’s most well known work: her 1677 play, *The Rover*. A carnivalesque play filled with sex, masks, cross-dressing, and plenty of lusty and lewd humor, *The Rover* ticks all of the appropriate generic boxes for a Restoration comedy. And yet, as many critics have noted, something about the play makes it different from standard Restoration stock, and those critics have attributed the difference to everything from substandard talent to a brilliant proto-feminist agenda. Yet I will argue that the play is distinctive because it is itself a masquerade pre-dating the ones that would become so famous in London mere decades after *The Rover*’s staging. So the play does not merely take up the subject of the carnivalesque; it actually uses the carnivalesque to *become* a masquerade as Behn drapes her own authorship and the generic characteristics of Restoration comedy over the pre-existing frame of her source play, Thomas Killigrew’s 1654 closet drama, *Thomaso*. The intrigue of the masquerade, as we will see, comes not from the body or the costume concealing it, but instead from the space between body and disguise—between self and other. This chapter seeks to locate the ghosts of the trans body in such spaces as they are created in and explored by *The Rover*.

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\(^3\) Bolam claims that Thomas Culpepper, one of Behn’s early biographers “remarked on the combination of names,” and that Mary Ann O’Donnell makes a similar suggestion in her book *Woman Writers of the Seventeenth Century* (xiii, note 11).
It seems only appropriate that the creator of these spaces of masked intrigue exists even now in our literary history as a somewhat hazy figure. Indeed, scholars and biographers of Aphra Behn have generally been able to say very little for certain about Behn’s life, unanimously agreeing only upon one fact: Behn was the first woman to earn a living by writing. And it was quite a successful living indeed. Yet despite the vast prolificacy and popularity that Behn enjoyed during the Restoration and in the early eighteenth century, her work fell out of favor after her death, and she disappeared for nearly three centuries from the generally accepted canon of Restoration literature, not to gain widespread critical reception again until the last decades of the twentieth century.\(^4\) During those three centuries of her relative obscurity, the few who did write about Behn often disagreed about many of the biographical details of her life—everything from her birth name to the occupation of her father and the social status of her mother. The new appreciation of Behn’s work in recent years, however, has led to more research of these biographical details, and now many scholars agree that Behn was most likely born in 1640 as Eaffrey Johnson, the daughter of barber Bartholomew Johnson and Elizabeth Denham, a woman probably of noble birth.\(^5\) Still, recent scholarly agreement aside, the centuries of confusion surrounding Behn’s early life has ultimately given her, according to Janet Todd, “a lethal combination of obscurity, secrecy and staginess, which makes her an uneasy fit for any narrative, speculative or factual. She is not so much a woman to be unmasked as an unending combination of masks” (9).

How appropriate for a discussion of Behn’s use of masquerade in her drama! Of course any investigation into Behn, whether biographical or literary, would not be complete without

\(^4\) As Cynthia Lowenthal puts it: Behn was “banished from the legitimate realms of scholarly inquiry,” yet “since those dark days…there has been an explosion of scholarship concerning the first woman playwright to make a living by her pen” (396).

\(^5\) My source for Behn’s biographical information is Mary Ann O’Donnell’s essay “Aphra Behn: the documentary record.”
calling attention to masks, because Behn herself, during her lifetime, was no stranger to intrigue and disguises. Writing was not the only field in which Behn’s presence as a female was unusual; before she became known for her dramas in the 1670s, Behn was recruited by Thomas Killigrew to spy for Charles II in the Dutch wars of the late 1660s. As her biographers note, Behn was sent by the king’s intelligence service to Antwerp in 1666 in order to attempt to convince William Scot to side with the king, and during this time she took on multiple aliases—among them Astrea and Affora—in her letters back to her superiors. These letters, full of coded language and carefully-gained intelligence are some of the first pieces of Aphra Behn’s writing that we have. Yet a mere four years later, after Behn had returned to England deeply in debt from her spying mission, the Duke’s Company produced Behn’s first play, The Forc’d Marriage.

Neither Behn’s association with Thomas Killigrew nor her success as a playwright ended in the 1660s; in 1677, she wrote what would come to be her most famous and successful play, The Rover, a revision of Thomas Killigrew’s own 1654 play, Thomaso, which was penned, most probably while Killigrew was in exile, during the political upheaval of Cromwell’s protectorate (Bolam xvii). Thomaso is intriguing in that, as Robyn Bolam states, it “was a closet drama that could not be performed at the time of its writing because the theatres were closed” (xvii). But, as she notes, even if the theatres had been open, “a play of its nature would have been forbidden.” The play was not printed until 1663, well after the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 (xvii). Fourteen years after Thomaso was printed, Behn’s The Rover was staged by the Christopher Wren’s Duke’s Theater, and the play was so similar to Killigrew’s that Behn was actually accused of plagiarizing Thomaso in her writing of The Rover. It is true that Behn’s

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6 Behn’s various biographers are generally in agreement about this phase of her life.
7 Jones DeRitter writes: “Like Behn’s contemporaries, many twentieth-century critics of The Rover have recognized this debt [to Killigrew], and as a result, many of them have concluded that Behn’s best drama is little more than a sprightly piece of plagiarism” (82).
adaptation keeps much in common with its source text; *The Rover* not only retains the basic plot as *Thomaso*, but it also keeps many of the characters’ names, and at times, Behn even borrows entire lines from the earlier closet drama.

