AMATORY CONVENTIONS, LUXURY TRADE, AND THE CULTURE OF EXCESS
IN THE RAPE OF THE LOCK, ROXANA, AND GULLIVER’S TRAVELS

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A THESIS
Submitted to the graduate faculty at The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2013
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ABSTRACT

This thesis expands scholarship in the study of amatory fiction by introducing three male canonical authors—Pope, Defoe, and Swift—into a body of criticism typically focused on female non-canonical authors. The authors’ awareness and engagement of the amatory template calls for a reconsideration of the profound role in which the amatory genre plays in the novel tradition.

I examine how amatory tropes are used in The Rape of the Lock, Roxana, and Gulliver’s Travels to satirize sexual politics in the domestic sphere, but I also extend amatory studies by positioning the authors’ satire in the public setting of a changing Britain. My research explores the ways in which Britain’s ascension as a growing capitalistic power and its strengthening as a force in international luxury trade inform the aforementioned literary texts; moreover, I argue that the authors’ engagement of the amatory temple demonstrates their anxieties about Britain’s growing ethos of commodification and consumption. My primary argument is that the conventions of amatory fiction are used to satirize sexual politics and to indict the culture of commodification fostered by capitalism and global luxury trade.

Keywords: amatory, satire, capitalism, luxury, trade, travel
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INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of my thesis is to expand scholarship in the study of amatory fiction by examining the use of amatory conventions in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1717), Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana* (1724), and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1735). My study will therefore introduce three male canonical authors into a body of criticism which has typically focused on female non-canonical authors. This critical approach allows for new ways of evaluating the cultural and literary impact of the amatory genre; more specifically, it builds upon the contributions of scholars who have challenged masculinist views regarding the genre’s influence in the invention of the early novel. In contrast with previous criticism of amatory fiction, which has typically positioned its satire of sexual politics within the domestic sphere, I also aim to expand this body of criticism by positioning the aforementioned authors’ satire within the public sphere of Britain’s international luxury trade. I will show how Pope, Defoe, and Swift use amatory conventions to satirize sexual politics in ways that demonstrate their unease about luxury trade and the culture of commodification and consumption it generates.

My thesis is comprised of three central claims about the influence of amatory conventions in *The Rape of the Lock*, *Roxana*, and *Gulliver’s Travels*. The first claim is that each author uses amatory conventions to satirize ideologically restrictive cultural assumptions regarding gender and the distinctive roles of behavior assigned to men and women. In this unique respect, the satirical and rhetorical ambitions of Pope, Defoe, and Swift are not unlike those of female amatory authors (most notably, the “fair
Triumvirate\(^{1}\) of Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Delarivier Manley), whose fiction frequently dramatizes sexual politics—a term I will later define in more detail, but for immediate purposes it points simply to a fierce competition for multiple forms of power existing between the sexes. My second claim is that each author uses amatory conventions to express coded anxieties about the growth of commercialism and consumption in Britain, a cultural shift enabled by a changing economy and global luxury trade. My final claim entails a convergence of the first two: amatory conventions are used in the process of treating sexual politics as symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange. My argument is that the aforementioned works use amatory conventions to satirize sexual politics and to depict with irony the business of luxury trade in early eighteenth century Britain. More specifically, my claim is that each of these canonical male authors uses amatory tropes to show that the sexual politics which he depicts is defined by developments in the British luxury trade.

Since the publication of A.D McKillop’s *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (1956) and Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), scholars have challenged both critics on the basis of their exclusive positioning of male authors at the center of the novel’s historical origins. Revisionist history, however, has recovered a mass of domestic fiction produced by women during the eighteenth century which in fact “dominated the production of the early novel in Britain” (Backscheider and Richetti ix). The popular success of novels by female authors has been linked by Watt to the emergence of the British middle class, which consisted of a large number of female readers who possessed the leisure time to read for pleasure. For the female authors who enjoyed this success,

\(^{1}\) Janet Todd also calls them the “naughty Triumvirate,” a clever means of branding the racy themes within the amatory genre; see: Todd, Janet. *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction 1660-1800.* London: Virago, 1989.
their popularity signified a reorganization of power in early eighteenth century British culture that in turn established a precedent for women to follow in the pursuit of financial autonomy and success in the public space of the literary marketplace.

In her influential text *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Nancy Armstrong links the history of the novel to the history of female sexuality. Her critical approach in turn influenced scholarship centrally focused upon the sub-genre of amatory fiction. The amatory genre was initially viewed as escapist propaganda for the status quo, but scholars most notably since the 1980’s have worked with diligence to restore its credibility. While it is more than reasonable to consider that the popularity of amatory fiction by authors such as Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Delarivier Manley can be explained in part by their short length and affordability, critical assumptions that reduce the genre to nothing more than lurid and scandalous entertainment are guilty of overlooking its potential to use popular formulas “for its own political, ideological, comic, or tragic purposes, which is precisely what on a different scale Richardson and Fielding sought to do in their novels” (Backscheider and Richetti xii). In consideration of amatory fiction’s contentious place in the larger history of the novel, Toni Bowers is wise to question “how our assumptions about literary value still work to valorize some voices and exclude others” (“Sex, Lies, and Invisibility” 70). Increased critical attention has thus been aimed to not only defend the amatory genre but

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2 Nancy Armstrong, Paula R. Backscheider, Ros Ballaster, Toni Bowers, Laura Brown, Catherine Ingrassia, Kathryn R. King, and John J. Richetti have all produced particularly valuable resources in the field of amatory studies.


to fully explore its covert satirical and rhetorical goals—in a broad sense, I believe that amatory authors critique the means by which men and (especially) women are ideologically defined and restricted during this period in early eighteenth century Britain. I also believe that amatory authors use their fiction to construct alternative realities as a form of self-empowerment and escape from such restrictions.

Amatory fiction has a rich tradition of examining the female experience. Backscheider and Richetti, for instance, describe feminist perceptions of the genre as one “dramatizing the universal and replicated condition of women in the patriarchy” (xiii). Likewise, Ros Ballaster discusses in Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740 (1992) how profoundly gender, class, and sociopolitical and ideological issues inform the amatory genre. Due to a covert interest in how society constructs and enforces gender identities, amatory fiction serves as an apt medium for critiquing sexual politics—a phrase I define in specific reference to the methods of role-playing and bullying enacted by both genders in the ruthless pursuit of material, intellectual, psychological or sexual dominance over one another. The genre’s critique of sexual politics is of course aided by amatory conventions, which are deployed by the “fair Triumvirate” of Behn, Haywood, and Manley.

The amatory plot commonly includes a female who is young, inexperienced, and so fragile in physical and mental constitution that she can easily be defrauded by the predatory male. As Bowers explains, that male is often “married already; usually he is of aristocratic birth; [and] frequently he is the young woman’s relative or guardian” (“Sex, Lies, and Invisibility” 52). Not only do amatory plots allow for possibilities of rape and

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5 For a fine summary of not only Ballaster’s text but also of other feminist scholarship on amatory genre, see Catherine Ingrassia’s Introduction to A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture, eds. Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2009): 1-17.
incest, they place young women in what Bowers calls a “double-bind”—women lacking sexual experience are vulnerable to conniving male predators; women with sexual experience are whores (“Sex, Lies, and Invisibility” 53). Particularly in Haywood’s works, however, the amatory plot is often complicated by subversions of its own tropes—females, for instance, may use their seductive powers to manipulate males, who in turn are rendered as caricatures of gullibility and beastly lasciviousness. The effects of this subversion are to highlight a fierce and more leveled competition for power between men and women within the reality of the works themselves; to likewise challenge the cultural assumption that seduction for the female is not an end point but rather is “the beginning of the heroine’s history” (Hultquist 142); and finally, to fulfill a fantasy for female readers who may wish to explore notions of female sexuality and alternative systems of morality. Contextually, this subversion also represents a tense literary environment that now includes women as viable competitors with men for both material and symbolic profit.

Analysis of the attention given to sexual politics in amatory fiction leads to fascinating revelations about an emerging shift in ideological values in Britain during this period. While Kathryn R. King’s scholarship focuses largely on subjects of sexuality and feminist rhetoric in amatory fiction, her description of the genre as one centrally interested in “heterosexual economy” is both useful and profound because it locates economics as a subtext to sexual politics (Jane Barker 7). For instance, the amatory trope in which the male seizes the female’s valuable sexual currency points in fairly obvious

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6 Consider, for instance, the heroines of the following two works, both of whom are willingly seduced: one, The British Recluse; or, The Secret History of Cleomira, Suppos’d Dead (1722) in Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730, eds. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford U. Press, 1996); and two, Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze (1724), in Fantomina and Other Works, eds. Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery, and Ann C. Patchias (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004.)
ways to an economic discourse existing in the genre. Other critics such as Nancy Armstrong, Catherine Ingrassia\(^7\), and Colin Nicholson\(^8\) examine in a more direct manner how the influence of a changing economy and Britain’s breakthrough success in global luxury trade has led to considerable alterations to British value systems. In this regard, one can look to sexual politics in amatory fiction as symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange. As mentioned previously, my thesis aims to expand amatory studies by analyzing how canonical male authors like Pope, Defoe, and Swift—authors not commonly paired with the amatory genre—use amatory conventions to satirize sexual politics and to express their anxieties about Britain’s new ethos of commodification and consumption, a cultural shift enabled by a changing economy and global luxury trade.

The structure of my thesis traces a chronological progression in the authors’ use of amatory tropes. In each successive work, the satiric tone darkens. I am interested in why this tonal shift occurs and what it suggests about each author’s unique satirical response to the increased pervasiveness of pre-industrialization and urbanization in Britain and continental Europe. As a method of literary analysis, I will engage the conventions of the amatory plot because such a reading allows for a nuanced interpretation of how Pope, Defoe, and Swift depict sexual politics as well as newly-emergent attitudes regarding materialism and other forms of exchange. As a strategy for contextual analysis, I will incorporate research by William J. Bernstein and Colin


Nicholson on the growing culture of commercialism and consumption enabled by a changing economy and the luxury trade business during the late seventeenth and early-to-mid eighteenth centuries. I will also rely heavily on British consumption studies, led by Linda Levy Peck and Lorna Weatherill, both of whom locate the arrival of new goods, new modes of shopping, and the rebranding of identities through consumables during this period.

My contextual analysis in the chapters will show that each author rejects the specific excesses of the consumer revolution and uses the conventions of amatory fiction to satirize sexual politics and to depict the deterioration of traditional values in British culture. Chapter One will focus on Pope’s The Rape of the Lock, a playful, Horatian-rich mock-heroic and amatory idyll in which luxury items and not people are heroes. Chapter Two will focus on Defoe’s Roxana, a text that uses conventions of amatory fiction to confront the moral issues that emerge when one equates happiness to luxury and capital. Finally, Chapter Three will focus on Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, a brutal indictment of contemporary Britain that parodies the conventions of amatory fiction to posit a direct (albeit implicit) correlation to Gulliver’s dehumanization and self-hatred. Cumulatively, the chapters demonstrate how the conventions of amatory fiction can be used to satirize sexual politics and indict luxury trade and the culture of commodification it fosters.
CHAPTER ONE, THE RAPE OF THE LOCK (1717)

In order to explain how Pope uses amatory tropes in *The Rape of the Lock* to signify his indictment of luxury trade and a growing culture of commodification, contextual groundwork must first be laid. The structure of Chapter One will consist of several segments, each of which will be distinguished by a relevant subtitle. I will begin with a cursory account of global trade during the late seventeenth century, a period that paved way to England’s economic expansion. Discussion of public credit and the considerable impact England’s financial revolution had on Pope’s work will then follow. Briefly, I will also address Pope’s own precarious involvement in print capitalism as well as his status as a cultural outsider in order to provide a plausible biographical link that helps to explain the author’s representations of sexual politics. My analysis of Pope’s many allusions to global luxury trade will alternate between textual evidence of such and contextual evidence of contemporary consumption studies. Finally, I will examine Pope’s use of amatory tropes in *The Rape of the Lock*.

My textual analysis will be divided into two discrete structural units. The first will focus on Pope’s indictment of luxury trade, which is achieved by the author’s parody of classical literary traditions and by his multiple satirical allusions to imported luxury items. Pope subverts heroic tropes to stress the demise of heroic standards. In this reality void of heroes, it is the greed for material ownership that renders both Belinda and the Baron positively *unheroic*. In a comical displacement of the divine, Belinda’s apparition takes the form of a dream in which purchasable commodities are fetishized. Pope parodies the ritualized arming of the hero, the epic catalogue, and likewise personifies objects as deities to be exalted and worshipped. The ample allusions to luxury goods in
private space and in fashionable arenas of public space are also central to Pope’s satire of mercantile culture. Pope references all kinds of imported luxury goods that include jewelry, perfume, cosmetic tools, silk petticoats, coffee, tea, tobacco, china, and various pieces of imported furniture. Belinda’s ownership of many of the aforementioned items determines her as an emblem of the seductive powers of materiality. Moreover, as an objectified commodity, Belinda’s worship of her own material beauty is matched by a society complicit in that same false worship. Central to Pope’s satire of luxury trade is Belinda and the world of luxury with which she interacts and ultimately symbolizes.

The second unit of my textual analysis will feature an examination of how Pope uses amatory conventions to satirize sexual politics and ironically depict the luxury trade business. Of course, at the heart of Pope’s satire of sexual politics is the Baron’s pursuit of Belinda, who fits the role of the amatory heroine because she is sexually inexperienced and a highly-desirable commodity; similarly, the Baron’s commodification of Belinda and his subsequent plotting to seize her most prized asset determines him as a reproduction of male antagonists common to amatory fiction. I will explore Pope’s appropriation of the amatory plot and his subversion of the amatory seduction scene, which humorously places the violation of one’s chastity on equal footing with the shattering of a fragile imported luxury item. I will also show how the mock-battles performed by Belinda and the Baron are allusive to the amatory staging of sexual politics in which both genders adopt methods of role-playing and other forms of subterfuge in the process of seeking dominance over one another. The mock-battles playfully dramatize their sexual tension and feature a discourse rife with sexual imagery and veiled sexual threats. Examination of the mock-battles will in turn show how these interactions
function as symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange—all coded references to luxury trade and Britain’s culture of consumption. Pope’s satirical treatment of sexual politics is therefore a means to express his indictment of Britain’s changing value systems.

I. The Rise of Global Luxury Trade and Finance Capitalism

As an introduction to my argument that Pope satirizes luxury trade and Britain’s emerging culture of commodification and consumption, it is useful to first consider William J. Bernstein’s panoptic study of global commerce and his explanation of how the ascent of England’s stature as a formidable trading nation coincided with the breakthrough success of the English East India Company. In *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World* (2008), Bernstein explains that when the Turks were finally driven from Vienna by an Austrian army largely comprised of Poles, they “left behind not only their hope of conquering Europe, but also large stocks of oxen, camels, tents, and gold” (248)—a small example of the inventory that would soon become more accessible to the West. In conjunction with the 1683 Battle of Vienna, England’s rapid commercial growth was aided first by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and later by the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689. Bernstein posits that the Revolutionary Settlement in particular “turbocharged England’s economy” and “made the British the most avid coffee drinkers in Europe” (249). By 1700 the British were now consuming one of the era’s

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9 The Dutch Protestant, Willem III, and his English wife, Mary, formed an alliance to overthrow the last Catholic monarch, James II. Willem, now King William, dealt away the ancient divine right of kings and elevated parliament to governmental supremacy. In exchange, Parliament gave William a tax base of levies (especially on luxury commodities such as coffee) to pay for his war against Louis XIV and France.

10 The establishment of a crown excise tax made it easier for the British government to pay off its debts; this in turn led to dramatically lowered interest rates.
great luxury commodities, a clear indication that European commercial supremacy had shifted to London.\footnote{For a detailed analysis of coffee craze in Britain during the early eighteenth century, see Chapter 10 of Bernstein’s \textit{A Splendid Exchange} (New York: Grove Press, 2008): 241-279.}

England’s economic expansion, largely facilitated by the global trading industry, paved way to the development of public credit. Both changes were instrumental in prefiguring a new economic order of finance capitalism and the industrial revolution of a later period. By the end of the Nine Years War of 1688-1697, the political vocabulary of all writers of this era began to alter significantly. Colin Nicholson’s claim that the Bank of England and the National Debt\footnote{This was created when the state promised to pay its creditors out of revenues yet to be collected.} “transformed the relationship of the citizen to the state” seems especially apt in light of the writings of the Hanoverian Opposition, whose work (including that of Pope, Defoe, and Swift, among others) stressed “nostalgia for Aristotelian notions of freehold and real property as the foundations of personality and value” (\textit{Writing and the Rise of Finance} 4). The Bank of England created a paper-money economy of credit that led to the emergence of “classes whose property consisted not of land or goods or even bullion, but of paper promises to repay in an undefined future” (Nicholson, \textit{Writing and the Rise of Finance} 7). Paper credit, as a form of immaterial property, threatened an old-world ethos in which land was perceived as a stable and tangible signification of one’s political and social subjectivity. The writings of Tory neo-classicists thus demonstrated an extreme discomfort with a modern society that promoted social mobility and in turn resisted England’s traditional balance of power between kings, lords, and commoners.
II. The Influence of a Changing England on Pope

Pope’s own relationship to the sociopolitical and economic landscape in England during his lifetime was as unique as it was complicated. In his renowned biography of the author, Maynard Mack observes that Pope adopted political attitudes and promoted associations that were both reactionary and nostalgic while he simultaneously profited handsomely from a new economic order that gave birth to print capitalism. Pope, for instance, used the popular success of The Rape of the Lock to advertise his forthcoming translation of Homer’s Iliad. When he then produced the Iliad, Pope revolutionized retailing methods by releasing it in annual installments. Subscription editions had appeared before—like Dryden’s translation of Virgil in 1697. Pope, however, improved on Dryden’s example: instead of a single large volume in folio that required one payment, Pope marketed the Iliad in six “more manageable” volumes and offered them for sale in “five payments spread over five years” (Mack 266-67).

The increased installments meant more profit for Pope, his bookseller, and his printer. Moreover, by reducing the size of the folios, Pope “effectively promoted a ‘pocket-sized’ penetration of the domestic market and so helped to engineer its fashionable provenance in England” (Nicholson, “The Mercantile Bard” 78). Already an astute self-promoter in the literary marketplace, Pope was also a pioneer in the publishing industry. Pope became his own publisher by taking control of decisions relating to font type, font size, layout, paper quality, and illustration. Considering Pope’s opposition to an economic reality that made social mobility possible, what emerges in even a peripheral

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study of his biographical relationship to print capitalism is potentially a serious conflict between an ideology in theory and one in practice.