Despite the similarities, however, Behn does actually make significant changes to Killigrew’s play. Indeed, as daring as Killgrew’s play might have seemed for its decade, Behn’s adaptation twenty years later completely radicalizes *Thomaso*, making it revolutionary even in a literary era known for its sexual license and linguistic liberality. As Bolam notes, in many cases, Behn actually keeps the names of Killigrew’s characters and some of their dialogue but reassigns their words to other characters. “When [Behn] retained the names of Killigrew’s characters,” writes Bolam, “as in the case of Angellica Bianca, Behn often altered their personalities and actions so that they are presented as new creations, and Killigrew’s dialogue may occasionally be reproduced (e.g. at I.i.129-34), but when assigned to a new character (particularly one of a different sex) and rearranged, the force of its impact is increased” (xv). Thus, as Jones DeRitter argues, Behn does not plagiarize as much as revise Killigrew’s work. DeRitter claims that Behn’s “adaptation reflects not only her desire to make *Thomaso* worthy of the stage, but also her fundamental hostility to the type of sexual politics presented and approved in Killigrew’s closet drama” (82). I agree with DeRitter that *The Rover* represents Behn’s careful revision of Killigrew’s *Thomaso*, and my interest here lies in the specific differences between *Thomaso* and *The Rover*, the differences that make *The Rover* so radical. I contend that Behn’s revision of Killigrew’s play hinges upon her addition of the carnival to *Thomaso*, an addition which allows *The Rover* a distinctly meta-theatrical interest in costumes and masks, and ultimately allows the play itself to become a sort of masquerade.
While *Thomaso*’s action takes place in Madrid in November, Behn moves the setting of *The Rover* to Naples, during the festive pre-Lenten season of carnival in the 1650s. Thus everything that happens in *The Rover* occurs in the haze of the carnivalesque, and many of the further changes made by Behn reflect this atmosphere. *The Rover* has three rather convoluted main plots, all of which rely upon the confusion caused by carnival’s disguises. In the first plot, we follow the titular rover, the rakish libertine Willmore, as he falls in love with Hellena, a woman using the freedom and costumes of carnival to attempt to find love before her brother sends her off to a convent. But Willmore faces problems when the prostitute Angellica Bianca falls in love with him and tries to thwart Willmore’s attempts to be with anyone else. The second plot follows Hellena’s sister, Florida, as she tries to escape marriage to Don Antonio, the man her brother has selected, in favor of marriage to the man she actually loves, Colonel Belville. When Florinda’s brother, Don Pedro, overhears a costumed Don Antonio scorning Florinda, Pedro challenges Antonio to a duel, a duel in which Antonio forces Belville—disguised as Antonio—to fight in his stead. In the third plot, another prostitute tricks Belville’s naïve country friend, Blunt, and steals his money and his clothing, leaving him to spend the rest of the play nakedly and comically searching for clothes and lamenting his own foolishness. Thus because one of Behn’s crucial additions to these intricate plots is this spirit of the carnivalesque, it is a play obsessed with costumes and disguises; carnival and costumes are inextricably linked. From the moment Don Pedro enters “*with a masquing habit*” in the play’s first act, to the climactic moment in Act V when Hellena, dressed in boys’ clothing, convinces Willmore to marry her, the play’s characters don costume after costume, some just for the fun of carnival, some out of necessity (and the comic inability to find anything else to wear), and some with a very specific goal in mind.
Yet, as I have suggested, *The Rover* is more than a play simply concerned with masks and carnival costumes; the play is itself actually an early version of the masquerades that would become so popular in England in the early decades of the eighteenth century. In her *Masquerades and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, Terry Castle explores the rising popularity of the masquerade in English society in the eighteenth century. The origins of the English masquerade are not entirely clear, although, as Castle notes, many of the eighteenth-century voices railing against the masquerade’s newfound popularity attributed the entertainment form to foreign influences, especially influences of Italy and France. “Technically speaking,” agrees Castle, “nothing generally recognized as a masquerade, in the eighteenth-century sense of the word, took place in England before the 1700’s,” although “similar events had been known elsewhere” (8). But although the masquerades of the eighteenth-century drew much inspiration from the European “world of carnival,” Castle cautions against falling into the eighteenth-century moralist position of attributing the entirety of the masque to foreign influence, for, as she notes, “the masquerade seemed from the start to draw on vestiges of English festive life,” and that “England had always had its own traditions of the carnivalesque, dating from the Middle Ages” (11; 16).

So for Castle, the trend of the “Midnight Masque” that swept across English society beginning in the 1720s was influenced not only by Continental scenes of carnival, but also by the carnivalesque embedded in England’s own historical celebrations. Castle notes that others, like the Shakespearian scholar C.L. Berber and historian Keith Thomas, have pointed out the carnivalesque in England before the eighteenth century, and here I want to show that the carnivalesque and the masquerade were coming together in England before the first public masquerade that Castle locates in the second decade of the eighteenth century. Castle is clear to
distinguish between the masque—“the lavish musical and dramatic court performance of the seventeenth century”—and the rise of the masquerade in the eighteenth century (19). While both the masque and the masquerade may have been “offshoot[s] of older practice,” she argues, the aristocratic masques “probably had little direct impact on the popular resurgence of carnivalesque behavior in the eighteenth century” (19). Ultimately, the masque and the masquerade differ for Castle in the varied exclusivity of their audience. “The Jacobean masque was an expression of an elite aesthetic culture, and a highly-articulated, self-conscious artistic fantasy. It was,” concludes Castle, “a performance, and a performance for the few,” far more elite than the later masquerades (19).

Despite Castle’s haste to separate the masque and the masquerade, however, I see The Rover as a productive link between the seventeenth-century masques and the eighteenth-century masquerades. Indeed, while it did not comprise large numbers of Londoners donning masked costumes, Aphra Behn’s 1677 play, The Rover, brings together many aspects of the carnivalesque—with origins in both English masques and Continental masquerades—to enact upon the stage an early version of what would, in the following decades, become the immensely popular phenomenon of the London masquerade. Thus we can locate The Rover in a moment of transition between earlier and later British manifestations of the carnivalesque.

Many scholars have argued for the presence of a Bakhtinian sort of carnivalesque in The Rover. Indeed, it is not a difficult argument to make considering that the actions of the play take place during carnival in Naples, and nearly all of the play’s characters are involved in the carnival festivities in some way or another. Somewhat harder to argue, however, is my claim that

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8 Bolam’s introduction to the play mentions this, and numerous articles and chapters take on the topic. Examples include Dagny Boebel’s chapter “In the Carnival World of Adam’s Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn’s Rover,” and Adam R. Beach’s article “Carnival Politics, Generous Satire, and Nationalist Spectacle in Behn’s The Rover.”
The Rover is actually not just a carnival, but also an early English masquerade. In no way could a play like The Rover have encompassed quite the level of collective raucousness and freedom that the later masquerades would engender; the essential difference between the play and the masquerades is that while masquerades involved large groups of people coming together in costume, The Rover merely involves large groups of people coming together to watch others don costumes for carnival. While there are indeed clear and important differences between theater and the masques, then, both The Rover and later masquerades brought vast numbers of people from different classes together to partake in entertainment that involved masking and disguise. Both The Rover and the early masquerades required tickets for entry, tickets expensive enough to pretend exclusivity, but not expensive enough to keep the lower classes away. Ultimately, The Rover enacts its own sort of masquerade upon the stage in a London that, while perhaps not quite ready for its own masked intrigue, is perfectly willing to watch a pre-masquerade foreign carnival staged in their city. Most importantly, we can find in the The Rover exactly what Castle locates in the masquerade: “a curious and often disconcerting mixture of native allusions and crassly inauthentic borrowings” (25). In the end, for both The Rover and the masquerade, “this ambiguity—the simultaneously English and non-English aspect...—may be frustrating to the typologist, or to those in search of unadulterated cultural forms. But it is also eminently appropriate to an institution that celebrated so profoundly the hybrid and duplicitous nature of material appearances” (25).

When Behn, a popular dramatist by the time she wrote The Rover in 1677, took up her pen to revise Killigrew’s earlier work, then, she was creating more masks than the ones that appear within the play itself. She was herself donning the mask of her male contemporary,

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9 As Castle notes, “the general availability of tickets gave the lie to the myth of exclusivity” at the masquerades. “For the first half of the century, the price of masquerade tickets remained relatively low” (29).
assuming the very masculine role of libertine playwright, becoming, for a moment, a Be(h)n Jo(h)nson whose very existence questions the gendering of the writing and the written body. Additionally, her revision of Killigrew’s earlier work throws a mask of sorts over *Thomaso*, creating new drama that acts as a palimpsestic body in disguise. Far from simply recreating Killigrew’s ideas, Behn transforms them in a way that leaves both the body of *Thomaso* and the masquerade costume of *The Rover* intact. And, like any good masquerade, *The Rover* finally exists in and calls attention to the space between the body and its costume. In *The Rover*, that space makes room for a number of productive questions not directly about the relationship between language and the body, but about the relationships between costumes—or performed identity—and the gendered body.

Although Castle’s work explores a phenomenon that she argues did not begin in earnest in England until the 1720s, if *The Rover* is actually an early stage version of the masquerades that would become so popular in the eighteenth century, then many of Castle’s claims about masquerade and culture are useful in reading *The Rover*. Castle argues against the common but reductive view of such masquerades as simply representative of a greater societal licentiousness, and instead calls attention to a much more complex relationship between the masquerades and the society of which they became such a large part. Indeed, for Castle, “an odd blurring sometimes takes place in the eighteenth century between masquerade and politics,” and even beyond any “local manifestation” of such blurring, “the masked assembly figured powerfully in the symbolic order as part of the imagery of urbanity itself” (3). In other words, the masquerade was *not* a way for people to distance or detach themselves from their society, but was instead a way for people to better understand that society; by projecting “an anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social, and metaphysical hierarchies,” the
masquerade was able to become “a meditation” not only “on self and other,” but also “on cultural classification and the organizing dialectical schema of eighteenth-century life” (6).