Critics such as Laura Brown, Catherine Ingrassia, and Colin Nicholson argue that Pope’s commercial preoccupation derived not so much from a desire for material greed but rather from an insatiable ambition to trump his competition in the literary marketplace. Ingrassia equates the literary environment at Grub Street to the “social fluidity, transgressive behavior, and speculative economic activity that marked Exchange Alley” (“Authorship” 40). Pope found himself at odds with a transforming literary culture that threatened an old-world literary hierarchy. The poet or gentleman-author was now competing with women and other so-called “hack writers;” authors such as Behn, Haywood, and Manley were among the most popular writers of fiction in England during the period of 1680 and 1740. While the literary merit of this particular “low-brow” fiction is a different subject entirely, Pope sensed that his own literary currency was at risk of being devalued if he could not attract serious-minded readers and in high numbers. By taking control of over nearly every aspect of merchandising his own product, Pope sought financial and creative autonomy in order to maximize his limited sense of personal power.

Much has been documented regarding Pope’s marginalized status as a Catholic living in a rigidly Protestant nation. While biographical evidence suggests that Pope did not devoutly practice his family’s faith, his allegiance to it resulted in punishment by law. Recusancy Acts denied Pope a formal classical education, political involvement, or the possession of property within London. Thomas Woodman argues that Pope’s religious

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marginalization may help to explain the author’s problematic status as a business entrepreneur who opposed finance capitalism\(^\text{17}\), with the inference being that Pope’s business ventures were a means of reclaiming power denied to him by the republic. Ingrassia views Pope’s religious persecution as instances in which the author was “denied access to the public activities that authenticated masculine power” (“Authorship” 45). She suggests that Pope’s aggressive involvement with print capitalism functions as a performative display of masculinity, a strategy of compensation for psychic inadequacies resulting from a lifetime plagued by physical disabilities, physical pain and deformity, and likely sexual impotence. In *Lives of the English Poets* (1781), Samuel Johnson explains that Pope “was not able to dress or undress himself, and neither went to bed nor rose without help” (263)—evidence which supports Ingrassia’s assertion that Pope’s dependence on others left him emasculated and frustrated by his physical limitations. Both Woodman and Ingrassia provide compelling insights that help to explain Pope’s involvement with print capitalism and his drive to succeed in the public sphere of the literary marketplace.

III. A Brief Critical Approach to *The Rape of the Lock*

Pope’s keen sensitivity to the radical changes currently in motion during his lifetime informed the author as he constructed, revised, expanded, and finally reissued *The Rape of the Lock* in 1717. As a mock-epic, the formal characteristics of the work suggest a tension between past and present codes of value—a tension that Pope himself was clearly struggling with. The opening of trade from the East, the financial revolution,

and the emergence of a more competitive and versatile literary marketplace all deeply affected Pope’s disposition as a cultural critic and literary artist. More personally, as an outsider in matters religious, social, material, and even psychosexual, Pope’s marginalization influenced his work as he adopted the task of critiquing British mercantile society in *The Rape of the Lock*.

At the forefront of Pope’s critique is a satirical dramatization of sexual politics which owes much to the conventions of amatory fiction. Belinda (backed by her army of Sylphs) is in competition with the ever-lurking Baron for material, intellectual, psychological, and/or sexual authority. Their mock-heroic battles function as symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange; the battles are allusions to the new socioeconomic order that Pope so strongly opposed. As Nicholson succinctly puts it, *The Rape of the Lock* is a work that “becomes a suitable frame for connecting commerce with changing ways of feeling and evaluation” (“The Mercantile Bard” 87). Amatory tropes are deployed by Pope to accomplish similar feats: to examine a more leveled competition for power between the sexes; to highlight the commodification of the individual; and to satirize England’s growing consumer culture and its newfound infatuation with imported luxury items. The primary effect of Pope’s use of amatory tropes is to bind together his many satirical and rhetorical objectives.

IV. Pope’s Formal Parody and His Satire of Global Luxury Trade

Formal characteristics of *The Rape of the Lock* serve to amplify the work’s reactionary rhetoric and aid in its satirical efficacy. As a Tory neo-classicist whose ideological position meant that he valorized an aristocratic cultural order, Pope’s use of
classical literary traditions has political resonance in its alignment with a poetics of opposition\textsuperscript{18}. The rhetorical effect of his parody of the heroic is to stress the demise of old heroic standards. Evidence of such is first apparent in Pope’s use of rhyming couplets instead of blank verse, which was as much a reaction to contemporary trends in poetry as it was an implicit refutation of the changing literary milieu at Grub Street. Canto I is marked by the author’s ironic subversion of heroic tropes, a satirical and rhetorical strategy deployed throughout the poem. A heroic protagonist, for instance, is absent, and the role is instead assigned to Belinda, who is neither male nor a warrior, or even noble born. The poem begins with an overview of the conflict yet to come. Important political or religious events, ordinarily common subjects among epic poetry, are replaced by a description of moral and social crimes: a “well-bred lord” assails a “gentle belle” (I, 8); later, the belle rejects the lord. The assault of the belle is deemed “strange” (I, 7), while the belle’s rejection of her predator is deemed “stranger” still (I, 9). Pope’s careful syntax prefigures his satirical depictions of a reality in which traditional codes of value are upended, reversed, or missing altogether.

It is not uncommon for the gods of classical epics to communicate with the hero by means of apparitions during sleep. Pope subverts this trope by staging Belinda’s sexual fantasy, a dream in which purchasable commodities displace human passion and become the focal point of human desire. In a parody of the epic catalogue, a vast inventory of acquired luxury items is featured in Belinda’s bedroom and likewise during her dream; this inventory includes white curtains, a lapdog, a down pillow, fine clothes,

“golden crowns and wreaths of heavenly flowers” (I, 34), and “gilded chariots” (I, 55).

Epic battles, which are featured at great length in Canto II and Canto III, are first parodied in Pope’s description of a “militia” of Sylphs (I, 43), who are designated as protectors of Belinda’s chastity from a “treacherous friend” (I, 73)—a clear allusion to amatory tropes that cast the male as the predatory schemer. Belinda’s potential victim-status, however, is complicated by her failure to absorb the Sylphs’ celestial warnings against the dangers of female vanity. In her dream, she fetishizes emblems of nobility that include descriptions of “garters, stars, and coronets” (I, 85). Distracted by objects of fashionable display, Belinda’s capacity for love is equated to a “moving toyshop” stocked with frivolous merchandise (I, 100). When she awakens from the dream, it is no surprise that she immediately forgets the Sylphs’ warnings because she receives a love letter filled with “wounds, charms, and ardors” (I, 119). Pope’s parody of the epic facilitates his indictment of a mercantile society that renders romantic love faceless and reduces desire to a commodified thing.

Pope characterizes Belinda as an objectified commodity; her external beauty, which is worshipped by Belinda herself, contrasts with an ugly interior that values this objectification above all else. Belinda covets her reflection, a “heavenly image” in glass (I, 125); the Sylphs decorate the sacred altar that is her face and body; fashionable society reveres her as a “goddess” (I, 133). Pope’s strategy is to implicate everyone, human or supernatural, in Belinda’s fraud. From Pope’s perspective, the rhetorical effect is to extend his contextual satire of a society complicit in the false worship of luxury items; within the narrative itself, Pope’s rhetoric shows that the universe has lost its moral compass and therefore its sense of sound judgment. The collective error is to then assume
that external beauty is a fair measure of one’s interior value. In a manner consistent with Pope’s mock-epic scheme, Belinda’s cosmetic rites in the dressing room simultaneously extend Pope’s rhetorical logic and function as a parody of the ritualized arming of the hero: she “arms” (I, 139) herself with “various offerings of the world” (I, 130) that include gems from India, perfumes from Arabia, and combs of tortoise and ivory from Africa (I, 133-35). “Decked with all that land and sea afford” (V, 11), Belinda’s body becomes a prop for globalized luxury adornments. Belinda is the embodiment of material glitz; she in turn is rendered as a symbol of the seductive powers of materiality.

In his 1980 study of *The Rape of the Lock*, Louis Landa does not engage the subject of Pope’s satirical and rhetorical objectives. Landa instead examines how Belinda’s style would be received by a contemporary audience. He asserts that the dressing room scene determines Belinda’s status as both an emblematic trendsetter and as a symbol of England’s “greatness as a trading nation” (180). Landa also contends that many contemporary readers of Pope would have been envious of Belinda’s luxury but pleased by the references to such imported items: “They testify to the vast expansion of England’s trade in the seventeenth century and to the search for exotic commodities in remote lands” (180). Examination of popular contemporary journals such as the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* serve to strengthen Landa’s claims that Belinda’s style is a reflection of new consumer trends in Britain. In a 1710 issue of the *Tatler*, for instance, Joseph Addison insists that a woman’s beauty should be complimented by “furs and feathers, pearls and diamonds, ores and silks” (No. 116, 5 Jan 1710). Addison’s description suggests that exploration and global trade helped to reconstruct society’s criteria for

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evaluating standards of the ideal female. Addison makes a similar claim in the *Spectator*:
“The single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates”
(No. 69, 19 May 1711). Quality for the female is now redefined to accommodate the
influx of luxury items; more importantly, the new emphasis placed on luxury items meant
that easily-accessible commodities were becoming cultural signifiers of one’s good taste
and social value. This meant that anyone with the wealth—regardless of their inherited
social class—could be grouped with persons of Quality on entirely superficial terms.

Of course, Landa acknowledges that not all contemporary readers of *The Rape of
the Lock* would view Belinda’s ownership of imported luxury items in such a positive
light. Given the goals of his satire, it is obvious that Pope himself was opposed to both
Belinda’s excessive consumption of materiality and the value to which she assigned
luxury items. Landa identifies the scene featuring Belinda’s petticoat as one that would
likely give offense to some contemporary readers. The narrative context prior to the scene
is worth noting because Pope’s satirical strategies are in full force. Ariel summons an
army of Sylphs and designates to each of them their duties. The duties alternate between
the serious and the ridiculous, only both are treated on equal footing. Reminding Belinda
to pray and protecting her chastity and her heart from potential predators is discussed
with the same urgency as preventing a stain on “her new brocade” or a flaw in “some
frail china jar” (II, 106-7), missing a masquerade, losing a necklace or a pair of earrings.
Special mention is then made of “the important charge” of protecting Belinda’s petticoat
(II, 118); in fact, the guarding of the petticoat is so vital that “fifty chosen Sylphs, of
special note” are chosen to protect it (II, 117)—presumably more than any other object,
including her chastity or her heart. Landa’s hypothesis is that the petticoat was almost
certainly very expensive and was more than likely “made of silk or satin . . . or any of various Indian silks” (188); such is why Pope so humorously amplifies the object’s importance. Landa explains that readers bothered by the extravagance of the purchase would likely label Belinda an “economic sinner” (Landa 189). From a mercantilist’s perspective, Belinda’s ownership of a silk petticoat would also signify “an economic evil of the first order” because silk frequently came from England’s main trade rival, France (189). Landa’s point is that in one respect Belinda is admired by contemporary readers for her glamorous style, and she is exalted as an emblematic figure of the nation’s strength in trade and transnational commerce; in another respect, however, Belinda is villainized for her material indulgence and is even posited as a national traitor. If Landa’s hypothesis is correct, the audience’s capricious response is a testament to Pope’s dramatization of the dangers of assigning meaning and value solely on the criteria of the goods that people own.

Even a cursory glance at British consumption studies of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries pays dividends with respect to understanding the contextual background of Pope’s allusions to specific imported luxury items during this period of the consumer revolution. Economist and cultural critic, Linda Levy Peck, asserts that men and women “sought to share a Western European culture that was expressed in what they read, how they lived, what they wore, where they went, what they built, and who they imagined themselves to be” (5). Lorna Weatherill’s research on probate inventories of 1660-1740 in England provides further support to Peck’s claims regarding the influence of consumables in the development and reshaping of British identity. Weatherill’s study of probate inventories identifies what men and women owned and
most valued. Her research unearths data suggestive of notable alterations to personal and social habits taking place inside the domestic space of middle-ranking households. New social codes at the table, for instance, were marked by increased ownership of knives and forks; new interests in interior design were marked by increased ownership of window curtains, table linen, and pictures. More people were also purchasing books, which suggested more leisure time to cultivate developing interests in the literary world. An increase in clock ownership reflected the need to know time. Clock ownership likely indicated people’s desire to organize social activities both inside and outside of the home.

Weatherill also discovers that the ownership of utensils used for hot drinks and china “increased enormously . . . by 1725” (140). This of course points to new drinking habits aided by the relatively recent influx of luxury items such as tea and coffee.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth century, coffee and tea were at the center of London’s commercial revolution. Roger Schmidt explains that coffee shops and tea houses of this period were “becoming important institutions for political, economic, and cultural transactions” (131). Bernstein echoes Schmidt in his observation that no group more than England’s merchant class welcomed “the pharmacological boost to stamina and mental sharpness” provided by coffee and tea (248). Similarly, David Liss refers to the items as “the drinks of commerce” (15). It is of little contention, then, that coffee and tea sustained considerable cultural and economic value in England, particularly in public space. Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, on the other hand, challenges the notion that these goods were universally popular. She argues that while men equally enjoyed coffee, tea, and chocolate in London coffee houses, tea became a commodity most commonly associated with the feminized
domain of domestic space. Kowaleski-Wallace references William Congreve’s *The Double Dealer* to show that as early as 1694 tea-drinkers were perceived as idle gossipers; the character of Mellefont, for instance, satirizes the ladies in the narrative as retiring to “tea and scandal, according to their ancient custom” (Congreve 121). It is fascinating to note, too, that the energizing effects of tea were refuted as often as they were praised. Kowaleski-Wallace locates Jonas Hanway’s 1757 “An Essay on Tea” as evidence of such; in his offensive diatribe, Hanway writes, “With regard to the custom of sipping tea, we seem to act more wantonly and absurdly than even the Chinese” (17). Hanway treats tea-drinking as a domesticated act that is indulgent and specifically effeminate; even worse, he considers the money spent on the importing of tea as money that could instead be spent on improving the nation. Deemed guilty of damaging England’s economy, the consumer of tea is thus aligned with the “economic sinner” who purchases foreign silk imported from France (Landa 189). Studies by Landa, Weatherill, and Kowaleski-Wallace demonstrate the ways in which imported luxury items are assigned and come to develop specific political and social meanings. In this new culture of commodification, the emphasis placed on luxury goods meant that society was now refashioning human personality on the basis of the goods people owned.

Pope’s references to imported luxury items in Canto I establish Belinda’s status as an objectified commodity whose external value is enhanced by the items she owns. Canto II marks a narrative transition into the public arena, where Belinda’s value as a commodity is tested in the public marketplace. Belinda, of course, is a triumph of fashion and desirability: “Fair nymphs and well-dressed youths around her shone, / But every eye was fixed on her alone” (II, 6-7). Her radiance rivals the sun, and the effect of her beauty
seems even to elevate the value of the natural world surrounding her. As Belinda sets sail down the Thames for Hampton Court, Pope describes “clouds of gold” (II, 60) and “the richest tincture of the skies” (II, 65). The economic diction assigned to nature suggests a kind of symbiotic relationship or reciprocity shared between Belinda, the luxury she both adorns and signifies, and the external world. This is a moment in which the commodification of Belinda by public admirers is so pervasive that it has altered subjective reality. Removed from any narrative context, the descriptions of Belinda interacting with nature are lyrical and romantic. For Pope, however, the scene is simply a rhetorical extension of the idea that a culture seduced by commodities loses the skill of objective evaluation; here the public sees only through the distorted lens of the commodity (or commodities) it most desires—Belinda, in her constructed artifice as a ravishing beauty, puts a spell on her most devoted admirers.

If public worship of Belinda stresses a crisis of reason, the worship of objects as deities stresses a crisis of spirituality. The inference is that material goods have replaced the divine, and that the subjective reality within the poem is defined by a disconcerting ambiguity regarding who or what is in control of human affairs. This motif is established in Canto I when Belinda is in reverential awe of “cosmetic powers” that elevate her beauty (I, 124). The “sacred” space of the dressing room is compared to an “altar” (I, 126-7). Belinda, of course, also worships luxury items, the “unnumbered treasures” given to her by admirers (I, 129). The Baron worships Belinda’s lock and has a history of hoarding relics of former romances; in a ritualistic effigy, he sacrifices his relics at an altar to Love. Pope’s naming of deities after objects used by Belinda extends the motif of idolatry and material worship. The mock deities are objects personified; the difference

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20 The emphasis is mine on both accounts.
here, however, is that Belinda does not serve the deities but rather they serve her:

Zephyretta’s job is to guard her “fluttering fan” (II, 112); Brillante must protect her earrings; Momentilla guards her watch; and Crispissa (from the Latin *crispere*, “to curl”) is in charge of Belinda’s precious Lock. Such a role-reversal suggests that traditional codes of value are upended or altogether non-existent. Even supernatural figures of some authority lack the potency to impact the material world. Ariel, for instance, has the power to summon an army of Sylphs, but when the crucial time arrives to protect Belinda’s lock, he cannot save Belinda from her own self-destructive carnal desires. Idolatrous prayer and worship signify bankrupt forms of spiritual commerce. Pope’s assertion is that a culture corrupted by commodification in turn corrupts the world of the divine.

Belinda’s arrival at Hampton Court in Canto III signals Pope’s interplay of allusions to imported luxury items with his satire of court culture. The boat by which Belinda sails down the Thames is an allusion to global travel and trade; Belinda is thus commodified as an imported luxury item received by the royal palace. Pope references the imported luxury item of tea in Canto I: “Soft yielding minds to water glide away, / And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental tea” (I, 61-2). In his characterization of “soft yielding minds,” Pope equates indecisive (or possibly mindless or banal) women with those who drink tea; this of course points to negative cultural representations of tea-drinkers discussed by Kowaleski-Wallace. The social custom of tea-drinking is referenced again at Hampton: “Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea” (III, 7-8). The syntax of Pope’s couplet posits tea-drinking as an idle custom in opposition to the productive act of taking counsel for purposes of governing. Queen Anne’s consumption of tea likewise stresses the
popularity of tea as a fashionable commodity. Further references to imported luxury items demonstrate the extent to which commodities pervade court culture and in turn influence the social customs and values of its inhabitants. The rhetorical strategy employed in Canto II (one that makes no distinction between the importance of protecting Belinda’s chastity and protecting items in her possession) is repeated at court, only here the social elite revere “the glory of the British Queen” in the same manner as they do “a charming Indian screen” (III, 13-14). In Pope’s rendering of court culture, the elite gossip as they sip imported coffee from imported cups at “the shining altars” of a Japanese table (III, 107); they smoke Chinese tobacco and play the Spanish card game of Ombre. There is perhaps nothing more symbolically British than the royal palace, and yet Pope litters this space with imported commodities in order to show how luxury trade has redefined British social behavior and in turn altered the makeup of British identity.