As I showed in the previous chapter, *The Country Wife* is obsessed with language and its power to create, change, and even destroy the body; if we can locate a similar singular fascination in *The Rover*, it is with the masks, costumes, and disguises that exist at every level of the play, from its writing to its content to its production. So it may seem, then, that this play is far less interested than *The Country Wife* in the particulars of language and how they are enacted by/upon the body. If, however, we read *The Rover* as a masquerade, and if we read that masquerade through Castle’s theories about masquerades, then it becomes clear that *The Rover* actually *is* about the relationship between language and the body, albeit a slightly different language than the one so prevalent in Wycherley’s work. Indeed, according to Castle, with the masquerade, costumes actually become their own sort of language, through what she calls a process of “semiotic defamiliarization” (36). Because, as she notes, “The eighteenth century perceived a deep correspondence between [clothing and language]: not only was language the ‘dress’ of thought—that lucid covering in which the mind decorously clothed its ideas—but clothing was in turn a kind of discourse.” She further argues that “dress spoke symbolically of the human being beneath the folds. It reinscribed a person’s sex, rank, age, occupation—all the distinctive features of the self” (55). So while Wycherley’s work asks clear questions about the relationship between words and the body, Behn’s work seems more interested in the relationship between clothing—a sartorial language—and the body. Through Castle, we can see the similarities in the questions that the two plays ask, and we can begin to explore the complex metaphorical link that Behn creates between clothing and language. Finally, we can interrogate
the bodies Behn writes and the costumes with which she covers them, and locate the ghosts of trans embodiment in the spaces between.

The ghosts exist in these spaces between bodies and embodied disguises, because they are spaces which, like those created by the masquerades that followed *The Rover*, make room for a subversively joyful delight in the multiplicity that disguised bodies create. As Castle notes, masquerades allowed people to move freely between classes, genders, ethnicities, and even species. Although there was a stunningly wide variety of masquerade costumes, the most ideal costumes, according to Castle, “represented an inversion of one’s nature…a violation of cultural categories” (5). One popular costume category, the domino, effaced such categories altogether. “It was,” writes Castle, “at once the most perfect and the least inspired of disguises—a simple loose cloak that totally enveloped the body in its folds. When the domino was worn with a mask…the shape and sex of the person beneath were virtually obscured” (59). The domino costume shows that the subversive pleasure of the masquerades came not simply from the costumed embodiment of one’s binary opposite, but instead from the power that the masquerade had to dismantle such binary categories, and to do so while allowing them to maintain enough alterity that movement between and around those categories remained subversive. The goal of the masquerade, then, was not dissimilar to that of the technologically-advanced Restoration theater; to bring people momentarily into a strange space of believing something they knew to be false, only to snap them out of it an instant later. This ultimately forced both theatergoers and masqueraders to question their methods of visually making meaning.

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10 The domino costume is a truly fascinating phenomenon that deserves far more analysis in terms of gendered embodiment than I can here dedicate to it. Rarely do we see examples like this of historical opportunities for people to remove gender nearly entirely from their outward presentation. There is certainly more to be said about the domino and its potential for the ghosts of trans embodiment.
Most importantly, the masquerade did not simply display such reversals and erasures; it revealed in them. Or, as Castle puts it, “Blatantly, joyfully, masqueraders subverted the myth of the legible body by sending false sartorial messages. The masquerade was reveling in duplicity, a collective experiment—comical and arabesque—in semantic betrayal and violation of the sartorial contract” (57). Thus through masquerades, Londoners not only acknowledged the Other, but they did everything they could to embody that Other, and to do so in a way that still allowed them to maintain a sense of self within their othered embodiment. They wanted not simply to become someone else, but to borrow the mask, the visage, of someone else, to drape it over their own bodies, and spend the evening savoring the space between body and mask, between self and other. It was this spectral, elusive, intangible space that made the masquerade so influential to eighteenth-century English culture.

And it is in this spectral, elusive, intangible space that we find the ghost of the trans body. For the masquerade is an atmosphere in which embodiment becomes complicated by the sartorial semiotics of the costume, of the cloak, of the mask. Neither the identity suggested by the costume nor the physicality of the body beneath it can ever become fully realized during the masquerade; the costumed revelers exist in an indefinable space of sometimes-self/sometimes-other, always somehow simultaneously both and neither. And this is the abstract body that Derrida urges us to locate, to interrogate, but never to arrest. This is the ghost of the trans body that haunts contemporary queer theory and contemporary trans studies—and the one that has been haunting expressive cultural production since at least the Restoration era.

In an attempt to link current tensions and past cultural production, Judith Halberstam suggests that to find female masculinity in pre-twentieth-century literature requires a kind of reading she calls “perverse presentism,” which she defines as “an application of what we do not
know in the present to what we cannot know about the past” (53). If we follow her definition of
the method, perverse presentism gives us exactly what we need to find the ghosts of the trans
body in the masquerade of *The Rover.*\(^{11}\) We do not know in the present how to make room for
the complex and not-always-definable trans body; we do not know in the present how to
reconcile the need for safe spaces for queer bodies with the danger of constricting such bodies
with labels and definitions; we do not know in the present how to speak about queer bodies
outside of the homonormative focus on desire. Within the masquerade exists, and exists joyfully,
all that we do not know in the present and all that we cannot know about the past, because the
masquerade is nothing if it is not a celebration of the inability to know.

While Halberstam urges “an application” of these present unknowns to the past
unknowables, this suggestion implies merely looking through our present at our past, which is a
sort of lens-method of criticism of whose ultimate worth I remain suspicious. It seems far more
productive, then, to establish a multidirectional relationship between what we do not know in the
present and what we cannot know in the past; a not quite definable channel not unlike the space
created between the masqueraders and their costumes. Acknowledging that the relationship
between contemporary tensions and historical unknowns is most productive when it is free to
constantly shift, expand, and contract allows us to let the struggles—but also the joy—of past
and present non-normative bodies come together.

As noted in my introduction, so much of the tension between contemporary queer theory
and contemporary transgender studies surrounds issues of gendered embodiment: for queer

\(^{11}\) I emphasize the definition of Halberstam’s method rather than her own application of it because while I
find her urge to apply “what we do not know in the present to what we cannot know about the past”
deply compelling, I think that in her readings, she does not tend to acknowledge just how much we do
not know in the present and how much we cannot know about the past. Therefore, in this project, I seek to
make fewer assumptions about both the present and the past than does Halberstam in her application of
perverse presentism.
theory, the physical body’s importance is secondary to the performance of a gendered identity, while for transgender studies, the physical body has generally been paramount. As I argued in the first chapter, we can locate similar tensions in explorations of the relationship between words and the body in Restoration drama. But while *The Country Wife* merely brings forth these questions in fascinating and often rather entertaining ways, *The Rover*, as a masquerade, not only presents us with intriguing ways in which these tensions become embodied, but it also creates an environment where the tensions construct *every* body and are therefore not only necessary but also actually desirable.

Nearly every character in *The Rover* wears a costume at some point or another throughout the play. Only sixty lines into the first scene, the stage directions tell us that Don Pedro enters “with a masquing habit.” After greeting his sister, Florinda, Pedro puts on the costume, an act that seems to go unnoted by any of the play’s characters; not until line 155 does Pedro even mention the carnival for which he has masked himself. This unremarked donning of costume in the very beginning of the play certainly normalizes the wearing of costumes in the world of the play—it must not be an unusual or odd occurrence if the other characters do not even seem to notice—but it also serves to pique the audience’s curiosity, because no character immediately reveals the reason for Pedro’s disguise. Pedro himself finally hints at the purpose of the costume when he tells Callis, the maid, to “lock [Hellena] up all this Carnival,” until “Lent,” at which time “she shall begin her everlasting penance in a monastery” (I.i.154-6). This brings the play and its audience into the destabilized world of the carnivalesque, where costumes and masks have the power not only to disguise and to enchant, but also to change outcomes.

After Don Pedro dons his masquing habit in the first scene, the play’s costumes begin to come out in full force as the rest of the characters get involved in the masquerade spirit of the
pre-Lenten carnival. Hellena manages to convince Callis not to imprison her, and she then tells Callis to: “Come put off this dull humour with your clothes, and assume one as gay, and as fantastic as the dress my cousin Valeria and I have provided, and let’s ramble” (I.i.199-201). So Hellena suggests to Callis that costumes will be able not only to exchange her “dull humour” for “a gay one,” but also to free the two of them from the prison created by their bodies and stations, and will allow them to “ramble,” a word whose seventeenth-century connotations are sexual (Bolam 14). Here we return to the semiotics of the body that characterized The Country Wife, but Wycherley’s language is now replaced by Behn’s metaphorically sartorial one. It is not simply language that seems to have the power to shift and alter the body or the mind; rather it is clothing, a semiotic cloak that covers and tentatively merges with the characters’ own bodies, giving them freedoms that they would not have in their naked or normally-dressed forms. Such sartorial semiotics are further produced by Don Pedro’s comment to Hellena that she is “not designed for the conversation of lovers” (I.i.100-1). Note that Pedro does not tell Hellena that she is not fit for a relationship, or even for sex, but for “conversation” with lovers. Yet as soon as Hellena enters the world of the carnival dressed like a “gipsie,” she gains a new freedom, for we immediately see her approached and suggestively spoken to by Willmore, who says: “Dear pretty, and I hope, young, devil, will you tell an amorous stranger what luck he’s like to have?” (I.ii.138-40). Thus through her costume and the carnivalesque, Hellena’s body is changed from one that must stay locked up to preserve it for a monastery to one that is designed for the conversation of lovers.

Throughout The Rover, we see these shifting and difficult-to-arrest spaces created between physical bodies and their performed identities, whether those identities are created by
costume, paint, or words.\textsuperscript{12} In other words, despite the ease of creating new identities through the spirit of the masquerade, the play suggests that there must always be a physical body beneath the performed or costumed identity, and that the space between identity and body is and should always be hazy and difficult to pin down or fully describe. In Act II, when Willmore asks Belville, “But why thus disguised and muzzled?” Belville replies: “Because whatever extravagances we commit in these faces, our own must not be obliged to answer ‘em” (II.i.2-3). Belville’s response suggests that his costume essentially makes him an entirely different person, that there is so much space between his body and his costumed identity that he loses any responsibility for his actions while wearing the costume. Yet much later in the play, we see an instance in which the body beneath the costume becomes important. Frederick and Blunt come across Florinda, who wears the costume of a “wretched maid,” and plan to have their way with her, until Frederick starts to wonder whether the maid is as wretched as she seems: “I begin to suspect something,” says Frederick to Blunt, “and would anger us vilely to be trussed up for rape upon a maid of quality, when we only believe we ruffle a harlot” (IV.v.141-3). So while the play’s libertine characters seem to believe that their costumes give them immunity, they become concerned when they realize that their victim also wears a costume.