Pope’s repeated allusions to the business of luxury trade facilitate his critique of a culture that has deviated from traditional values and subsequently lost its anchoring sense of morality. The narrative scheme of The Rape of the Lock stages Pope’s argument that a culture defined by luxury trade renders romantic love faceless, reduces desire to yet another form of commodification, and leads to a refashioning of both individual and national identity. With the intention of now transitioning into an examination of Pope’s use of amatory tropes in the work, it is vital to recall that amatory fiction commonly explores the motif of sexual politics—a term that points to the ways in which both genders adopt methods of role-playing and other forms of subterfuge in order to achieve material, intellectual, psychological, or sexual dominance over one another. The sexual politics existing between Belinda and the Baron function in much the same manner, and
Pope in turn characterizes both figures as creations that could fit comfortably within the confines of the amatory plot. Their interactions serve as further symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange—all coded references to luxury trade and the culture of consumption it promotes. If this ethos of consumption can be compared to a disease, the sexual politics between Belinda and the Baron are symptoms of that disease.

V. The Role of Amatory Tropes in *The Rape of the Lock*

While previous critical discussion of Canto I focused primarily on Pope’s use of formal parody and on the establishment of the poem’s satirical and rhetorical objectives, revisiting the second stanza of Canto I reveals the author’s playful appropriation of the standard amatory plot: a “well-bred lord” assaults a “gentle belle” (I, 8); later, the belle rejects the lord; the assault of the belle is deemed “strange” (I, 7), while the belle’s rejection of her predator is deemed “stranger” still (I, 9). Of course, not every amatory plot is exactly alike, but the common crisis is the potential violation of a desirable female’s chastity. A similar tableau is augured during Belinda’s dream; here Ariel warns that “the purity of melting maids” will be threatened by “treacherous friends” (I, 71-3). As a stand-in for the amatory heroine, Belinda is in many ways a natural fit for the role: first and foremost, she is sexually inexperienced, but she is also a highly desired sexual commodity. Her desirability intimidates her maid, Betty, who trembles as she witnesses Belinda’s powerful cosmetic rituals. In Canto II, Pope extends Belinda’s status as a desirable object and demonstrates the extent to which she, as a sexual prey, is vulnerable to sexual predators disguised as “well-dressed youths” (II, 5). In a humorous scene that combines Belinda’s luminous sexuality with a religious relic, Pope describes “a sparkling
cross” worn by Belinda “on her white breast” (II, 7). Pope then satirizes the abandonment of traditional values in place of the idolatrous worship of luxury items. Commodified as a luxury item herself, Belinda is so intoxicating that men will abandon their religion and convert to the idolatrous worship of her: “On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore, / Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore” (II, 7-8). Belinda’s brand of sexuality has international appeal; similarly, while “infidels” may point to non-believers who are now converted, it also stands as a coded allusion to the Turks and to England’s trade with the East. Belinda’s alignment with the amatory heroine therefore reinforces her status as a symbol of commodification, sexual currency, and globalized luxury trade.

True to the standard amatory plot, Belinda must have at least one admirer who seriously threatens to violate her chastity. Of course, it is the Baron, a reproduction of male antagonists typical to amatory fiction, who fulfills that role: he is predatorial, a voyeur, and of higher station than Belinda. The fact that he remains nameless further aligns him with that of a generic predator of amatory fiction; his defining characteristic is that he wants Belinda’s most prized asset. Introduction to the Baron is preceded by a description of Belinda’s famous locks of hair, which are compared to “labyrinths” that can enslave “mighty hearts” (II, 23-4). Here Belinda’s commodification becomes especially literal, since the lock is the ornament that increases her value and makes her most appealing. The Baron’s desire for Belinda is subsequently a desire for a material thing; both romantic love and traditional sexual desire are in turn displaced by the fetishization of materiality. It is also worth noting that Belinda’s locks “surprise the finny prey” (II, 26). Belinda is a sexualized prey, but she is also a predator in her own right; in this respect, she is reminiscent of Eliza Haywood’s amatory heroines, many of whom use
their seductive powers to control male suitors. Already well aware of her seductive powers (as much is implied during the dressing room scene), Belinda’s vanity is validated by gifts of luxury items from suitors and by the lascivious stares she receives in public domain. Pope characterizes Belinda’s awareness of her own strengths as a commodified object in order to preface the dramatization of sexual politics (and play) in the mock-battles of Canto III.

The Baron’s unrepentant goal of acquiring Belinda’s lock extends Pope’s satire of a culture in which traditional codes of morality are trumped by an insatiable appetite for ownership of luxury goods. His resolution to “win” the locks “by force to ravish, or by fraud betray” further aligns him with the sexual predator of amatory fiction (II, 31-4). The altar to Love that the Baron erects is a comical and absurd demonstration of love deified in material form; the relics sacrificed at the altar are further examples of Pope’s allusive play with both romantic conventions and the genre of seductive fiction. The Baron’s effigy, for instance, is comprised of “twelve vast French romances . . . three garters, half a pair of gloves, / And all the trophies of his former loves” (II, 38-40). Like the standard amatory male antagonist, the Baron is a student of seduction and has a history of sexual exploits to show for his hard work. In this reality where material objects have replaced the divine, the sacrifices made by the Baron at the altar result in an exchange of spiritual commerce and in a strengthening of his amorous powers: “With tender billet-doux he lights they pyre, / And breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire” (II, 41-2). As Pope sets the stage for the mock-battles of Canto III, Ariel senses the new danger posed by the Baron. Ariel’s subsequent battle cry is followed by Pope’s extended descriptions of pre-battle rituals that include the designation of each Sylph to a
station upon Belinda’s body; it is there that they must guard all things precious to Belinda (her chastity, her heart, and of course the material objects in her possession).

Canto III marks Belinda’s arrival at Hampton Court, where exchanges of sexual politics and play are dramatized by a series amatory of mock-battles. Pope’s parody of epic battles comes to full fruition when Belinda plays Ombre with “two adventurous knights” (III, 26). Though he has not yet been identified in the scene, the Baron has already been described as “adventurous” in Canto II (II, 29). Such is worth noting because it demonstrates Pope’s wry usage of the term: in a reality where moral codes have been displaced by the worship of commodities, the Baron’s intent to commit a figurative rape is deemed a reflection of his “adventurous” spirit as opposed to a symptom of a pathological moral disease. The game itself highlights Belinda’s pride and overconfidence: her breast “swells . . . with conquests yet to come” (III, 28). Like the general of an army, Belinda reviews her cards, declares spades trumps, and commands her “troops” into “combat” (III, 43-4). Belinda’s early success is nearly thwarted, however, by the Baron’s mounting comeback. Pope uses the card game to playfully stage their sexual tension and to posit them both as players in this game of psychosexual one-upmanship. On the brink of possible defeat, Belinda is described by the narrator as one “just in the jaws of ruin” (III, 92). This is a fascinating moment in which Pope assembles his many coded allusions. The image of “jaws” points to the predatorial nature of the amatory antagonist, but it also functions as a pun on the consumptive appetite of the material culture satirized by Pope. The concept of “ruin” consists of obvious sexual undertones; within the context of the entire phrase, however, “ruin” is also equated to a form of stasis in which the commodified individual is figuratively cornered and on the
brink of being devoured by a culture that preys up on it. Considering that Belinda *enjoys* her role as a highly desirable object, it is difficult to discern what is really at stake if she were to lose the game, or even if she would necessarily object to the defeat. Belinda’s ecstatic public celebration after winning Ombre is one clue to answering this riddle; her confession after suffering from the public humiliation of losing her locks is another: “Oh, hadst thou, cruel! Been content to seize / Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!” (IV, 175-6)—the inference, of course, is that actual rape at least offers the protection of a hidden shame. Pope asserts that Belinda’s self-perceived value is based solely upon the reception she receives from the public; provided that no one but she and the Baron serve as witnesses to the sexual act, there is little reason to presume that she would not comply.

Pope engages the amatory trope of sexual interplay throughout the card game, and the stanza featuring the climactic (but entirely figurative) seduction scene is similarly rife with sexually-charged innuendo. It is important to note that prior to the seizing of Belinda’s locks, the Baron is engaged in a ritual of coffee-drinking with Belinda. As discussed by scholars such as Bernstein, Schmidt, and Kowaleski-Wallace, coffee was an extremely popular commodity in Britain and was well-known for its restorative properties. Pope’s indictment of globalized luxury trade is extended by his humorous rendering of the effects of coffee: “Coffee (which makes the politician wise, / And see through all things with his half-shut eyes) / Sent up vapors to the Baron’s brain / New stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain” (III, 117-120). Obviously, Pope also uses the scene to execute a thinly-veiled attack on politicians (most likely Whigs), but the couplets are significant because coffee is credited for reenergizing the Baron’s corrupt schemes. The faux-seduction scene is filled with images both phallic and parodic: the Baron uses a
“spear” to “arm [himself] for the fight” (III, 130); he “extends / The little engine on his fingers’ ends” (III, 131-2); and finally he penetrates Belinda’s “meeting points” with his shears (III, 153). The violation experienced by Belinda elicits “screams of horror” (III, 156); the screams are compared to those which follow the shattering of “rich china vessels fallen from high” (III, 159). Again, Pope has created a reality in which all traditional codes of value are reversed, upended, or missing altogether. In this instant, the violation of one’s body (and symbolically, the violation of one’s chastity) is placed on equal footing with a damaged luxury item.

Pope’s parody of epic literature becomes a central amatory focus of Canto IV, as the sadistic gnome called Umbriel flies into the underworld to visit the Cave of Spleen. In this splenetic world characterized by melancholy, mists and vapors cover “the dismal dome” (IV, 18). Fiends and “pale specters” line Umbriel’s path (IV, 44), their “bodies changed to various forms by Spleen” (IV, 48). It is at the cave that Pope’s formal satire of the culture of commodification becomes grotesque and menacing. In this nightmarish subterranean space, objects can no longer be controlled, admired, or even fetishized; here they assume autonomy, and the effect is to render objects monstrous. In their personification, Pope describes “living teapots” (IV, 49), a walking earthen pot, a sighing jar, and a talking goose pie (IV, 53). Umbriel’s exchange with the Goddess of Spleen results in his return to the world of the living with a bag comprised of “sighs, sobs, and passions” designed to fuel Belinda’s wrath (IV, 84). Initially dejected and inert after her public humiliation, Belinda’s newfound wrath leads to a final mock-battle that restores Pope’s previous examination of sexual politics and in turn paves way to further engagement of amatory tropes. Belinda, accompanied by her friend Thalestris, assembles
a group of women to wage an attack on the Baron. This final confrontation results in an epic battle of the sexes, and it is here that Pope simultaneously alludes to both luxury items and amatory conventions: as the women attack, their “fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack” (V, 40); losing the battle, such men as Dapperwit and Sir Fopling submissively sink beside imported chairs (V, 62); similarly, the men, who commodify the women as luxury objects, are “killed . . . with a frown” but “revived” with a smile (V, 67-70). Of course, the final confrontation between Belinda and the Baron results in the loss of the lock itself—a particularly ironic resolution because neither character manages to procure the object most desired.

In order to effectively explain how Pope uses amatory tropes in *The Rape of the Lock* to signify his indictment of luxury trade and the culture of commodification it generates, I have provided extensive contextual and critical groundwork that includes a cursory history of seventeenth century global trade, England’s economic expansion, and the use of public credit. I have likewise considered Pope’s complicated relationship to print capitalism and his status as a cultural outsider, with the goal of producing a plausible biographical link that helps to explain the author’s representations of sexual politics. In my textual analysis, I have shown how the text’s formal characteristics enhance Pope’s goals of parody and satire. In my analysis of Pope’s many allusions to global luxury trade, I have alternated between textual evidence of such and contextual evaluations of contemporary consumption studies. My methodological strategy has therefore been to establish ample evidence of Pope’s critique of luxury trade and Britain’s culture of commodification in order to then demonstrate how amatory tropes function as coded references to these very same topics. Finally, in my discussion of
amatory tropes, I have examined how the interactions between Belinda and the Baron function as symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange—all coded references to luxury trade and the culture of consumption.
CHAPTER TWO, ROXANA (1724)

Like Pope, Defoe uses amatory tropes to indict the culture of commodification engendered by the advent of finance capitalism and England’s economic expansion as a global force in luxury trade. The tone of Pope’s satire in The Rape of the Lock is playful even at its most biting, but Defoe’s Roxana is foremost a tragedy of capital, a narrative that treats material and immaterial forms of capital as destructive forces. The satirical elements of the text surface in Defoe’s representations of courtship rituals and in his depictions of Roxana’s lovers, all of whom possess characteristics typical among amatory male suitors. The men of Roxana desire ownership of her, whether sexually, psychologically, or materially. Several of Roxana’s lovers, for instance, are forthright in their efforts to domestically confine her; these men wish to hoard her value as a sexual object, and Roxana’s complicity in her own exile suggests that she not only enjoys this objectification but that her perceived self-worth is greatly invested in the sexual power she possesses. Like Pope’s Belinda, Roxana aligns with amatory heroines whose bodies become symbols of commodification and sexual currency. Belinda, however, is hardly more than a prop designed to facilitate the author’s satire; she is characterized by her desire to be worshiped and by her worship both of herself and the luxury items she acquires. Defoe’s Roxana is of an entirely different construction. A character of great psychological depth, her tragedy is one of moral decay—a decay that Defoe illustrates in Roxana’s many metamorphoses (she has an uncanny talent for self-reinvention) and in
her evolution into nothing short of a monstrous emblem of capital excess and moral abatement.

Over the course of the narrative, Roxana repeatedly reinvents herself—her origins, her name, her social class, even her proposed religion—partly for self-preservation (either to conceal her true identity or to hide from those who know her by a different title) but primarily to advance her capital. That capital may exist in material forms (currency, paper credit, or property such as land, houses, or luxury goods) or in more abstract, immaterial forms (her social rank in the public sphere; her sexual rank as a mistress to powerful men; her ability to manipulate her lovers; her influence over devoted female partners like Amy, and later, the Quaker). The question of how she is so successful in her endeavors is easily answered by the text itself, for Defoe goes to great lengths to describe her cunning methods and the power to which she wields over her most devoted followers. The subject, however, of why Roxana would become so complicit in her own corruption is far more complex. As Chapter Two will demonstrate, Roxana’s appetite for material and immaterial capital initially derives from the trauma she experiences in the midst of an unexpected, crippling poverty. Her appetite is likewise enabled and enhanced by a changing culture in England and continental Europe, one that has made paper credit a reality, and one that has made readily accessible the most exotic luxury items to compliment Roxana’s expanding narcissism and ego. Roxana is thus the creation and embodiment of England’s financial and material climate; she is capital personified at its most nightmarish and destructive.

A primary goal of Chapter Two is to demonstrate how Defoe uses amatory tropes and elements of the amatory plot to express his anxieties about the cumulative effects of
England’s expanding wealth, its shift towards finance capitalism, and the impact of global luxury trade on English culture. Similar to Pope’s satirical portrayal of Belinda, Defoe’s title-character adopts the false ideology that one’s capital (whether material or immaterial) is a fair measure of one’s interior value. Roxana’s body generates capital (via her sexual career); her extreme fertility further exaggerates her status as a grotesque emblem of capital-in-excess. A secondary goal of this chapter, one closely related to the first, is to illustrate how *Roxana* is a commentary on the destructive powers of capital, both when an individual possesses too much or too little of it.

As with Chapter One, the structure of Chapter Two will consist of several segments, each of which will be distinguished by a relevant subtitle. I will first provide biographical research that will contextualize Defoe’s portrayal of the considerable influence of capital and luxury trade in *Roxana*. In doing so, I will demonstrate that Defoe himself was an ambitious merchant who borrowed and invested irresponsibly until he was finally imprisoned for debt. The experience of prison had a lasting effect on both Defoe’s psyche and his work, as did his public outing as a failed businessman. Defoe, like the tragic heroine he invented decades later in *Roxana*, also had to contend with bankruptcy. The terror of not knowing how or even if he could provide for his family significantly impacted his youthful idealism—how he viewed himself and the potential dangers (financial, social, political, and legal) around him. Like Roxana, he too was an expert in reinvention. I will therefore discuss Defoe’s reinvention as an author whose political pamphleteering and satirical poetry provided a steady living but also resulted in him making powerful enemies. Defoe’s later political persecution under Queen Anne’s

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21 It is worth noting here that the narrative is part-confessional and is told by a supposedly wiser, now repentant Roxana—but her repentance does not alter the fact that she lived by this false ideology for the majority of her adult life.
reign led to further imprisonment and three separate visits to the pillory—experiences that changed his writing “in purpose, focus, and tone” (Backscheider 125). Finally, I will discuss Defoe’s double-life as an English spy in order to preface a later analysis of how his covert career informed the details of Roxana’s own unique forms of sexual, social, and financial espionage.

The second section of Chapter Two will focus on textual analysis of *Roxana*; this section will seek to accomplish two primary goals. The first goal will be to demonstrate how Defoe examines the considerable effects of material and immaterial forms of capital on one’s value system. I will explore the author’s many allusions to paper credit, transnational trade, and imported luxury goods with specific reference to their destructive impact on Defoe’s heroine. The second primary goal of my textual analysis, which will focus on the author’s prolific engagement of amatory conventions, will provide another means of evaluating Defoe’s feelings about England’s alteration in cultural values. I will examine the ways in which Roxana both adheres to and defies categorization as an amatory heroine; further, I will show how her male suitors align with male antagonists common to amatory genre. I will also explore Defoe’s appropriation of the amatory plot and his subversion of the amatory seduction scene. In many instances, Roxana is the sexual instigator, while in others she knowingly performs the role of unwitting sexual bait; the effect is to deceive her suitors into believing that they possess the sexual power. Such a strategy enables Roxana to extract maximum capital (luxury goods, credit, property, even titles) from these men. Finally, I will demonstrate how Roxana’s sexual curiosity is akin to the amatory trope of inquiry and in turn functions as a coded allusion to England’s explorations in global trade. Chapter Two will show that Defoe’s
deployment of amatory tropes is vital to understanding the author’s indignation towards England’s culture of commodification, one brought on by finance capitalism and the growth of luxury trade.

I. The Effects of a Changing England on Defoe’s Life and Work

In the context of analyzing Defoe’s attitudes toward capitalism and the impact of imported goods on English culture, an apt starting point in a biographical study of the author is his career as a merchant and his subsequent imprisonment for bankruptcy. Before Daniel Defoe was imprisoned in 1692 for an enormous debt of £17000, he aspired to be a tradesman like his father. James Foe was a successful tallow chandler and a member of the Butchers’ Company, an esteemed livery company in London. James was a freeman, which meant that he—unlike the ordinary London householder who was allowed to vote for Common Councilmen—could vote for higher officers such as the lord mayor, sheriffs, auditors, and even members of Parliament. In his mid-twenties, Defoe was married and optimistic that he could not only emulate but surpass his father’s accomplishments; regarding his motivation for success he once wrote, it is “hard to restrain youth in trade” (Complete 1: 73). He set out to become a general merchant, and he dealt in hosiery, wine, beer, and tobacco, many of which were imported from Spain, Portugal, and the New World. Defoe’s business ambitions were marked (and marred) by his willingness to take financial risks; he borrowed regularly and made a series of poor investments that included merchant ships which regularly lost cargo, a diving bell scheme

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23 For more information on Defoe’s career as a merchant and his subsequent bankruptcy, see Chapter Three of Backscheider’s biography, “Bankrupt”: 41-61.
aimed to recover sunken treasure, and the purchase of seventy civet cats whose musk were used as base in fashionable perfume.

In her biography of Defoe, Paula R. Backscheider traces how quickly the author’s exorbitant debt accelerated and led to many run-ins with the law that included a “sheriffs’ sale” of the cats (which he knew he could not legally sell) (56), along with disputes that went to court over his many unpaid bills. As Backscheider puts it, “Quite simply, Defoe’s creditors had run out of patience” (58). Prior to his great fall, one which resulted in his exile at the Fleet Prison in October 1692, Defoe maintained the public appearance of success, even keeping five servants until he could no longer pay them. Once he was imprisoned, however, reality came crashing down, and the shock of prison life and what amounted to a public outing of his failures informed his writings over the next forty years: “His characters would examine the motives for actions over and over . . . They would feel ambition and fall to the temptation of putting on a prosperous, genteel front . . . They would try to reform” (Backscheider 58). Defoe’s financial collapse and imprisonment meant that his dreams to become an alderman would never materialize; his public disgrace meant that his inclusion in prominent social groups now became complicated, if not improbable. His career as a tradesman was certainly finished, and just as the themes of identity construction and reinvention would become so pervasive over thirty years later in *Roxana*, Defoe needed to reinvent himself in the public sphere.

Defoe’s reinvention into a career as an author was gradual and a culmination of extreme tenacity, cleverness, and opportunism. Prior to his imprisonment, Defoe demonstrated a strong advocacy for civil rights; in 1685, for instance, he left his family and business to join the duke of Monmouth’s ultimately failed rebellion after the
establishment of the Clarendon Code. Established by Charles II, the Clarendon Code was a set of penal laws aimed to religiously persecute the Dissenters with whom Defoe associated as a lifelong Presbyterian and non-Anglican (Cragg 241). Backscheider’s research on the author’s publication history suggests that his first two pamphlets were of a distinctive political nature, and she posits that Defoe’s educational background afforded him years of training in argumentation and rhetoric that would later serve him well in the writing of polemical essays. His first publication was a short essay arguing that England should hope for the Turks’ defeat at the 1683 Battle of Vienna: “Defoe saw the Turks as vigorous propagators of the Muslim religion, and thus a greater threat to Christianity than a potential alliance between France and the Empire that would strengthen Catholicism” (Backscheider 44). For Defoe, victory at Vienna signified a protection of Christian values and culture; the economic boost that England would later enjoy as a result of new trading access to the East was evidently not a pressing subject on his mind. His second publication was probably A Letter to a Dissenter from His Friend at the Hague, concerning the Penal Laws and the Test, a four-page warning to the Dissenters in which Defoe questions the motives of King James’s second Declaration of Indulgence in 1688.24

During his imprisonment, Defoe’s family—which at this point included a wife, Mary, his daughter Maria, and a new baby—was forced to live with Joan Tuffley, his mother-in-law. He exited the Fleet Prison with no credit and the pressing urgency to earn an income. From the years of 1695-1699 he worked as an accountant, but outside of that work he revived his impulse to construct money-making schemes. The one property that Defoe could not lose after his bankruptcy was land that he owned in Essex, which he

24 See Backscheider’s discussion of Defoe’s early publication history in her biography of the author: 43-46.
mortgaged and eventually used as a factory to make bricks and pantiles; the factory was a success: “Good bricks were in demand for the ongoing and rebuilding of London, and pantiles, S-shaped tiles developed in Holland, were economical and could be highly ornamental” (Backscheider 64). Defoe also sought permission to build twelve brick tenements on the property of Christ’s Hospital, only negotiations eventually broke down.25 After the failed proposal, Defoe shifted his attention to the booksellers’ market, an increasingly diverse and competitive trade.

As discussed in Chapter One, Pope loathed the new influx of “hack writers” and other independent authors because their success potentially threatened his livelihood. For Defoe, however, the market potential of this new literary climate was a promising business opportunity: “Booksellers encouraged writers who offered pamphlets on news events such as crimes or controversial political issues and regularly paid some to feed the debate with additional tracts” (Backscheider 67). Already a publisher of pamphlets, Defoe quickly found work. He wrote an elegy for Samuel Annesley, a prominent non-conformist and Puritan, which was highly marketable to the Dissenting community; he then published *An Essay on Projects*, which included several proposals that addressed the ways in which England could increase its wealth by improving its methods for trade. Defoe proposed that roads be improved in order to aid inland trade; he also suggested that the navy aim for improvements in recruiting and maintenance for purposes of benefitting trade rather than advancing national security.26

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26 For more information on Defoe’s early writings and his commentary on transnational trade, see “Recovery,” Chapter Three of Backscheider’s biography of Defoe: 62-83.
Defoe’s career and reputation as a writer who championed political and moral reform quickly gained momentum. By 1701 he had published multiple pamphlets and was earning a stable living. His enormously popular poem *The True-Born Englishman* defended King William, who was Dutch; it was published at a time when Englishmen “wanted to believe that more united them than divided them” (Backscheider 75). His publications during that period also included three pamphlets in favor of William’s standing army, five on Protestant interest, and three on parliamentary elections—in short, he began to be branded a “party writer” and was associated closely with court Whigs. As a political author, his growth in popularity was an assurance that he was also making powerful enemies. Following William’s death, for instance, Defoe’s well-known pamphleteering and political activities made him an easy target for Williams’s successor, Queen Anne. The new queen favored moderate Tories because they were more likely to share her Anglican religious views; her offensive against Nonconformists landed the author back in prison in 1703. Defoe was once again forced to cope with the squalor of prison life, but unlike his previous imprisonment caused by his own financial carelessness and questionable business ethics, he was now a victim of political xenophobia. This fact alone greatly complicated the author’s attitude towards and relationship with the state for many years to come.

Before Defoe’s sentencing in 1703, he spent nearly half a year at Newgate Prison waiting for trial. Backscheider speculates that “prison quickly became torture” for Defoe (106), not only because he was so accustomed to his own independence, but because he was forced to share the Press Yard with murderers and felons. Due to the nature of his public status as a well-read pamphleteer and the crime to which he was accused
(“seditious libel,” which was interpreted as publishing work that slandered the government), his trial was nothing ordinary: visitors paid a shilling for a seat and saw “a vast concourse of people who made such a din that it was often impossible to hear either the barrister or the judges” (Quarrell and Mare 124-5). His punishment was nothing ordinary either: “each part of it was a bit more severe than the average handed out to journalists between 1702 and 1708” (Backscheider 110). Defoe was sentenced to stand in the pillory three times, to pay a punitive fine, and to remain in Newgate “until he could find sureties to be of good behavior for the space of seven years” (Beattie, Crime 459). On three separate occasions, Defoe was subjected to the pillory at noon and in the busiest parts of London. Though the pillory was considered a mild form of punishment, his neck and arms would have been locked into an unnatural position; he would also have no means of protecting himself from the rain or from any variety of objects aimed in his direction. By the time he was taken to the pillory, however, he was already greatly admired by the common London citizen who felt “scandalized at the vices of the rich and the abuses of recent elections, and the first to agree with Defoe’s portrait of Salathiel Lovell27, who ‘never hangs the Rich nor saves the Poor’” (Backscheider 118); it is speculated that his pillory was surrounded by protectors and that nothing harmful was thrown his way.

Defoe’s career as a spy—one which informs the motif of espionage explored in Roxana—was initially made possible by Robert Harley, the English Secretary of State, who took a great interest in Defoe both before and during his imprisonment. By 1703 the government employed “agents” to perform services ranging from sampling opinion to

27 Defoe’s long poem Reformation of Manners (1702) included a satiric attack on Lovell, an English judge.
informing employers about people or pamphlets that might oppose their best interests. Harley needed agents to help thwart the growth of the extreme branch of the Tory party; he was also worried about the passing of the Act of Security in Scotland. In Defoe, Harley saw an experienced, talented political pamphleteer—and one whose imprisonment meant that he was hardly in a strong position of refusal. Harley worked covertly and managed to determine a fine that the queen would accept for Defoe’s bounty; by mid-January of 1704, he was released from Newgate and officially pardoned at the end of July. Defoe was indeed grateful to Harley for his release, and he thanked him in a most superlative manner: “I Can Not but Profess my Self as a Debtor wholly to your Self” (Defoe, Letters 10). By the time of his second release from prison, Defoe had six children with one on the way. He was again bankrupt and with no credit to his name, and he had massive debts to repay. He simultaneously had to quickly earn a large income, repair his reputation, and somehow repay his debt to Harley.

Defoe’s publication of a staggering amount of work in 1704 signaled his desperation to escape poverty for good—a particular kind of desperation which would later surface as a major theme in Roxana. He continued his work as a vigorous pamphleteer and was still publishing poetry, but for a period of at least several months it is suggested that his intended work for Harley was still undefined. It is speculated that his double-life as an English spy began as early as the summer of 1704, when he traveled to

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28 See Backscheider’s discussion of the kinds of work implemented by these agents, as well as the details of Defoe’s recruitment: 120-125.
29 This act essentially, which gave Scotland the right to choose a successor to Queen Anne from the Stuart line, meant that England and Scotland would have different monarchs. There was fear that Scotland would form an alliance with France. See: Lynch, Michael. Scotland: A New History. London: Pimlico Books, 1992.
30 Backscheider, in her biography of Defoe, claims that he published over 400,000 words in 1704. See Chapter Seven, “Four-Hundred Thousand Words”: 139-158.
the southeast to allegedly take note of opinions, infiltrate groups, identify faction leaders, and write pamphlets designed to win over the suspicious or the uncommitted; he reported which counties were primarily Whiggish, High Church, moderate, or Tory (Backscheider 160). The next year he traveled all over southwest England and recorded the same kind of information. In 1706 Defoe left for Scotland where he remained a secret agent for six years. During this period of rampant political change, Queen Anne’s death led to the fall of Tory power. Defoe nonetheless continued his intelligence for the Whigs, writing “Tory” pamphlets that actually undermined the Tory perspective.

The publishing history that followed Defoe’s double-identity as an author-spy would come to signify the many years of turmoil he experienced and certainly informed the motif of espionage in *Roxana*. Moreover, like Roxana, Defoe knew poverty, and he acutely understood the fears and realities of bankruptcy. Defoe’s imprisonment and exile from public space is akin to Roxana’s many exiles—first, by way of the financial and domestic exiles she experiences after her husband, the Brewer, abandons the family and leaves them bankrupt; later, in the many self-imposed exiles during her career as a mistress. Roxana, like Defoe, also knew what it was like to be responsible for a large family; early in the narrative, she is plagued by such responsibilities and is “sadly afflicted” when compelled to split them up (19). Defoe’s familiarity with self-reinvention and espionage are also likely influences in his characterization of Roxana, whose similar skill-set in this regard is integral to her success as she evades former acquaintances and accrues a truly staggering amount of capital through improvisation, careful scheming, and self-reinvention. Consideration of Defoe’s fascinating life and its influence in the creation of *Roxana* allows one to more meticulously examine his complex attitudes regarding such
topics as public and private identity, the English class system and English law, social and sexual politics, and of course the effects of finance capitalism and global luxury trade on the ethos of the English character.

II. A Brief Critical Approach to *Roxana*

*Roxana* was published in 1724, or thirty-six years after the Battle of Vienna—a period in which trade from the East, in conjunction with a major shift in financial culture, gradually but persistently played its role in reshaping English notions about what was fashionable, what was desirable, and how those in possession of such goods were to be relished as symbols of a newly-defined elite. As a way of transitioning into a textual analysis of Defoe’s representations of material and immaterial forms of capital in *Roxana*, it is helpful to consider Jan de Vries’ invaluable research on luxury consumption in Europe during the late-seventeenth century. De Vries observes that “it was luxury production that supplied the elites with the markers of their status and authority” ("Luxury" 73). Luxury, he argues, is associated with power, but the consumption of it is “universally understood to be fraught with moral danger” (73). The dangers of luxury could not only bankrupt one’s family but could “submerge a healthy personality into debauchery” (“Luxury” 73). Werner Sombart saw capitalism emerging from luxury spending, a behavior adopted from the example of court culture and one that led men to avariciously pursue pleasures of “the eye, the ear, the nose, the palate, or the touch” (5). Defoe knew all too well the moral dangers of desiring capital, and it is evident in his characterizations of not only Roxana but also of Amy (her loyal servant) and several male figures in the text that he equates such a desire to a disease of the soul.
III. Roxana’s Origins, Her Marriage to the Brewer, and the Traumatic After-Effects

The novel’s preface casts the author as a limited narrator, an acquaintance of Roxana’s father as well as her first husband, the Brewer, but as one who never knew Roxana. Instead, the author is recounting her “History” based on what he knows partly as “Truth”; of the latter portion of her life (in which she lives abroad), the author hopes his account will be “a Pledge for the Credit of the rest” (1-2). There are two notable aspects to the preface: one, that Roxana is mythologized by the author; and two, that Defoe is deploying a conspicuous strategy of economic discourse to draw attention to the novel’s association of human desire with material and immaterial forms of capital. Defoe’s preface is almost overwrought with a language of economy: he writes of providing moral instruction for the “Pleasure and Profit” of his audience; he makes a pun on both “Pledge” and “Credit”; he alludes to Roxana’s story as one that has been “transacted” to him; and of course when presenting the text’s central moral message, he explains that “even in the highest Elevations of [Roxana’s] Prosperity\textsuperscript{31}... That the Pleasure of her Wickedness was not worth the Repentance” (1-2). His economic discourse likewise prefigures his deployment of amatory tropes, which he uses to stage the commodification of the individual and thus demonstrate the extent to which the cultural desire for immaterial and material capital is so pervasive that it determines how his characters view one another—not as human beings but as goods to be valued, used, abused, hoarded or even disposed (as in the case of Roxana’s crime of fratricide). By establishing the work’s themes and its rhetorical framework so early in the text, Defoe is able to demonstratively

\textsuperscript{31} The emphasis here is mine.
convey his indignation towards the corruptive influences of capital brought on by finance capitalism and global luxury trade.

Following a preface in which Defoe elevates Roxana to mythological status, Roxana becomes the formal narrator and consequently offers a history of herself. In essence, she is self-mythologizing (and self-commodifying), and as the narrative unfolds it becomes apparent that Defoe is pairing her with the figure of Roxolana\(^\text{32}\), whose diverse mythology derives from specific geographical and cultural spaces unique to Eastern Europe and the Orient—an implicit reference to the cultural influences of the East on English culture. The pivotal moment in which Roxana is finally coined “Roxana” does not arrive until well after the mid-point of the novel, which further illustrates Defoe’s assertion that her identity is unfixed, something akin to a costume she can wear and remove at her own volition. It is certainly a paradoxical moment (and one that will be addressed more directly at a later point in this chapter) because Roxana does possess a certain power or autonomy, a freedom to refashion herself, but her names are more often than not assigned to her by others: during her first marriage, she is known simply as the wife of the Brewer; she’s rebranded as the “Widow” by her landlord (30); when the landlord is murdered, she is identified as “the pretty Widow of Poictou” (57); her long-term affair with a Prince in France leads to his branding of her as his “Princess” (though she is one of his many mistresses) (64); she is finally given the name “Roxana” while dressed in imported Turkish garb at a London ball (176). Defoe is emphasizing Roxana’s status as an emblematic construction of external forces; her power, in other words, is

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limited because she is both influenced and defined by England’s culture of commodification. As a sexual commodity herself, her numerous “brandings” are a reminder of her inability to achieve authentic self-actualization or agency; they are a reminder of her compromised state of existence.

Roxana claims that her narrative is a confessional, a gesture of repentance, and one designed to provide moral instruction. The sincerity of her repentance is an unsettling subject, especially in light of the peculiar elusiveness of what brought on the sudden change; at the novel’s conclusion, Roxana credits it to a “Blast from Heaven” (330). Whatever this may be, whether it is an instance of special Providence or not, it is difficult for the reader to imagine any permanent alteration to Roxana’s moral sensibility. When she and Amy flee from France to Amsterdam by sea, for instance, they are caught in a dangerous storm; both women repent, and Roxana refers to herself as the “Devil’s Instrument” (126)—but of course she returns to her former ways once the fear of death wears off. The events preceding her supposed repentance demonstrate a boundlessness to her methods of acquiring and preserving capital. It is perhaps an exercise in futility, then, to seek a clear understanding of her sincerity; a more productive question to ask relates to why she began to pursue such a lifestyle in the first place. Her marriage to the Brewer is an apt starting point. In a rare moment of humor, Defoe (like Pope) parodies the epic catalogue and provides an inventory of the ways in which the Brewer is a “Fool”—he is self-centered, conceited, obstinate, lazy, and a glutton for food and drink; he wastes his inheritance, ruins his business, and spends his wife’s dowry. Certainly, his lifestyle of “debauchery” fits de Vries’ description of a personality devoured by the pleasures of luxury.
The Brewer’s abandonment of Roxana, which leaves her bankrupt with five children to care for, triggers her descent into a psychological despair that is vital to understanding her later motives in the pursuit of capital. Initially surprised by her husband’s abrupt departure, her fear accelerates into panic: “To think of one single Woman not bred to Work, and a Loss where to get Employment, to get the Bread of five Children, that was not possible” (15). Roxana seeks the help of relatives but receives “not one Farthing of Assistance from anybody” (15). Because her needlework earns but a meager income, she is compelled to sell luxury goods in her possession: china, jewelry, silverware, pictures, furniture, mirrors, and finally “every thing suitable” (17); she is left starving and with almost nothing to call her own. In an effort to understand the psychological impact of pawning her goods, it is helpful to recall de Vries’ assertion that luxury items were “markers” of one’s status and identity; her identity is now defined not by what she has but by what she no longer has—a husband, wealth, a home to call her own, material goods to fill that home. Roxana subsequently falls into fits of crying and paralyzing despondency: “I was reduc’d to such inexpressible distress, that it is not to be describ’d” (16). Finally, with the help of Amy, she resolves to hand over her children to local parishes so that she “might be freed from the dreadful Necessity of seeing them all perish” (19). Much has been written about Defoe’s representation of Roxana’s maternal identity33, and Defoe is clearly invested in exploring what happens to the psyche of a mother who must—due to economic factors beyond her control—detach herself from an

identity so strongly associated with contemporary perceptions of what it meant to be a “Woman.” Roxana is “sadly afflicted” by the separation, but “the Misery of [her] own Circumstances hardned [her] Heart” (19). It is at this point, one in which she encounters a “new Scene of Life” (26), that her entire moral code begins to alter. Unshackled from the burdens of providing for her children, Roxana’s value as a sexual commodity eventually affords her opportunities for travel, reinvention, social ascension, and of course a new means of “Employment.”