\textsuperscript{12} Although many have long been aware of Virginia Woolf’s assessment of Behn in \textit{A Room of One’s Own}—she says of the playwright that: “all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn…for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds”—few realize that Woolf’s lover, Vita Sackville-West, was also interested in the playwright, enough so that she penned an entire book about Behn in 1928. Much less complimentary of Behn than is Woolf, Sackville-West calls attention to a sort of flatness of character in Behn’s plays. “It is all very superficial,” scoffs Sackville-West. “A few astute observations, of a rather vulgar kind; a supply of quick and easy dialogue; and that much-vaunted management of situation: this constitutes her stock-in-trade” (155). She even calls Behn’s characters “puppets” and suggests that Behn “thinks that she ought to adopt not only the plot but also the idiom of her model, still she thinks it necessary to adhere to certain prescribed rules…” (155-6). As dismissive as Sackville-West’s assessment of Behn might be, her actual critiques are quite intriguing when we see the play itself as a masquerade. The superficiality of the characters and their actions becomes far more complex when we ask about the space between Behn’s “puppets” and the bodies upon which they sit.
It is not enough, however, simply to say that the play creates shifting spaces between physical bodies and their outward appearances and identities. Such spaces, as radical as they might be, do not inherently suggest the presence of the ghosts of trans bodies. Abstract, ghostly bodies, certainly, but not necessarily trans ones. Yet while *The Country Wife* is a play that uses gender—among other things—to examine the relationship between words and the body, *The Rover* is a play that uses the masquerade and the semiotics of costume to explore gender. Indeed, as Castle argues, gender plays a key role in the subversive glee created by the masquerade, and as many other critics have noted, Behn explored gender in all of her work, and *The Rover* is no exception. Ultimately, then, the masquerade of *The Rover* not only creates shifting and indefinable spaces between the body and its sartorial semiotics, but does so in order to examine where gender falls in those spaces.

One angle from which to approach gender in *The Rover* is the cross-dressing that takes place in the play. Scholarly work on the carnivalesque and the masquerade has much in common with work on Restoration drama, and one interest shared between the two is the gendering of costume and disguise, particularly the instances in which a character or masquerader dons a gender-bending costume. Much has been said about cross-dressing in Restoration drama; the new presence of actresses on the stage in England after 1660 certainly vastly expanded the opportunities for playwrights, companies, and individual players to make some sort of point about gender by creating situations in which an actor or actress would assume the costume of a person of uncertain or opposite gender. Like other scholarship about gender in Restoration literature, however, much of this interest remains rooted in questions of desire. Scholars view “breeches roles”—roles in which female actresses or characters dress in men’s clothing for one reason or another—as excuses for actresses to draw attention from male audiences by wearing
tight clothing on stage, or as expressions of thinly-veiled homoerotic desire between female characters in a play. While much evidence in the plays supports the important work these scholars are doing in terms of subversive desire, again, I want to attempt to detach gender from desire and to examine what else these cross-gendered or agendered actors and characters might be doing.

One scholar who writes extensively about cross-dressing in Restoration theater is Beth H. Friedman-Romell, whose article “Breaking the Code: Towards a Reception Theory of Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Eighteenth-Century London,” takes a fairly standard scholarly position in an attempt to “illuminate many of the contingencies that have informed how theatrical cross-dressing could be interpreted by audiences in eighteenth-century London” (460). She states:

…if medical, political, and literary authorities launched the struggle to define sexual and gender identities as oppositional and fixed during this period, cross-dressing provided spectators both an affirmation of the new norms through parodic inversion and a vicarious outlet for occupying increasingly transgressive subject positions through an identification with the transvestite performer. (462)

While her goal, then, is to explore the unfixed nature of both sexual and gender identities in this period, she ultimately makes the same move as other scholars and focuses her analysis of gender around sexuality, saying that “adopting male dress and demeanor was an important mode of self-identification for most of these early women-loving women” (463).

Yet when we examine the staged cross-dressing in The Rover through its link with the masquerades of the eighteenth century, sartorially-embedded gender becomes far more complicated than it might seem if we merely see the phenomenon as evidence of repressed or disguised same-sex desire. If we see gender in terms of the masquerade, a point that seems
ancillary to Friedman-Romell’s argument becomes central: “The type of distancing which occurs between the sex of the performer and the gender of the character is incomplete, and is elided from time to time when text and performance do not diligently reinforce the disparity” (470). So regardless of the motives held by the facilitator of the cross-dressing—be it the playwright, actor/actress, or masquerader—the result is the same imperfect and shifting distancing that Castle calls attention to between the performer’s body and the one represented by their costume. Like the English masquerades it pre-dates, The Rover exists and revels in this space of uncertainty, especially in the play’s approach to gender and the costumed or disguised performances of gender. The Country Wife has its own instances of cross-dressing, but as I have argued, it is far more interested in examining more generally the relationship between language and the body than it is in asking any specific questions about gender. The Rover, on the other hand, as many critics have argued, is a play far more concerned with questions of gender—some critics have even read the play as proto-feminist—something it explores through the masquerade.

Even before the play itself begins, gender becomes foregrounded in an interesting way. In the play’s prologue, a bold defense of the writing of such a play, Behn assigns the anonymous author masculine pronouns: “If a young poet hit your humour right,” the anonymous speaker goads, “You judge him then out of revenge and spite” (11). The prologue goes on to make the masculinity of the playwright even more explicit at the end of the prologue, when its speaker notes that, “as for the author of this coming play, / I asked him what he thought fit I should say / In thanks for your good company today” (37-39). It seems, then, as if Behn has taken on a masculine persona in her writing of this particular play; she has become in the prologue, a Behn Johnson. Yet despite the masculine pronouns used throughout the prologue, the lines also liken the art of writing to a far more feminized process: that of labor and childbirth. “Some write their
characters genteel and fine,” says the speaker, “But then they do so toil for every line, / That what to you does easy seem, and plain, / Is the hard issue of their labouring brain” (26-9). Their labor “pains” ultimately produce the artistic work being staged. In the prologue, then, often read as Behn’s defense of what some call her near-plagiarism of Killigrew’s earlier play, the words of the anonymous PERSON OF QUALITY are oddly gendered by the use of language that suggests masculine identification of a more feminine embodiment.