While having five children at her age (she is approximately twenty-one when the Brewer abandons her) is excessive, the number is not extraordinary. By the novel’s conclusion, however, she has produced nearly a dozen children and has suffered multiple miscarriages, and by a number of different men across geographical, cultural, and social space. There is no denying Roxana’s sexual desirability, but her extreme fertility is grotesque, a biological aberration. J.G.A. Pocock is commonly referenced for his observation that credit in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was seen as helping to create “new types of personality, unprecedentedly dangerous and unstable . . . Hence, the imagery of Credit as a female and hysterical figure” (235). Ann Louise Kibbie builds on Pocock’s ideas about Lady Credit, asserting that “biological reproduction is explicitly bound up with capital increase” (1024). Roxana’s body thus becomes a body of capital, an unnatural symbol of capital-in-excess. Indeed, her maternal instincts, or even any semblance of maternal duty or guilt, appear to abandon her once she begins to acquire wealth. The primary exception occurs during an attempt to help an adult son (who is the youngest product of her marriage to the Brewer), though she does so covertly through Amy. Roxana is not seeking a relationship but rather the gratification of helping
him financially. It is worth noting that her effort to help this one son is put forth only as her value as a sexual commodity is in vast decline. Accustomed to a lifetime of being needed by men, Roxana’s assistance to her son is self-motivated, another demonstration of her vanity; it is likewise a meek attempt at atonement for the number of children she has ignored in spite of having the wealth to reclaim them all. Her complicity in the murder of her daughter Susan, whose obsession with establishing a mother-daughter relationship is perceived by Roxana as a threat to her livelihood and the identity she has now constructed, is a horrific indication of her antagonism towards the kind of self-sacrifice required of parenting. As a grotesque emblem of Lady Credit, Roxana’s incapacity to share (either herself or her capital) with her children reinforces not just her greed but her shattered value system.

IV. Defoe’s Deployment of Amatory Tropes and Roxana’s New Career

Defoe’s introduction of the landlord establishes the amatory motif of the male as a predatorial sexual schemer, but it also marks Roxana’s initially reluctant career as a whore—an identity that develops organically and out of a sense of obligation to repay him for his charity. The landlord provides her with free rent; he buys back for Roxana all of the goods (luxury and otherwise) she once sold to feed her children, in essence, restoring her leisured status; he also purchases food and repeatedly attempts to get her drunk. His courtship strategy is a performance of feigned altruism; Roxana, like the typical naïve amatory heroine, is apparently blinded by his methods. She is enlightened by a much more astute Amy, who says, “He is not so unacquainted with things, as not to know, that Poverty is the strongest Incentive; a Temptation, against which no Virtue is
powerful enough to stand out” (28-9). Roxana is astonished by the idea that he is attempting to gently coerce her into bed, and she stresses great offense to Amy’s complicity in his plot. Amy, in fact, confesses that she would gladly prostitute herself on Roxana’s behalf “if he would but give [Roxana] enough to live easie upon” (28). With external pressure coming from both the landlord and Amy, Roxana must determine whether or not to forego her moral code for sake of economic pragmatism.

The landlord’s efforts to seduce Roxana are expressed explicitly in terms of capital, which is consistent with Defoe’s rhetorical strategies and his economic discourse. The landlord woos her with material gifts and expressions of flattery; he claims that his only “Reward would be, the Satisfaction of having rescued [Roxana] from Misery” (30). Of course, this is blatantly false, and the transaction he desires becomes more declarative as he feeds Roxana wine, kisses her “twenty times or thereabouts [and finally] put a Guinea into [her] Hand” (31). In a gesture which conveys that he would benefit from Amy’s cooperation during his attempted seduction, he “also gave Amy Half a Crown” (31). This moment also signals his valuation of Amy as a sexual commodity, foreshadowing his seduction of her as well (one that includes a forced seduction, a rape, or even a series of rapes). Aligned by Defoe with the amoral amatory schemer, the landlord’s courtship of Roxana is aptly described as a “Scheme of [her] Management” (32). With her home now fully-furnished, his efforts become more ambitious and persuasive; he suggests that she rent out rooms to summer gentry, pay no rent, and keep the profits for herself, with the caveat that he would be one of the lodgers. He uses his wealth to penetrate the barrier of Roxana’s personal, domestic space, and he earns her trust by purchasing it with material goods. Roxana’s profit continues to expand as she
acquires *more* luxury items (furniture for two rooms, two cabinets, and mirrors, along with other valuables), and she confesses to the reader that the “terrible Pressure of [her] former Misery . . . made [her] have scarce the Power to deny any thing he wou’d ask” (33-4). Defoe is thus establishing Roxana’s sexual career as one that derived from a sense of duty to repay her debtor; her acceptance of his advances points, however, to her own gradual realization that she can profit from her considerable value as a sexual commodity.

In his depiction of the landlord’s courtship of Roxana, Defoe deploys multiple amatory tropes to not only satirize the courtship process itself but to posit amatory tropes as coded references to his own attitudes regarding England’s culture of luxury and commodification. Toni Bowers observes that the predatory male figure of amatory fiction is more powerful than the woman he deceives; he is “of a higher social station . . . and often his prey’s relative or legal guardian” (“Representing Resistance” 141). Defoe engages the amatory template, using it to facilitate his own rhetorical condemnation of the corruptive and coercive powers of capital. Roxana’s origins as the daughter of a wealthy French merchant and her marriage to the Brewer locates her in a leisured class, much like the landlord—but of course he is of a higher station once she is bankrupted by her husband. The landlord exploits her economic vulnerability in his attempts to seduce her, and he flaunts his wealth as a measure of his power. While the landlord is not Roxana’s relative, he does own her home, making him a legal guardian of sorts. His asserted dominion over her is actually so pervasive that she claims to lack the will to resist his wishes: “He sat down, made me sit down, and then drank to me and made me drink two Glasses of Wine together . . . [he added], I’ll make you easie” (27). At a later point, Roxana explains that he “order’d [her] to put up a Bill for Letting Rooms,
reserving one for himself, to come to as he saw Occasion” (33). Defoe’s repeated emphasis on what the landlord makes her do is suggestive of the potential for sexualized force, which recalls the rape trope in amatory fiction. As a highly-sought sexual commodity, Roxana’s French origins also determine her as something akin to an imported luxury good, an object the landlord desperately desires; moreover, this manner of Roxana’s commodification reinforces Defoe’s assertion that global luxury trade and the culture of consumption it fosters has transformed the English value system.

It is also no coincidence that Defoe places Roxana in a garden with the landlord while she is drunk from wine and beer. The garden symbolizes fertility and is a common setting for seduction in amatory fiction. Defoe describes it as one “all in Disorder, overrun with Weeds” (29), a signification of the landlord’s untamed, potentially violent desire for Roxana. The landlord knows, however, that he must tread the landscape of her body with extreme caution, for he could potentially undermine his carefully-plotted plan of seduction. Upon seeing the state of the garden, he employs a servant “to do several things in it, to put it into a little Order” (29). With the promise of it being restored to more fertile ground, Roxana mentions that she hopes to grow turnips and carrots—imagery that, in its implied bawdiness, notably contradicts Roxana’s pious insistence that “a Woman ought rather to die, than to prostitute her Virtue and Honour” (29). Even if she will not fully accept ownership of her desires, she not only wants the promises of luxury that the landlord can offer, she also desires him sexually. She repeatedly blushes at her suitor’s advancements, and after the landlord confesses his “love,” Roxana reciprocates by conceding that “he had made [her] what [she] was” (35). Roxana thus begins to see herself in the same manner in which she is perceived by the landlord: foremost as a
commodity to be admired and pampered, but also as one that can be molded, reconstructed, or altogether reinvented.

Defoe parodies classical uses of philosophical discourse by staging an argument between Amy and Roxana over the meaning (or lasting importance) of female virtue. Amy insists that Roxana should fulfill the assumed sexual contract upon which she has entered with the landlord; Roxana insists that Amy behaves as if she were “one of his Privy-Cousellors,” and that she has “but too much Rhetorick in this Cause” (38-9). Defoe then employs economic diction in two pivotal early scenes of the novel: first, when Amy effectively persuades Roxana to prostitute herself for reasons of economic pragmatism and “duty” of repayment for the landlord’s kindness; and second, when the landlord proposes an illegal “marriage” (as they both still legally have spouses), what he calls a “Contract in Writing” (42). In the first instance, Roxana describes the moment in which she finally embraces her new sexual career: “Amy and I canvass’d the Business between us; the Jade prompted the Crime, which I had but too much Inclination to commit” (40). The second scene unambiguously establishes an agreement for payment of sexual services: the landlord will provide for her as he would a legal wife; drawing a contract, he promises her a “Penalty of £7000 never to abandon [her],” and he likewise agrees to give her a bond of £500 within three months of his death (42). With negotiations complete, he “pull’d out a silk Purse, which had three-score Guineas in it, and threw them into [her] Lap, and concluded all the rest of his Discourse with Kisses” (42). With this scene, in particular, Defoe demonstrates the displacement of moral virtue in favor of capital. By tossing money not even in the direction of Roxana’s hands but at her lap, it is evident that the landlord is treating her with an indignity to which she willingly accepts—both are
complicit in their own degradation. Moreover, Defoe’s reference to the landlord’s “silk Purse,” which was likely imported from the Catholic nation of France, would remind contemporary readers of England’s heated tensions with their main rival in trade\textsuperscript{34}; such a detail, however minor, would presumably anger Defoe’s English audience and likewise reinforce the author’s characterization of the landlord as one of the novel’s central antagonists.

Roxana’s departure from England to France with the landlord extends Defoe’s alignment of the pair with a French ethos that was perceived by many (Defoe included) as a threat to Protestant England’s values, values which were already deteriorating due to the rise of finance capitalism, global luxury trade, and England’s growing culture of consumption and commodification. Backscheider stresses that Defoe’s political writings sized up France’s strengths—its king (Louis XIV), its civil service, its totalitarian requisition system—as a “vision of Armageddon: England, the defender of Protestantism, pitted against France, the Catholic leviathan” (78). Preceding their business in France, it is important to note that the author continues to assign traits to Roxana and the landlord which posit them as moral monstrosities. Roxana’s moral state is already compromised due to her sexual contract with the landlord, but her swift descent into depravity is quite startling. Roxana, for instance, admits that she “design’d [a plan] . . . that [her] Maid should be a Whore too, and should not reproach [her] with it” (47). Her plan includes stripping Amy of her clothes and insisting that she bed with the landlord, whose sexual appetite guarantees his unhesitant compliance.

During this scene of sexualized force, Defoe engages the amatory seduction trope of hot weather, a further instance in which he uses amatory tropes to signify acts of commodification and, in this case, abuse. Roxana explains her role in the crime: “It was hot Weather . . . so I fairly stript her, and then I threw open the Bed, and thrust her in” (46). Bowers asserts that the two models for consensual sexual relations in amatory fiction, courtship and seduction, “implicitly take place within the possibility of rape’s violence and degradation” (“Representing Resistance” 141). Defoe subverts this trope in several ways: for one, he posits multiple rapists (Roxana coerces Amy; the landlord commits the sexual act itself); also, Roxana’s performance as co-conspirator signifies a role-reversal, for she is female and would typically be cast as victim of such a crime; and finally, rather than eroticizing sexual force and blurring the lines between seduction and rape, Defoe’s rendering of the scene is entirely unambiguous: “The Wench being naked in the bed with him, ‘twas too late to look back, so she lay still, and let him do what he wou’d with her” (47). Following the rape, Amy “was grievously out of Sorts . . . [and] cry’d two or three Days about it” (47). Defoe also provides a fascinating insight into the psyche of the criminal-rapist. The landlord initially deflects responsibility for his actions by blaming Roxana for enticing him with Amy’s naked body; he stresses later that he “hated [Amy] heartily” for making him commit such a “vile Action,” and Roxana supposes he could “have kill’d her after it” (47). The landlord feels remorse but blames others; Roxana, however, blames only herself, and yet this self-awareness only encourages her behavior: “As I was now become the Devil’s Agent, to make others as wicked as myself, I brought him to lye with her again several times after that” (48). Roxana embraces her depravity, and Defoe renders her as something more monstrous
than even the male amatory schemer who does wrong but does not take ownership of his actions.

Prior to their departure for France, the landlord insists on creating a jointure (one that includes a bond for £100) for Roxana in the event harm were to come his way. Such a gesture confirms his desire to treat her as a kind of “shadow-wife” in an otherwise illegal union. From a rhetorical perspective, Defoe’s pairing of paper credit with the morally corrupt landlord is significant. Pocock asserted that the economic man was perceived as feminized, as one “still wrestling with his own passions and hysterias and with interior and exterior forces let loose by his fantasies and appetites” (114). Such a description aptly suits the landlord, who is consumed by the self-destructive forces of his sexual appetite; by a similar logic, his other occupation as a jeweler and importer of luxury items implicates him as a contributor to what Defoe viewed as England’s deteriorating value system, one facilitated by finance capitalism and the influx of luxury items. As a merchant whose job was to move such commodities across national and cultural boundaries, the landlord is complicit with spreading this disease of consumption and commodification. Just as Defoe’s motif of commodification becomes apparent with Roxana’s many names and reinventions later in the novel, the landlord undergoes a similar transformation: in England, he is simply “the landlord”; in France, he is publically known as “the Jeweler”; privately, Roxana calls him “my Gentleman,” as if to flaunt her prideful commodification of him. Now temporarily residing in Paris, the Jeweler/Gentleman expresses concern again for his safety, for he is known locally as a very rich man, “tho’ not as immensely rich as People imagin’d” (51). Defoe reemphasizes his branding of France as a corrupt, wicked place; in England, Roxana
imagines that Amy could be murdered, but in France murder is treated as commonplace. It is there that the Jeweler is robbed and murdered by three men on horseback who are described as wearing “Soldier’s Cloaths” (54)—a reference to French soldiers and thus an implicit xenophobic detail on Defoe’s part, one which further stresses contemporary Franco-English tensions.

Roxana profits handsomely from the Jeweler’s death both materially and immaterially; moreover, his death makes possible her rebirth in public space. The schemes by which she accumulates capital stage her improved talents for performative display and, in particular, her new skills in social, financial, and sexual espionage. Because it was illegal to have Protestant services in France, Roxana tells a curate of a local Parisian parish that the Jeweler was Catholic and that she, his “widow,” was also Catholic. Such behavior would surely appall Defoe’s contemporary readers, who would view her actions as a grievous, if not treasonous sin, a betrayal of her sacred cultural identity. Disguised as his widow, Roxana seizes the opportunity to profit from the Jeweler’s death by claiming the robbers stole his gold watch, a diamond ring, and most importantly, his casket of extremely valuable diamonds—the very goods he left with her prior to his murder. She also discovers gold he had locked away in his writing-desk as well as foreign-bills, all of which totaled nearly £10000.

As an act of ruthless financial prudence, Roxana then informs Amy to “[gut] the House” (55): to secure all of the luxury goods at his home in England (plates, linens, and so forth) and sell or dispose of the furniture; in doing so, his legal wife cannot inherit what no longer exists. Roxana adopts the disguise of his French widow (she is fluent in the language, after all) when the head manager of the Jeweler’s estate travels to Paris to
question her; she claims she knew nothing of another wife in England and was therefore not in the wrong for selling his property—legally, she is protected. Though Defoe makes no mention of how her crime impacts the Jeweler’s widow, the implications of Roxana’s fraud are astonishing: she has likely bankrupted this woman; and if that is the case, one can imagine the widow will suffer a trauma not unlike the one Roxana suffered at the hands of the Brewer. She is so corrupted by the promise of capital and luxury goods that she does not flinch when inflicting upon another the kind of ruinous existence that initially compelled her to abandon her children and become a mistress/prostitute.

V. Amatory Tropes, Roxana’s Reinvention, and Her Long-Term Contract with a Prince

With the death of the Jeweler, Roxana acknowledges an opportunity for reinvention: she adopts a French identity and is known publicly as “the pretty widow of Poictou” (57); this moment also prefaces Defoe’s introduction to the amatory trope of inquiry. Barbara Benedict points out that Roxana’s espionage—her many identities, the ways in which she manipulates and deceives in order to advance herself socially and financially—derives from what she calls an “inquiring impulse” commonly explored in amatory fiction (201). Benedict cites such amatory authors as the fair triumvirate of Behn, Manley, and Haywood as those who “exploited in the novel the generic link between two kinds of exploration of the unknown for personal gratification—the desire to find something out, curiosity, and the desire to be aroused” (194-5). Defoe expands but also subverts the amatory trope of inquiry: Roxana’s “inquiring impulse” is associated with personal gratification, but specifically at the cruel expense of others (her children, Amy, the widow of the landlord/Jeweler). Moreover, romantic love—a subject integral to
amatory fiction—is displaced by Roxana’s consumptive desires for material and immaterial capital. While she certainly does possess curiosity about sexual arousal, her primary motives for investigation and espionage are to feed her expanding appetite for capital, not sexual pleasure.

Roxana’s second sexual contract with the Prince occurs under entirely different circumstances than her first. Because she is now considerably wealthy, her decision to accept the role of a mistress to the Prince is entirely her own. In one respect, her behavior could be perceived as a demonstration of self-empowerment, a means to express her agency in both public and private space—put simply, she can now pursue whatever path she desires. Defoe, however, undercuts her potential proto-feminist status by again stressing that Roxana is a slave of capital, for she will debase her physical and moral well-being in the pursuit of capital she does not even need. Roxana begins to hustle the Prince—the very customer to whom the Jeweler was set to sell the diamonds. Defoe’s use of economic diction as a basis for sexual negotiation becomes apparent during Roxana’s first encounter with the Prince: she deceives him, claiming that the goods the Jeweler intended to sell were stolen, and as “Reparation” he puts a silk purse (a coded reminder of Defoe’s indignation towards French politics and values) with gold coins into her hand, promising her a “farther Compliment of a small Pension” (58-9). Defoe satirizes the performative aspects of courtship rituals as both Roxana and the Prince adopt performative disguises and mimic courtship behaviors: Roxana plays the role of distressed widow whose tears, she confesses, “were a little forc’d”; the Prince adopts the role of concerned stranger whose intent, he claims, is solely altruistic (59). Of course, his promise that he will “find ways to restore [Roxana’s] Fortune” is loaded with innuendo,
and his virtuous persona is quite obviously put into question when he compliments Roxana for “being very handsome” (59). The Prince is aligned with the typical amatory schemer, but Roxana is by now an expert at this game of espionage and sexual negotiation. She revels in the idea that she possesses the upper hand; it is a source of great pride: “I manag’d him with such Art, that he generally anticipated my Demands” (66). Defoe ironically subverts the female-as-victim motif of amatory fiction by staging Roxana’s talent for performing as the widow-victim: she plays up her innocence to the Prince’s ulterior motives in an effort to accelerate the transaction they both desire.

Defoe’s critique of the corruptive and pervasive powers of consumption and commodification becomes quite explicit when the Prince places Roxana in front of a mirror. He does so in response to Roxana’s claim that she may return to Poictou (one clearly designed to provoke a response from her suitor); at the mirror, he points to her figure in the glass, and then pleads, “Stay, and make some Gentleman of Quality happy, that may, in return, make you forget all your Sorrows” (60). The Prince’s sexual proposition of Roxana is apparent, but it is his unconcealed, unapologetic commodification of her that is most significant—she is an object to be desired and enjoyed, and the Prince’s gesture demonstrates his wish that she view herself in precisely the same manner. Little does he realize that Roxana is already fully alert to her sexual value and has no qualms with being used as such. At a later point, the Prince inspects her as if she were a doll or toy: “He was spanning my Neck, to see how small it was, for it was long and small” (73). This peculiar, potentially unnerving moment hints at the potential for sexualized force, thus echoing the landlord’s rape of Amy and the rape trope of amatory fiction; the scene, however, functions primarily to stress the Prince’s
incapacity to see Roxana as an individual who possesses any interior substance—she is no different than a luxury good designed for his admiration and pleasure. Roxana, of course, sees herself much in the same way: “I was the vainest Creature upon Earth, and particularly, of my Beauty” (62). Roxana’s body is also compared to that of a lavish meal upon which the Prince shall dine. When he seduces Roxana for the first time, the seduction setting is littered with luxury goods; the Prince’s servant, for instance, sets up a table “cover’d with a fine Damask Cloth . . . [and] upon it, was set two Decanters, one of Champaign, and the other of Water, six Silver Plates, and a Service of fine Sweet-Meats in fine China Dishes” (62). With the meal of three roasted partridges and a quail on elaborate display, the Prince declares, “I intend to Sup with you” (62), but the sexualized double-meaning of “Sup” is apparent. The seduction scene stages Defoe’s use of luxury items as props which facilitate illicit behavior and material indulgence; moreover, it functions as yet another reminder that in this culture of commodification and consumption, the potential for spiritual love has been displaced by the fetishization of materiality.

Roxana’s relationship with the Prince extends for eight years and results in the birth of three boys. She refers to the birth of the first boy as a “Disaster” due to its illegitimacy as a bastard child (81). The third boy she mentions only in passing and, presumably, he suffers the same fate as the first child. The second child, she explains, died after two months. Roxana in no way reflects on his death, a further reminder of her defiant rejection of a maternal identity and certainly a flaw implanted by Defoe not only to shock his contemporary readers but to reemphasize the new kinds of identities produced in an era of finance capitalism and global luxury trade. Roxana’s identity—how
she defines herself in relation to the surrounding world—is directly tied into her business of extracting capital. Defoe stresses Roxana’s status as a monstrous aberration, a creature antagonistic or at least indifferent to the natural order, for her success in the bedroom makes a perverse mockery of pre-existing distinctions between private and public space. Private space now becomes a setting for business; sexual intimacy is now a transaction described as a “Conference . . . in Bed” (71). Roxana’s maternal rejection and her treatment of private space as a place where capital can be exchanged (the leasing of her body for material and immaterial compensation) signify Defoe’s prediction of capitalism at its most extreme and nightmarish endpoint; Roxana’s characterization as the embodiment of this kind of capital is therefore meant to be understood as a threat to traditional values and ideologies—the very values Defoe believed were diminishing as a result of finance capitalism and global luxury trade.

Roxana’s contract with the Prince entails her total commitment to his sexual desires; her compliance results in ample reward. This arrangement is quite clearly summarized by Roxana, who explains, “As he lov’d like a Prince, so he rewarded like a Prince” (70). Roxana subsequently provides a thorough inventory of her “immense Bounty” (72): all the items meant for a luxurious dressing-room clad in silver; jewels; suits “of the finest Brocaded Silk, figur’d with Gold, and another with Silver, and another of Crimson” (70); suits she itemizes by design, expense, and occasion; ornate gowns and petticoats; and eventually an income so enormous that “[her] greatest Difficulty now, was, how to secure [her] Wealth” (106). She also takes great pride in the titles to which the Prince assigns her. First she is his “Princess” (64), and when they travel abroad she is “Countess de _____” (106). In reality she is but one of his many mistresses, though she is
certainly his most high-ranking—a confirmation of her value as a sexual commodity. Their sexual contract also requires non-disclosure; such is why the Prince requires of her that she should “take a Country-House in some Village, a good-way off of the City, where it should not be known who [she] was” (67). With Roxana isolated and confined, the Prince can protect his identity and simultaneously make certain that she remains exclusively his. This attention flatters Roxana’s already inflated ego but, of course, she “made no Scruple of the Confinement” because it is to her benefit (67)—it is good for business and promises that the Prince will remain a loyal customer.

The Prince’s unexpected reform after an eight-year affair, one which has produced several children, is brought on by his wife’s abrupt illness and death; this in turn leads to his termination of his sexual contract with Roxana. Roxana’s response to the news illustrates her extreme emotional detachment and serves again to remind the reader that this has been nothing more than a business transaction all along. Roxana admits she was “exceedingly surpriz’d” but “was fully satisfied” upon hearing his reasons (110). Moreover, she revels in the idea of her newfound freedom: “Now I was at Liberty to go to any Part of the World, and take Care of my Money myself” (111). Defoe simultaneously parodies and subverts the bildungsroman, for Roxana’s goal is not to find romantic love or to mature emotionally and intellectually but rather to increase her financial literacy, to become a “She-Merchant” (131) or a “Man-Woman” (172). With the introduction of the Dutch merchant, who is described as “a Man of Substance, and of Honesty” (111), Defoe continues to stage Roxana’s obsession with acquiring and expanding her wealth. For contemporary readers, the Merchant’s Dutch nationality would
be a clear hint that he is likely an expert in matters of finance and commerce. Indeed, Roxana values her relationship with the Merchant because he can teach her about the seller’s market for luxury goods and can likewise introduce her to the various arts of public credit; due to his “great Reputation” (111), he is also especially useful because he possesses the power to transfer Bills of Exchange into tangible capital.

VI. Amatory Tropes and Roxana’s Affair with the Dutch Merchant

In his rendering of the courtship process between the Merchant and Roxana, Defoe’s use of amatory tropes is pronounced and again expresses his anxieties regarding the culture of consumption and commodification fostered by finance capitalism and global luxury trade. Defoe prefaces their courtship with a brief, if bizarre, anti-Semitic subplot in which a Jew attempts to blackmail Roxana in an effort to seize her diamonds (those formerly owned by the Jeweler). The Merchant successfully implements a plan to help her sell the jewels and flee for Amsterdam; as a result, Roxana feels heavily indebted to him—a predicament echoing the start of her long affair with the landlord/Jeweler and her origins as prostitute. In certain respects, the Merchant aligns with the typical, lascivious amatory suitor who commodifies the female, and Defoe’s economic discourse suggests the potential for another sexual contract: “[The Merchant] had yet a Design to lay before me, which, if I wou’d agree to his Proposals, wou’d more than balance all Accounts between us” (138). Moreover, the potential for sexualized force is implied when he grabs her by the arms and kisses her with such purpose that he

“wou’d not give [her] Leave to say No, and hardly to Breathe” (141). Roxana adopts the performative disguise of a virtuous widow and pretends to be inflexible to his advances; secretly, however, she resolves to let him “have his Will easily enough” (142). After the seduction rite of “merry” drinking and “Mirth” (143), Roxana retires to her chamber but leaves the door ajar so he can watch her undress; here Defoe subverts the trope of the female as victimized sexual bait in Roxana’s positioning of herself as bait. She “made a seeming Resistance” but of course submits (143). In this culture of consumption and commodification, Roxana anticipates the Merchant’s desire and exploits it in order to simultaneously repay her debt and reclaim any power he once held over her.

The Merchant and Roxana spend two consecutive nights together; on the third night, he confesses his wish to marry her. With the Merchant’s proposal, Defoe inverts the amatory template by presenting a male who wishes not only to seduce but to marry, and it is the female who has no qualms about the state of her own virtue—and certainly no interest in restoring it. Roxana’s suspects him of wanting to marry only so he can gain access to her wealth. This suspicion partly derives from her obsession with preserving and growing her capital, but it also points to the trauma she suffered at the hands of the Brewer (who is now deceased, which means she is free to marry legally if she wishes to do so). His proposal spurs a long philosophical discourse that provides a fascinating insight into Roxana’s psyche while also demonstrating Defoe’s contemporary observations about the inequity of marriage and property laws. Roxana states her objection rather bluntly: “the very Nature of the Marriage-Contract was, in short, nothing but giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and every-thing, to the Man, and the Woman was indeed . . . a Slave” (148). The Merchant’s rebuttal, as revealing as it is rampantly
sexist, includes his claim that married women have do nothing but *consume*, or as he puts it, “Eat the fat, and drink the Sweet” (140). Roxana’s reply foreshadows her later assertion that she desires to be a “Man-Woman” (171): “While a Woman was single . . . she was a Man in her separated Capacity, to all Intents and Purposes that a Man cou’d be so to himself” (148). Roxana aspires to cultivate a double-gendered identity, to be both a “man” who earns and invests his capital, and to be a “woman” who enjoys that capital through luxury consumption. Kimberly Latta address the subject of Defoe’s feelings about women who desired to become autonomous agents; she concludes they were “mixed, and [that] he expressed this ambivalence perhaps most succinctly in Lady Credit” (363). If Roxana is to be perceived as a symbol of Lady Credit, it appears that Defoe’s opinion on the matter is less “mixed” than Latta asserts. Her unnatural breeding, her disregard for her duties as a mother, her violation of pre-existing distinctions between public and private space, and likewise her ambition to be a “Man-Woman”—these are all examples of how Defoe renders Roxana as an aberration, a monstrosity whose disinterest in tradition is again a nightmarish prediction for the kinds of personalities capable of being produced in an era of finance capitalism and global luxury trade.

The conclusion of their marriage negotiation highlights Roxana’s value system, one which is wholly corrupted by the desire for capital. She is persuasive in her position that marriage for a woman is no different than a loss of the individual self—so much, in fact, that the Merchant, who is wealthy himself, offers to keep their capital entirely separate; moreover, he will settle in any part of the world she wishes to live; he also says he would trust her with *his* estate even if she would not trust him with hers. In short, the Merchant concedes to every possible objection made by Roxana; he will grant her
financial, social, and geographic liberty. Surprised by his response, she admits, “If ever any Man in the World was truly valuable for the strictest honesty of Intention, this was the Man” (157). Roxana, however, also privately reflects that during the discourse she “was inflexible, and pretended to argue upon the Point of a Woman’s Liberty” (157). Roxana’s “Wickedness” is amplified by Defoe (159), for she becomes impregnated by the Merchant, continues to refuse his proposal of marriage, and flees to London to reinvent herself yet again. Of the unborn child, Roxana says she “wou’d willingly have given ten Thousand Pounds of [her] Money, to have been rid of the Burthen [she] had in [her] Belly” (163). Little detail is given on the child’s account, save for that it was a boy who would, due to the insistence of the Merchant, be given a sum of money for his education; like her children by other men, the bastard child is extracted from the home and presumably sent to an orphanage in London.

VII. Amatory Tropes and Roxana’s Public Emergence at Pall Mall

Roxana’s move to Pall Mall marks a crucial point in the novel, for it is in the elite public space of London that she finally acquires her name. Prior to being coined “Roxana” (an allusion to the historical and cultural figure of Roxolana, and one that Defoe’s contemporary audience would almost certainly recognize)\(^{37}\), she disguises herself as a wealthy French woman living among aristocratic society. Newly-reinvented,}

\(^{36}\) The emphasis here is mine.

\(^{37}\) Judy A. Hayden explains that Roxolana mythology began to be dramatized on the English stage during the reign of Charles II; Hayden identifies three specific Carolean plays in which Roxolana appears in a leading role: William Davenant’s The Siege of Rhodes (1663), Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery’s Mustapha (1668), and Elkanah Settle’s Ibrahim the Illustrious Bassa (1667). The plays, just a few of many, were also performed during Defoe’s lifetime. For more information, see Hayden’s “The Tragedy of Roxolana in the Court of Charles II,” which is Chapter 3 of Yermolenko’s edited text, Roxolana in European Literature, History and Culture. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010): 71-88.
she states two lofty goals: the first, to become mistress to the King of England; the second, to continue to grow her already enormous capital. Of the latter, she recruits Sir Robert Clayton, a historical figure who would be recognized by Defoe’s contemporaries as a successful merchant and financier; indeed, he invests Roxana’s capital with such acumen that she becomes “monstrous rich” (171). Backscheider asserts that Clayton is introduced as a “reminder of the everyday London business world . . . and, in Roxana’s life of corruption and predatory conduct, of honesty and straightforwardness” (474). Clayton’s presence in the narrative fits Defoe’s rhetorical engagement of amatory tropes—Clayton, like the Dutch merchant, is a suitor whose intentions are described as “thorowly honest” (169); he certainly may value her as a sexual commodity, but he also wishes to provide her an outlet from a debasing sexual career. The amatory template is subverted by Defoe when Roxana rejects Clayton for the reason that “[her] Heart was bent upon an Independency of Fortune” (170). Roxana would rather be wed to capital than pursue a life of virtue or redemption; moreover, she will neither risk compromising the freedom to pursue capital nor will she alter a moral code that enables her to extract capital with such success. Defoe thus also ironically subverts the amatory seduction scene to stress Roxana’s seduction by capital.

Roxana’s predatorial pursuit of the King is another reversal of the amatory trope of the female as sexual bait; her actions also align with Defoe’s treatment of her as a modern Roxolana. Roxolana’s biographical origins entail a history of enslavement in which she was abducted by Crimean Tartars and shipped to multiple slave markets, where she was finally purchased at Istanbul for the imperial harem. She became a

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courtesan, quickly ascended in rank to become the favorite of Suleiman I, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, upon whom she wielded such considerable influence that he broke with tradition, freed her, and she became his legal wife. As an imported cultural and literary icon, Roxolana began to be known in Western Europe by the late 1520s; Galina Yermolenko explains that Roxolana’s “early modern image as a ruthless schemer was replaced with a more seductive and intelligent figure operating from the heart of the Turkish seraglio” (“Roxolana” 38). Yermolenko hypothesizes that this gradual alteration to the ways in which Roxolana was portrayed in literature and on stage was likely due to the fact the Ottoman Empire was no longer perceived as a menace after the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683. Defoe appropriates Roxolana mythology by rendering Roxana as an amalgam of both the old and new Roxolana personas—the ruthless schemer and the intelligent seductress.

Certainly some of Defoe’s allusions to Roxolana are implicit, though a reader familiar with the rich history of Roxana’s name would likely make the connection. The Turkish slave purchased for Roxana by the Prince is one such allusion. This is Roxana’s first intimate experience with the culture of the Orient: “Of [this slave] I learnt the Turkish language; their way of Dressing, and Dancing, and some Turkish, or rather Moorish Songs, of which I made Use, to my Advantage, on an extraordinary Occasion, some Years after” (102). Roxana is foreshadowing her encounter with the masked stranger at her home in the “new Sphere” of Pall Mall (172). The ball she hosts is purely business, as she intends on ensnaring her next customer—hopefully, the King, who (rumor has it) may be among the visitors dressed in “Masquerade” (173). During the ball, Defoe’s use of amatory tropes and his satire of the performative aspects of courtship
behavior are pronounced. Roxana boastfully explains that she was “harras’d with Lovers, Beaus, and Fops of Quality” (172)—all adequate models for the amatory schemer. The masks that are worn by some of the men call attention to their performative disguises. The home itself becomes a staged seduction setting: it is equipped with luxury goods (wine, candy, and confections), a “green Table for Play” (which echoes Pope’s parodic rendering of sexualized epic battles during a game of Ombre in *The Rape of the Lock*); music is played and ladies dance, and “everyone began to be merry” (173). Roxana advertises herself as sexualized bait, for she is adorned in imported luxury goods and adopts the persona of an Oriental siren: “Dress’d in the Habit of a Turkish Princess” (173), she seductively dances for the entire room. Her performance is so convincing that many believed the French music to be Turkish, and in a manner of comical, climactic ecstasy, her enthusiastic audience cries aloud, “Roxana! Roxana!” (174). Roxana’s corruption is well-documented by Defoe, but here he implicates all of English society, including perhaps even the King. Defoe’s use of amatory tropes, in conjunction with his allusions to Roxolana and Oriental culture, facilitates his repeated assertion that global luxury trade and the culture of consumption it fosters has transformed the English value system.

It is also worth noting that Roxana draws comparisons to Roxolana in her many confinements: first, with the landlord/Jeweler; then with the Prince; and finally with a high-ranking person (possibly the King) whose identity she protects because it is her “Duty . . . not to reveal” (181). Her confinements likewise align with the author’s use of amatory tropes: she is sexually commodified by the men, all of whom adopt performative displays in an attempt to seduce her. Like Roxolana, who lived in a harem with “about
three hundred other beautiful women” (Yermolenko 4), Roxana competes with many mistresses of the Prince; it is also mentioned that the King “had several Mistresses, who were prodigious fine” (172). Roxana’s ascent from an abandoned, impoverished wife of a Brewer to the role of an incredibly rich mistress of high-ranking royalty is also not unlike Roxolana, who uses her keen intelligence and sexual value to ascend from slavery to royalty. As a modern Roxolana, Roxana’s talent for self-preservation and social mobility is admirable, but Defoe appropriates this mythology while he simultaneously engages the amatory template in order to dramatize the destructive power of capital and the culture of commodification it engenders. Roxana, a product of this culture, uses her sexual currency as a source of dangerous agency. Her value as a sexual commodity enables her to manipulate and steal; it aids in the efficacy of her multiple reinventions and deceptions; and it affords her the opportunity to transcend geographic, cultural, and social space in the process of acquiring an astonishing amount of capital. It is crucial to remember that her power would be dispossessed if she operated in a cultural reality that did not place so much value upon commodities in the first place. This is perhaps Defoe’s most scathing indictment of contemporary English (and Western European) values: Roxana’s monstrous moral code is a culmination of the very same values permitted in her society.