The text continues to bring up issues of gendered embodiment through the characters’ various carnival costumes. Like most Restoration plays, it does not fail to include cuckoldry. As I noted in the previous chapter, Eve Sedgwick argues that, in The Country Wife, cuckoldry is, in large part, a function of language. Since Castle claims that, in the masquerade, costume and mask become their own sort of sartorial semiotics, it would make sense to see cuckoldry represented in The Rover through costume, and we do in the first act of the play. Belville and Willmore, in their own masqued habits, see “two men dressed all over with horns of several sorts, making grimaces at one another, with papers pinned on their backs.” Upon seeing these men dressed in costume representative of the cuckold, Belville exclaims: “Oh those fantastical rogues, how they’re dressed! ‘Tis a satire against the whole sex” (I.i.113-4). Thus the horns of the cuckold, which generally remain a function of language alone, have been embodied in a costume, donned by men who “start, swell, and stab at the word ‘cuckold,’” but “stumble at horns on every threshold” (I.i.116-18). As far as the costumed cuckolds are concerned, their costumes are made amusing by their confidence that they themselves have not been made cuckolds but instead have been making cuckolds of other men. Belville’s sardonic comment, however, suggests that these men have been made cuckolds, but that they have not yet become aware of their own cuckold status. Thus Belville calls into question—and potentially collapses—
the space that the costumed cuckolds have created between their own bodies and the costumes which cover those bodies. At the same time he places “the whole sex” into that space by noting that the men’s costumes are a satire against all men.

So, repeatedly throughout the play, the characters use their costumes and the spirit of the masquerade to ask how gender is embodied. Yet since The Rover makes the play’s entire world a masquerade, the questions that the texts asks about gendered embodiment have implications outside of the world of the masquerade and outside the words of the play. The real-world implications of the play become especially explicit through the prostitute Angellica Bianca. Angellica is the one character who does not seem to be directly participatory in the costuming of the masquerade, and we never see her on the stage dressed as anyone other than herself. While so many of the play’s other characters get caught up in the masquerade, Angellica insists on working outside of the masquerade system. When speaking of her approach to relationships, Angellica says: “inconstancy’s the sin of all mankind, therefore I’m resolved that nothing but gold shall charm my heart” (II.i.149-151). She therefore demonstrates an awareness of the false faces that the Rover and his fellow men show to her—two acts later she says to Willmore: “Dull man, that canst not see how ill, how poor, that false dissimulation looks. Begone and never let me see thy cozening face again, lest I relapse and kill thee”—and swears that she will only accept gold, believing that gold is something that cannot wear a costume to hide its true identity (IV.ii.401-4). So not only does Angellica remain un-costumed, she also attempts to remain entirely outside of the world of the masquerade.

But the masquerade encompasses all, and even Angellica becomes ensnared. She falls for Willmore’s charms despite herself, and realizes that she has used her own beauty in the same way that Willmore and the others use their masquerade costumes. Despite her seemingly stable
identity, the text still makes a space between her outside appearance and what that might represent. “In vain,” she says,

I have consulted all my charms, in vain this beauty prized, in vain believed my eyes could kindle any lasting fires; I had forgot my name, my infamy, and the reproach that honor lays on those that dare pretend a sober passion here. Nice reputation, though it leave behind more virtues than inhibit where that dwells… (IV.ii.415-22)

She acknowledges with these words although she may have believed her outward appearance and her identity to be one, she focused so much on that outward appearance that her identity disappeared; she lost her name, her infamy, her self. “Had I remained in innocent security,” she laments, “I should have thought all men were born my slaves, and worn my power like lightning in my eyes” (V.i.295-6). In other words, had she been able to continue to see her appearance and her identity as united, she would have been far more powerful, but this is the world of the masquerade and everyone, whether they choose to participate or not, wears a costume. Despite her efforts to be transparent about her profession, despite her efforts to set a clear and stable value on her own appearance, even Angellica ultimately must realize that the masquerade forces space between her appearance and her own embodiment.

In this world of the masquerade, where all bodies exist beneath ever-changing costumes, the ghosts of trans embodiment abound. Because an ethical reading of trans embodiment is one that acknowledges that trans identity requires recognition of the physical body, but it also depends upon linguistic, sartorial, and otherwise not-quite-flesh ways of being. An ethical reading of trans understands that both the flesh and the not-flesh are always present, always somehow connected, and always changing, morphing, slipping into and away from each other. An ethical reading of trans respects that what is flesh for one might be not-flesh for another, and
that a word, a costume, or an anatomy can be flesh, non-flesh, both, and/or neither at any time. An ethical reading of trans sees these bodies and these spaces, this flesh and this not-flesh, as the ghosts of trans embodiment to whom Derrida urges us to speak. Finally, an ethical reading of trans locates these specters within and across the hundreds of years of expressive cultural production that build our present and will carry us into our future. Such a reading locates them, it acknowledges them, and it *speaks* to them.
CONCLUSION