This chapter has presented Roxana as a tragedy of capital, as a narrative that explores how material and immaterial forms of capital are dangerous, destructive forces. More specifically, this chapter has explored how a culture that cultivates these forces is responsible for producing new kinds of personalities that are likewise dangerous and destructive. In an effort to contextualize Defoe’s examination of the corruptive forces of finance capitalism and global luxury trade, I have provided a cursory but relevant
biographical history of the author. In doing so, I have shown that *Roxana* is informed by the author’s own failures as a merchant, by his traumatic experiences with bankruptcy and imprisonment, and by his subsequent career as a spy who understood the arts of disguise and reinvention. Particularly, it is Defoe’s experiences in prison that greatly inform the interior logic of the text: Roxana equates poverty with imprisonment; she in turn equates capital to liberty. Defoe examines the dangers of such a philosophy, and he provides numerous examples of how capital distorts value systems and can lead to the total abandonment of traditional ideologies. Roxana is characterized as a body of capital-in-excess, as a creature antagonistic or at least indifferent to what Defoe perceived as the natural order—she is grotesquely fertile and has no maternal instinct whatsoever; she violates pre-existing distinctions between private and public space; and she desires to be a “Man-Woman,” to simultaneously generate and consume capital.

In my textual analysis, I have focused on Defoe’s prolific deployment of amatory tropes to signify his anxieties about England’s growing culture of consumption and commodification. By looking closely at Roxana’s sexual negotiations and her career as courtesan-mistress, I have demonstrated how amatory tropes dramatize the commodification of the individual as an object to be used, abused, hoarded, or even disposed—an expression of Defoe’s attitudes regarding England’s altering value system brought on by finance capitalism and luxury trade. I have examined the ways in which Roxana both adheres to and defies categorization as an amatory heroine; I have shown how the majority of her male suitors align with amatory male schemers, and I have explored the significance of her rejection of those who valued her as something more than a sexual commodity. I have discussed Defoe’s appropriation of the amatory plot and
his many subversions of the amatory seduction scene. Finally, I have demonstrated how Defoe expands but also subverts the amatory trope of inquiry. By concluding with a discussion of how Defoe alludes to Roxolana mythology while he simultaneously engages amatory tropes, I have provided a clear link between the title-character and that of an imported cultural icon, a person whose biographical history aligns so closely with Roxana’s that the implication is her history is not even entirely her own. Defoe appropriates this mythology to assert that Roxana is meant to be perceived only as a commodity, as a luxury good; she is thus the creation and embodiment of England’s financial and material climate, a hollow thing with no interior substance.
CHAPTER THREE, *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS* (1735)

As Jonathan Swift was working on *Gulliver’s Travels* in the 1720s, he referenced on some occasion in letters a preoccupation with travel literature. In one such letter to Vanessa, a girl he tutored (and, incidentally, who was in love with him), he explained that a bad spell of weather led him to “[reading] I know not how many diverting Books of History and Travells” (*Complete Works* 57). This era of geographical exploration and discovery, one partly made possible by the Turks’ defeat at the 1683 Battle of Vienna, coincided with a booming production of travel literature during Swift’s lifetime. In his excellent study on this unique period in literary culture, Thomas M. Curley explains: “Travel was a national enthusiasm and a prime manifestation of that exuberant Georgian curiosity to survey and to study the expanding geographical frontiers of human knowledge” (1). Defoe, like Swift, was keenly interested in travel, but both men publicly disparaged the other’s preferred method of learning: Swift called Defoe “illiterate” (*Examiner*, No. 16) and Defoe mocked Swift as a man who “[knew] nothing of the World, and has never look’d abroad” (*Review*, Vol. 7). Defoe, who once boasted that he was a “Master of Geography” (*Daniel Defoe* 81), did have a point about Swift’s lack of real-world experience in travel. Swift generally only traveled between Dublin and Moor Park, or between Dublin and London; he once planned an extensive journey to Vienna but never carried it out (Moore 227). His experience with foreign culture was thus largely intellectual and therefore imaginative—a considerable difference when compared to Defoe, who published a three-volume travel book called *Tour Through the Whole Island*
of Great Britain (published between 1724 and 1727), which was innovative partly because he had visited the places he described. Simply put, Defoe was nomadic and learned about other cultures first-hand; Swift’s method of acquiring knowledge was primarily through print journalism and literature.

As a foundation to an analysis of Gulliver’s Travels, this chapter will carefully consider the role of travel as it informs the author’s satirical objectives and his engagement of the amatory template. Travel during Swift’s lifetime was of course intimately linked to transnational trade and the rise of capitalism. Like Pope and Defoe, Swift sensed and served witness to a collapse of classical notions of selfhood, to what he perceived as the emergence of new identities in possession of dangerous, unpredictable moral codes. The structure of Chapter Three will first position Swift as a Christian Humanist who was disturbed by the ideological and institutional shifts in Britain. Following this will be an analysis of how Swift’s ideas regarding the “real essence” (to borrow from Lockean terminology)\(^3\) of the human are expressed in the author’s prolific satirical display in Gulliver’s Travels. I will then focus on Swift’s deployment of amatory tropes, which he uses to express his anxieties about how travel adversely impacts the British ethos and psyche. For Swift, travel facilitates corrupt codes of thought and action—not just trade and material consumption, but also the cruelties associated with colonial conquest.

The amatory trope of inquiry is therefore essential to Swift’s dramatization of the unpredictable dangers of travel. As Gulliver encounters foreign lands, he is continuously displaced and defined by his outsider-status. In an immediate sense, it is his material body—one entirely alien to the native norm—which predetermines his status as an absurd

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monstrosity. Swift also stresses that Gulliver, as a representative of modern Britain’s imperialistic practices and its hegemonic worldview, possesses a belief system that is in its own right absurd and monstrous. As will be shown in Chapter Three, Swift depicts imperialism as but another form of commodification and consumption. It is therefore no coincidence that travel for Gulliver is so traumatic that he experiences a comprehensive disintegration of his former identity; his understanding of “the real” is permanently altered, as his understanding of the “the real” in others—the rhetorical impact on an audience of contemporary readers would presumably be both personal and powerful.

Swift traces Gulliver’s alteration from an exaggerated, hyper-masculine representative of hegemonic values to a submissive and dehumanized subaltern figure. The effect is partly to satirize hegemonic distinctions of cultural and racial superiority; more implicitly, Swift demonstrates how travel can be perceived as a signification of cultural arrogance and entitlement—and subsequently a dangerous violation of not only geographical but also moral boundaries. In conjunction with his deployment of amatory tropes, Swift’s rendering of Gulliver’s devolution serves as a nightmarish prediction for the direction in which Britain is headed.

While the amatory trope of inquiry serves as a basis to Swift’s examination of the potential ramifications of travel on the British ethos and psyche, he also uses a variety of other amatory tropes to express the ways in which human beings are commodified as goods to be valued, used, abused, hoarded, or even traded—all veiled allusions to his indictment of the culture of consumption and commodification brought on by finance capitalism and global luxury trade. As a preface to an analysis of Swift’s parodic use of amatory tropes in the text, I will examine how Gulliver’s many mercantile travels serve
as possible allusions to slave trade—perhaps the very worst form of trans-global commerce and commodification. Alternate forms of commodification surface in many other instances in which Swift engages the amatory template. The trope of the all-powerful amatory male schemer is comically amplified at Lilliput, where Gulliver is rendered as a grotesque emblem of virility. Swift reverses this strategy by reducing Gulliver to a miniature size, something akin to a doll or pet, at Brobdingnag. Such a reversal facilitates further subversions of amatory tropes in which the male is not merely emasculated but becomes the vulnerable, commodified target of sexualized force. Swift both plays into and challenges the tropes of the empty-headed and sexually inexperienced female; he satirizes female vanity and the amatory trope of the female as irresistible siren; on several occasions he also subverts the amatory seduction scene. As Chapter Three will show, Swift’s parodic engagement of the amatory template enables him to stage his anxieties about how the activity of travel is symptomatic of a diseased Britain, one infected by the persistent desire for commodification and consumption.

I. Swift’s Humanism in Gulliver’s Travels

In an effort to understand Swift’s unique brand of Christian Humanism and its relevancy to his satirical objectives in Gulliver’s Travels, it is necessary to first make a clear distinction between the two opposing sides of humanist philosophy during the author’s lifetime. This debate actually began during the Italian Renaissance with the revival of classical culture, a period in which differing beliefs about literature and learning led to fundamental disagreements among the era’s most influential
intellectuals. The debate was still heated in the 1690s, and Anthony Grafton has argued of this period that there were two primary inclinations in humanism: “One set of humanists seeks to make the ancient world live again, assuming its undimmed relevance and unproblematic accessibility; another set seeks to put the ancient world back into its own time” (620). In this particular context, Swift unquestionably belongs to the ancients rather than the moderns, and his work reflects a desire to exalt the ideas and values first expressed in classical antiquity. The very notion of progress—how to define or identify it; how to determine its role in shaping the ideals of society—was up for debate. With A Tale of a Tub (1704) and a short satire called The Battle of the Books (a parody of epic battles in which library books humorously come alive and attempt to settle arguments between the two opposing sides), Swift’s rhetoric quite clearly mocked the pride displayed by those who believed their own age to be supreme. A cursory glance at Gulliver’s Travels aligns with a similar perspective: at Brobdingnag Part II, the rational giants are akin to the ancients, for they live in an agricultural society and find Gulliver’s modern values to be excessively shocking and corrupt; Part III is largely a satire on modern science; and Part IV employs Juvenalian satire to posit the Yahoos as materialism incarnate.

In his seminal study of Eurocentric conceptions of barbarism, Claude Rawson posits in God, Gulliver, and Genocide (2001) a link between Swift and Montaigne, the sixteenth century French essayist and philosopher. Montaigne, like Swift, was extremely curious about other cultures and relied heavily on acquiring knowledge by reading, though he did, as Rawson observes, travel to Italy and to Protestant cities in Germany;

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Rawson also observes that the work of both men contain “political thought and ethnographic observation which go back to Plato and More, and to a vast body of classical and Renaissance writings from Homer onwards which is preoccupied with the idea of the barbarian or savage” (2). The idea, for instance, of the “savage in all of us” goes back to Plato’s musings on the tyrant whose brutalities are equated to cannibal barbarism (Rawson 4). The beliefs of Montaigne and Swift regarding to the nature of man and his capacity for grievous moral crimes were no doubt influenced by their classical leanings; their studies subsequently informed their indignation towards acts of imperialism, plunder, and the vulgar cruelties of racism.

II. Imperial Conquest and the Lockean Concept of “Real Essences”

During the Age of Discovery (otherwise known as the Age of Exploration) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Spain and Portugal spearheaded European exploration around the globe and established large overseas empires. As William J. Bernstein observes, other nations like the Netherlands, France, and England were envious of that wealth and began to establish colonies and trade companies of their own\(^\text{41}\). From the perspective of the ambitious explorer-capitalist in Britain, a series of fortunate events unfolded in rather swift succession: the Turks’ failed 1683 siege of Vienna provided an opportunity for travel to distances previously impossible; the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689 boosted England’s economy; and a number of wars harmed the status of the Netherlands and France as global powers, which in turn left England as the remaining dominant colonial power—particularly in India and North America. *Gulliver’s Travels*

was constructed in this particular context, a period in which the acquisition of property (national, cultural, material, and so forth) was very much on the collective minds of British citizens.

Similarly fluent in this society were notions about British superiority and the “savagery” of the colonized native. J.A. Downie looks to Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as a possible influence on Swift’s expressed ideas about the “real essences” of the human. Specifically, he argues that Swift is not satirizing Locke but is instead “playing with ideas” to which Locke gave currency (457). Locke made shape and rationality signs of the human and Swift does the same through his irrational Yahoos and rational horses in Book Four. Gulliver initially fails to recognize them as human—a perhaps deliberate subversion of one of Locke’s assumptions. What is apparent is that Swift perceived the potential savage in everyone, regardless of culture, nationality, or race; moreover, he vehemently derided the modern humanistic notion that humanity was improving upon the past.

III. Amatory Tropes and Gulliver as a Modern: A Preface to Lilliput

Swift’s deployment of amatory tropes in *Gulliver’s Travels* enables him to expose the absurd hypocrisy of modern values which posit Britain as a kind of divine hegemonic power somehow deserving of all it desires, no matter the consequences; such self-entitlement serves as false justification for the mercantile capitalism, the excessive consumption of luxury goods, and the cruelties of colonial conquest. Barbara Benedict’s ideas about the trope of inquiry in amatory fiction are enormously useful because travel—an activity based upon the most basic idea of inquiry—is so central to the text. As
mentioned previously in Chapter Two, Benedict identifies two modes of inquiry in amatory fiction: curiosity and the desire to be aroused (194). Swift is certainly well aware of both: even on the first page of “A Voyage to Lilliput” he provides ample references to mercantile travel (to the Levant, to the East and West Indies) and makes a series of masturbation puns. The reader is given a brief but vital history of Gulliver’s lineage: as a farmer, his father comes from an agricultural background, which links him to the ancients. Gulliver however is apprenticed to a wage-earning job, and he trains to become a surgeon, a modern profession. The name of his teacher, Master Mr. Bates, is a thinly veiled allusion to masturbation, which implies that the capitalistic underpinnings reduce modern professions to sterile forms of self-indulgence or self-pleasuring. What Swift presents is a parody of the amatory trope of inquiry while he simultaneously attacks modern values.

Very early in the narrative, Swift also establishes a motif in which Gulliver, who has a wife and children, is constantly drawn from home towards the promised commerce of the sea. Of course, it is nothing unusual for the male in this society to cultivate an identity in public space, but Gulliver’s absence from home is astonishing due to the duration of his absences: two years after being married, he “made several Voyages, for six Years” as a surgeon onboard two ships (16); he returns home for three years, only to then depart again for a voyage to the South-Sea. It is at this point in which Gulliver’s ship encounters a storm and he awakes in Lilliput, where he remains for close to three years. After Lilliput he returns home and stays for two months, “for [his] insatiable Desire of seeing foreign Countries would suffer [him] to continue no longer” (66). In June 1702 he
boards a merchant ship bound for Surat, an Indian seaport\textsuperscript{42}; after a series of mishaps near the Cape of Good Hope, they do not set sail for nearly a year. When they do, they encounter a “Southern Monsoon” (69), become rather lost, and then unknowingly discover the land of Brobdingnag, where Gulliver is accidentally left behind. Gulliver spends three years there, totaling four since his initial departure.

In June 1706 he arrives in England, is offered more work aboard a traveling vessel just ten days after his arrival, which he accepts and departs for the East Indies two months later. Part III features Gulliver’s imprisonment by pirates and his travels to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubdrib, Luggnagg, and Japan; he does not return home for five years and six months. He arrives home in April 1710, stays home for just five months, and leaves his wife “big with Child” (187); he does not return home from the land of the Houyhnhnms until November 1715. Gulliver claims he has traveled for sixteen years and seven months, but the math is inconsistent. If his timeline is to be taken seriously, he has spent approximately twenty-three years abroad and just five years and nine months at home, covering a period of nearly three decades. Swift’s rhetoric is unambiguous: Gulliver’s desire for inquiry trumps any duty he feels towards his family, which reinforces the notion that modern values are sterile and self-serving. Gulliver has all but missed the development of his children and has left his wife to care for them alone. Perhaps most baffling is his repeated returns to the sea, especially in light of the multiple traumas he experiences as a cultural and physical monstrosity in foreign lands.

\textsuperscript{42}Albert J. Rivero, the editor of the Norton critical edition of the text notes that Surat was the first English settlement in India in 1612: \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 66.
IV. Amatory Tropes and Gulliver as a Giant at Lilliput

While the amatory trope of inquiry is most obviously staged in Gulliver’s many disastrous sea voyages, the theme of curiosity surfaces on multiple occasions and reinforces Swift’s implicit condemnation of the modern values of commodification and consumption. Gulliver’s arrival at Lilliput is one such example, for he is perceived with great curiosity by the natives. A giant in a land of tiny Lilliputians, Gulliver is a grotesque, foreign commodity, and they fasten him to the ground because they instinctively fear him. The image of his “Arms and Legs [being] strongly fastened on each side to the Ground” conjures the amatory trope of sexualized force (17), especially in consideration of Swift’s prolific deployment of other amatory tropes. For instance, in order to stress Gulliver’s commodification, Swift provides an itemized catalogue of Gulliver’s body: his “long and thick” hair, his armpits, thighs, legs, breast, chin, and eyes (17). Swift also parodies the amatory seduction scene by alluding to hot weather: “The Sun began to grow hot, and the Light offended [his] Eyes” (17). Such details provide a perverse element of sexual objectification to his shackling, which Swift builds upon in his descriptions of other forms of physical invasion. Gulliver feels “several slender Ligatures across [his] Body” (17); the Lilliputians are also equipped with phallic weaponry (bows and arrows), which they shower over him and cause tremendous pain. The entire scene of Gulliver’s capture at Lilliput is a brilliant parody of the amatory template; moreover, as a colonial representative, Gulliver’s imprisonment and the pain he suffers from physical violation play out like a revenge fantasy for the colonized persons who seek retribution against the oppressive (and in this case, much larger) hegemonic force. The Lilliputians,
however, are colonizers themselves, so their imprisonment of Gulliver is more a demonstration of how such cultures react when encountering an outsider.

Of both Part I and Part II of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Margaret R. Grennan argues that Swift is partly responding to a Celtic preoccupation with the very little and the very big. Swift was of course Irish and many of his works pointed to a preoccupation with Irish poverty, particularly during the 1720’s. Grennan’s reading of *Gulliver’s Travels* is an interesting one. She posits a relationship between Irish folk tales and what she calls “Lilliputian lineage” (189). While her claim that there is a “certain pleasure derived from seeing ourselves in miniature” may be true in some ways, her assertion that the Lilliputians are “not sub-human . . . but nature on a tiny scale” is perhaps missing the point of Swift’s satire and rhetoric (190). Lilliputian values are a satirical amplification of modern Britain; more to the point, their characterization as a hyper-militaristic, anti-individualistic, and violently antagonistic society is Swift’s means of demonstrating how the very worst of humanity is no better than the most base animal.