FIELDING’S FEARFUL PLEASURE:
THE FEMALE HUSBAND’S BODY

As the masquerade became increasingly popular over the course of the early eighteenth century, the general public gained access to the once highly transgressive act of taking on the persona of an Other. No longer was cross dressing reserved for the few actors and actresses who played roles in plays like The Country Wife and The Rover, but instead it became a popular and participatory act in public entertainment and celebration. As Castle argues, the widespread popularity of the masquerade does not entirely diminish its power to disrupt and dislocate societal understandings and norms in the early eighteenth century, but it does allow new tensions about the gendered body to develop. Such tensions appear throughout the rapidly-changing literature of the eighteenth century, but nowhere are they more pronounced than in Henry Fielding’s inflammatory 1746 pamphlet, The Female Husband. The questions about the gendered body—those that make up the ethically historic reading of the trans body that this project has built—change between the Restoration plays of the 1670s and the rise of the novel in the mid eighteenth century. Questions that were asked through the merry word play of The Country Wife and the gleeful transgression of The Rover become in Fielding’s pamphlet a sort of paranoia in which the author seems to take a certain amount of suppressed pleasure.

In 1959, Sheridan Baker called “The Female Husband” “an anonymous pamphlet so obscure and so nearly pornographic that its few acquaintances have passed it by, almost in complete silence” (213). The Female Husband, which despite its anonymous publication was almost certainly written by Fielding, is based somewhat loosely on the true story of Mary
Hamilton, a woman who was tried in the mid-seventeenth century for disguising herself as a man and marrying another woman. Fielding, embellishing liberally the true story of Mary Hamilton, tells a story which begins with Hamilton’s corruption at the hands of an older and sexually suspect woman and ends with the public conviction and punishment of Hamilton for her illicit marriage to the naïve Mary Price. Over the course of the brief pamphlet, then, Hamilton not only falls prey to and then spreads dangerous and clearly contagious same-sex desire, she manages to deceive countless people with her masculine disguise. Importantly, those deceived people are not just the women she marries and presumably has sex with, but are also the patients she treats when, in her disguised state, she becomes a fairly prominent and successful doctor.

The cross-dressing we see portrayed by Fielding in this pamphlet, however, is not the artistic gender play seen on the Restoration stage. While Wycherley, Behn, and other playwrights of the late seventeenth century used cross-dressing, word play, and the masquerade to bring their audiences into a space of suspended disbelief in regards to simplistic binary divisions of the gendered body, their plays’ exploration of gender rely upon an audience who is always at least somewhat aware that they are being deceived by the actors in front of them. Although we are forced to wonder whether language has the power to make Horner a eunuch, his non-eunuch status is always present as a foil to his supposed castration. Similarly, although characters in *The Rover* might temporarily become Other through the costumes of the masquerade, their own bodies always remain beneath the costumes, allowing the very space between body and costume that I have argued is so joyfully transgressive. In *The Female Husband*, however, Mary Hamilton’s disguised female body has a different and perhaps more dangerous kind of power.
Fielding makes clear from the beginning of his tale that he does not think highly of women between whom pass “transactions not fit to be mention’d” (31). His pamphlet begins with a stern dictum regarding the necessity of binary and heteronormative divisions of the sexes: “That propense inclination which is for very wise purposes implanted in one sex for the other,” he charges, “is not only necessary for the continuance of the human species; but is, at the same time, when govern’d and directed by virtue and religion, productive not only of corporeal delight, but of the most rational felicity” (29). Yet, as Terry Castle argues in a 1982 article about the pamphlet, despite his continual attempts to push Mary Hamilton away, Fielding seems hopelessly drawn to the cross-dressing woman, creating a mock heroic epic whose derisive tone cannot quite erase the power of the female husband body; “On one level,” writes Castle, “he is afraid of her and what she represents; on another, he delights in speaking of her” (608).

Most importantly for this project, the body and the language used to describe it again converge here in Fielding’s fearful discursive pleasure. Indeed, what Fielding so fearfully delights to speak of is Mary Hamilton’s transgressive and dangerous body. For Fielding, Mary Hamilton’s ultimate perilousness comes from her ability to deceive not just her patients and those around her, but the women that she presumably actually penetrates. Of course, Fielding cannot mention this directly. “To this widow,” Fielding notes of one such conquest, “our adventurer began presently to make addresses, and as he at present wanted tongue to express the ardency of his flame, he was obliged to make use of actions of endearment, such as squeezing, kissing, toying, etc” (35). Here Fielding slips—almost unconsciously, it seems—into masculine pronouns to refer to his heroine, but even more notable is his simultaneously direct and vague conflation of the tongue with the phallus. Metaphorically, the sentence seems to state that Hamilton is too overcome with lust to speak, and therefore must resort to expressing desire
through physical actions, yet the use of “tongue” as a metonym for words undeniably hints at Hamilton’s lack of a different organ.

While this reading might be seen as a return to the penis-having/penis-lacking binary that I called problematic in my introduction, placed in dialogue with the questions about the gendered body that I located in earlier Restoration drama, Fielding’s exploration of the female husband’s body cannot actually be reduced to such a simple issue of embodiment. The female husband’s body is linked inextricably for Fielding to the simultaneous danger and pleasure of speaking that body. Following the ghosts of trans in expressive cultural production beyond the Restoration, then, would necessarily rely upon a seventeenth-century worldview that the language and the body are always already connected while also acknowledging that conceptions of language and of the body were changing significantly in the early decades of the eighteenth century.
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