Certainly, the Lilliputians are intelligent, but they apply all of their skills towards battle and colonial conquest—they have no interest whatsoever in cultivating a non-violent, democratic society. Their mathematical and mechanical skills are applied for the construction of war instruments, enormous “Machines fixed on Wheels” (21). They will wage war for the most inane reasons, such as the right way to break an egg. Swift stages a rift between the Tramecksans (high heels) and the Slamecksans (low heels), one followed by violence and eventually genocide, in order to satirize the existing conflicts between

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44 Consider Swift’s *Proposal for Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (1720), *Drapier’s Letters* (1724), and *A Modest Proposal* (1729), all of which arguably earned him the status of an Irish patriot.
the Tories (High Church) and Whigs (Low Church)—the effect is to show that modern
Britain is no more civilized than the barbarous Lilliputians; moreover, this topical
allusion makes yet another mockery of the pride displayed by those who believed their
own age to be supreme.

Gulliver’s colossal size establishes his status as a grotesque emblem of virility but
also as an enormously valuable commodity for the Lilliputians, who perceive him as an
unstoppable weapon perfectly designed for war and colonial conquest. Covertly, this is
another means for Swift to stage the many ways in which a modern society commodifies
the individual only on the basis of material appearances. Of course, it is worth noting that
Gulliver’s size is also a comical exaggeration of the all-powerful amatory male schemer
who possesses the power to wield his authority if he so chooses. Swift, however, parodies
this amatory trope just as he inverts it in many ways. Gulliver, for instance, plays along in
the Lilliputian “mock skirmishes” or war-play in which he is commodified as their
wartime mascot: “[The Emperor] desired I would stand like a Colossus” (35), and
between his legs would be a marching army equipped with colored flags, horses, beating
drums, and pikes advanced. Later Gulliver urinates on the Emperor’s apartment in order
to extinguish a fire; with his phallic full display, he lewdly demonstrates the full
power of his inflated masculinity. Swift subverts the amatory trope of the lascivious male
by rendering Gulliver’s sexual potency cartoonish and absurd. The fire itself is started by
the carelessness of a maid of honor “who fell asleep while she was reading a romance”
(46), a textual detail that is hardly a coincidence. Not only does it play into the amatory
trope of the empty-headed female, it also explicitly highlights Swift’s familiarity with a
genre from which he is borrowing in many ways to accomplish his satirical goals.
Just as Gulliver is a comical exaggeration of the all-powerful amatory male schemer, he is also an inversion of that very idea. In spite of his obvious physical superiority, he does not retaliate against the Lilliputians who attempt to harm him with arrows. More significantly, he also refuses to enslave the Blefuscus, against whom the Lilliputians are waging an absurd war. The Emperor reveals his voracious appetite to become “the sole Monarch of the whole World” (44), an obvious example of how colonialism is yet another form of commodification and consumption. The assertion that the Emperor’s consumptive desires can never be satisfied is significant, for it points to the severity of capitalism on the modern psyche; it is the capitalist who attempts to fill the bottomless void in his soul—not with spirituality or domestic felicity—but with immaterial and material capital. Gulliver’s philosophical discourse with the Emperor is fascinating for several reasons; he “plainly protested, that [he] would never be an Instrument of bringing a Free and Brave People into Slavery” (44). This early version of Gulliver, one just starting what will prove to be a long series of travels, is well-intentioned even if he does by nature of his birth represent a modern, hegemonic Britain. His moral code is actually a vivid reminder on Swift’s part of how easily modern society commodifies an individual based solely on material evidence—just because he is giant does not make him cruel; the fact that he is British does not render him insensitive to the inhumanity of violent imperialism. Also, by Part IV, his early sensibility serves as a vivid reference point in his transformation from a man with the self-confidence to assert his moral will to a dehumanized, self-loathing subaltern.
V. Amatory Tropes and Gulliver’s Emasculation at Brobdingnag

At Brobdingnag in Part II, Gulliver undergoes a transformative role-reversal that is instrumental in what leads to his personal, psychic disintegration. Swift again deploys multiple amatory tropes to stage this role-reversal; in a larger sense, the tropes extend the author’s indignation towards the ways in which human beings are commodified as goods to be used, abused, and hoarded. Such a rhetorical strategy pervades Gulliver’s experiences at Brobdingnag. Formerly a giant among the Lilliputians, his reversal into a miniature size is a clear signal of his newfound status as a vulnerable, emasculated commodity; his alteration is likewise a means for Swift to subvert the amatory trope of the male as a dominant force of physical power. Upon seeing the native giants, Gulliver rues his power-reversal: “I could not forbear of thinking of Lilliput, whose Inhabitants looked upon me as the greatest Prodigy that ever appeared in the World; where I was able to draw an Imperial Fleet in my Hand” (72). Gulliver’s reaction to their physical appearance is revealing: he commodifies them on the basis of material appearances, which is no different than the treatment he received from the Lilliputians. He identifies the natives as “Monsters” and rationalizes that they must be “more savage and cruel in Proportion [due] their Bulk” (72). Gulliver’s evident lack of prudence coincides with a disposition that is aggressive and ideologically combative.

Gulliver’s emasculation and psychic transformation is most immediately triggered by the vulnerability he now experiences due to his miniature size. In the process of staging Gulliver’s gradual breakdown, Swift engages several amatory tropes. Perhaps most apparent is the trope of curiosity, which pervades the entire narrative at Brobdingnag because Gulliver’s size is an unfathomable oddity to the natives. When he is
first discovered by one of the giants, Gulliver is perceived with “a Curiosity, much wondering to hear [him] pronounce articulate Words, although [the giant] could not understand them” (73). Upon meeting a “substantial Farmer,” Gulliver describes the farmer’s disbelief, how he “blew [his] Hairs aside to take a better view of [his] Face” (73-4). Of course, Gulliver also becomes a victim of curiosity as well. When he is informally adopted by the farmer’s family, he is taken by the patriarch to a marketplace; it is there that he is put on display, commodified as a “strange Creature” capable of “[performing] an hundred diverting Tricks” (82-3). Brobdingnag is primarily an agrarian society, but Swift aligns depravity with humanity’s propensity to unabashedly exploit for material profit. Gulliver is forced to perform for hundreds each day until he “was half dead with Weariness and Vexation” (82); finding him so profitable, the farmer even takes Gulliver on tour as the star of his very own traveling freak show—another means for Swift to stage the dark side of travel. Gulliver is enslaved, shackled by “a Leading-string” and forced to “act [his] Part” beyond the excesses of humiliation and exhaustion (83). When Gulliver is finally sold to the Queen for a thousand pieces of gold, he is so desperate to flee from his cruel master that he drops to his knees and kisses her “Imperial foot” (84). Gulliver is an enslaved victim of curiosity and a symbolic victim of humanity’s most base desires to commodify and exploit. Swift is thus covertly commenting on the kinds of psychic diseases resulting from capitalism and trade (in this case, slave trade); with the figure of the farmer, in particular, Swift is also illustrating how material greed creates new identities capable of horrific cruelties.

Gulliver’s groveling submissiveness to the Queen is jarring in light of how he once stood his moral high ground with the Emperor at Lilliput. The psychic trauma of
being enslaved and emasculated leads him to this low point. Swift notably subverts two amatory tropes to stage his transformative unraveling: the male as the dominant force of physical power; and the female as sexual object and powerless sexual prey. Gulliver’s physical vulnerability is constant and all-encompassing: while being held by the massive finger and thumb of a giant, he “was not able to forbear groaning and shedding Tears” (73); he also describes being terrorized by the farmer’s cat and his trepidation at the sight of a mastiff “equal in bulk to four Elephants” (76). His experiences at the farmer’s home are frequently violent and traumatic. The farmer’s wife carelessly hands Gulliver over to her baby, who promptly shoves him inside of its mouth. For a brief moment, Gulliver is suckled upon as if her were a woman’s nipple. Reduced to this humiliating, helpless state, his head is enveloped by the baby’s saliva—it is a gross violation of his physical space, a quasi-rape, and thus an implicit reversal of the amatory trope in which the female is the victim of sexualized force.

Swift continues this rhetorical strategy, as Gulliver is repeatedly commodified, violated, and exploited. In Part I, Gulliver’s public display of his enormous phallus is a grotesque absurdity, a means to flaunt his virility; in Part II, however, he experiences a near reversal of a similar incident. Swift describes the “monstrous breast” of the farmer’s wife, which disgusts Gulliver and likewise demystifies the amatory trope of the female’s irresistible powers of sexual persuasion. He is also dressed and undressed like a doll, a most humiliating form of emasculation, and by a girl whose “towardly parts” terrify him (79). This scene is significant not only because Swift is obviously highlighting Gulliver’s commodification; given the context of the girl (who is only nine years old) undressing him, Gulliver is the forced participant in a quasi-sexual exchange. The disparity of their
age is troubling enough, but especially surreal is the blurring of boundaries between traditional sexual expression and the forced usage of Gulliver as a sexual prop or plaything. The child may not understand the gravity of her actions, but Swift certainly does. He again subverts the amatory template to illustrate the emergence of new personalities and dangerous moral codes which result from the spreading disease of commodification and consumption—one that has penetrated the agrarian society of Brobdingnag.

A most extreme example of Gulliver’s emasculation that extends his casting as a victim of quasi-sexual force occurs when he is stripped naked and placed on the bosoms of certain members of elite Brobdingnag society. Gulliver is treated as if he were a living and breathing doll, a luxurious and foreign play-thing; he explains, for instance, that the Maids of Honor sought “to have the pleasure of seeing and touching [him]” (98). In yet another subversion of amatory tropes, the women exercise complete control over Gulliver’s body; moreover, Swift debunks the trope of the female as irresistible siren, for they are rendered entirely undesirable. Gulliver is appalled by the “offensive Smell” of their natural odor (98), and in a manner customary of romantic heroines, he swoons from the intensity of their perfumes. The amatory trope of the male sexual voyeur is also parodied and subverted. Gulliver is forced to play the role of voyeur as the women “would strip themselves to the Skin, and put on their Smocks in [his] Presence, while [he] was placed on their Toylet directly before their naked Bodies” (99). Female vanity, which is harmless in consideration of the acts to which Gulliver has already been subjected, is posited as a destructive, perverse mode of self-commodification; the women want to be objectified, to be valued solely on the basis of their material selves. For an ancient like Swift, this is absurd and symptomatic of a much larger moral problem.
As a method of compensation, Gulliver’s psychological response to his miniature size and his new status as a vulnerable, toy-like commodity is to latch onto the uglier facets of his inherited British identity. Robert Markley, for instance, detects an attitude of “European triumphalism” in Gulliver (459), an imperialistic haughtiness that emerges when he feels most physically vulnerable. Upon first arriving at Brobdingnag, Swift provides many clues that Gulliver has stumbled upon an agrarian society, which in turn potentially aligns the natives with ancient as opposed to modern values. Gulliver describes the “fully cultivated” land (74), and of course he encounters farmers and multiple animals. Also, the native who discovers Gulliver appears “wholly ignorant” of the currency that Gulliver places into his hand (74), but a likely explanation is that he simply does not recognize such tiny currency as being currency at all. As mentioned previously, Gulliver labels the Brobdingnagians “barbarians” on the basis of their size alone (72); and in light of Gulliver’s many suffered traumas, his assumption is not a stretch in certain instances. Not all Brobdingnagians, however, are as sadistic as the farmer or as careless as his wife. In fact, the King, with whom Gulliver engages in a philosophical discourse, more than adequately fits the mold of the rational ancient. Gulliver adopts the role of the proud nationalist and goes into ample detail explaining modern customs of British law, politics, economics, and its history of imperialism and warfare, which includes boastful descriptions of modern war machines. The King’s response is one of the most memorable moments of *Gulliver’s Travels*, particularly as he expresses astonishment at the savagery of British values, what he identifies as “the very worst Effects that Avarice, Faction, Hypocrisy, Perfidiousness, Cruelty, Rage, Madness, Hatred, Envy, Lust, Malice, or Ambition could produce” (110). Swift uses this discourse
to summarize his own beliefs regarding the vast decline of modern Britain, one contextually related to the rise of finance capitalism, global luxury trade, and the egregious expansion of the British Empire. The King’s rhetoric is profound and powerfully delivered, but his ancient ideals are withering away even inside his own country. Such is yet another reminder from Swift that the ethos of commodification and consumption is rapidly facilitating cruel new identities and modes of behavior.

VI. Gulliver’s Dizzying Exposure to Bad Ideas, and the Trope of Inquiry

Part III of *Gulliver’s Travels* is an anomaly because it is highly episodic and features Gulliver’s encounters with representatives of “real” locations such as the Netherlands and Japan as well as fictional nations like Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubdrib, and Luggnagg. Rhetorically, the section functions mostly as a satire on modern thinking—particularly modern science—and it revives the ancient versus modern debate with which Swift was so heavily engaged. The amatory trope of inquiry is implied in Part III by the activities of travel and discovery—most notably, Gulliver’s numerous trips to foreign lands, trips which primarily function as a panoptic survey of what Swift would surely label “bad thinking” across multiple cultures. This section is a wonderful example of Swift’s expertise in delivering Menippean satire. Critics such as Robert Markley and Glyndwr Williams argue that Part III is the author’s means of lambasting the corruptive ideologies associated with empire. It is also more than reasonable to conclude that the Dutch pirate who captures Gulliver serves as an allusion to the monopoly on trade.

enjoyed by the Dutch, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth century; Swift’s negative portrayal of the Dutch pirate as a “malicious Reprobate” very likely plays into the author’s vitriolic attacks on the Dutch in other works. While amatory tropes in this section are scarce, Part III is especially valuable in consideration of what follows. Part III is loaded with satirical references to modern science, and Gulliver is overexposed to a variety of modern ideas. Part IV, in which Gulliver travels to the country of the Houyhnhnms, posits horses as the dehumanized embodiment of reason. The psychological impact on Gulliver is significant, for he becomes increasingly confused about his own identity and that of his relationship to his British cultural roots and values.

VII. Amatory Tropes and Gulliver’s Psychological Break

As a traveler to strange lands, Gulliver is repeatedly cast as the outsider; his physical differences render him freakish and further solidify his outsider-status, but his cultural values have a similarly polarizing effect. When he arrives at the country of the Houyhnhnms, he undergoes a marked change to his psyche; his self-image deteriorates from a proud, hegemonic representative of Britain to a self-hating, submissive subaltern. The devolution of his character serves as a logical conclusion to Swift’s deployment of the amatory template, for Gulliver becomes the proverbial punching bag for a changing world armed with dangerous, new personalities and corrupt moral codes—contextually, this of course points to Swift’s commentary on the effects of the modern traditions of finance capitalism, global luxury trade, and the ethos of commodification and consumption on the British psyche. Part IV is Swift at his most satirically dark and mean-

spirited; not only does the section signal Gulliver’s psychic breakdown, it also features the loathsome, filthy Yahoos, who for Swift signify materialism incarnate. Rawson has argued that the Yahoos are on the one hand a “type of all savage nations” and at the same time “generically human, ourselves” (96). Gulliver’s nightmarish epiphany is that he, too, is a Yahoo, and he is devastated upon confronting the basic truth that his self-imagined identity (his lineage, his values, his self-worth) is not the valuable commodity he once imagined. This is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of Swift’s rhetoric: Gulliver, who is used and abused as a commodity, is also guilty of self-commodification. For Swift, the hefty investment by the individual in the act of self-commodification is perhaps modernity’s most careless and dangerous flaw. Gulliver’s loss of his own identity results in a psychic death from which he cannot recover.

Amatory tropes continue to play a major role in facilitating Swift’s antagonistic rhetoric towards modern values and practices. Prior to his arrival at the country of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver’s self-imagined status as an empowered patriarch is shattered when he captains a mercantile ship whose workers stage a mutiny at his expense. The typical amatory male is strong, a schemer, and Swift reverses this trope—it is Gulliver who is the victim of a scheme that further calls into question his status as a masculine commodity. A key ingredient for the male figure of amatory fiction is to be in control, to feel stable in his surroundings. Gulliver sizes up his surroundings, which are very natural and pre-modern: “The Land was divided by long Rows of Trees not regularly planted, but naturally growing; there was plenty of Grass, and several Fields of Oats” (189). This quasi-Edenic scene is abruptly disrupted, however, by the appearance of the Yahoos; Gulliver is both vulnerable and terrified by what he describes at differing moments as
“Animals,” “Monsters,” and “Brute Beasts” (190-1). Their effect upon him is striking:

“Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my Travels so disagreeable an Animal, which I naturally conceived so strong an Antipathy” (190-1). Gulliver’s instinctive repulsion towards the Yahoos helps to dramatize the abject shock he later experiences upon realizing that the man-beasts are but pre-historic versions of the human race to which he, of course, belongs.

The Yahoos are materialism incarnate because they care only about satisfying their most base desires. For Swift, the nakedness of the Yahoos serves not only to stress their lack of modesty or self-awareness; rather, their physical state also enables Swift to unmask and amplify the material façade of a modern civilization that uses clothing, jewelry, and other luxury items to disguise its most base self. As an ancient, Swift would no doubt assert that the very notion of assigning material objects the power to define or rebrand one’s identity is absurd and self-destructive; humanity is defined not by what it owns but by its values and actions. The Yahoos may not possess material goods in the modern sense, but that is not to say they do not crave materiality in other forms; they exist to satisfy their insatiable appetites, what Swift calls “their Wants and Passions” (194). They will stop at nothing to “greedily [devour]” the most offensive and foul food (195), and their sexual appetites, in particular, are ravenous and frequently unmanageable. The mating rituals of the Yahoos are a culmination of Swift’s brilliant and prolific parodying of amatory tropes:

A Female-Yahoo would often stand behind a Bank or a Bush, to gaze on the young Males passing by, and then appear, and hide, using many antick Gestures and Grimaces, at which time it was observed, that she had a most offensive Smell; and when any of the Males advanced, would slowly retire, looking often back, and with a counterfeit shew of Fear, run off into some convenient Place where she knew the Male would follow her. (222-3)
In a single scene, Swift simultaneously subverts multiple amatory tropes to demonstrate the ways in which the Yahoos, however crudely, cultivate a ritual of sexual commodification and consumption. Foremost, the female (rather than the male) adopts the performative role of sexual prey even though it is she who prompts the seduction rite; she thus appropriates sexual power and casts herself as sexual bait—and of course the male is eager to play along. Laura Mulvey’s concept of the “male gaze” in film is especially useful in evaluating the Yahoo mating ritual; her argument is that the camera itself fetishizes the female as an object. Indeed, there is a cinematic element to much of *Gulliver’s Travels*, one which vividly stages performative displays and acts of voyeurism. Swift satirizes courtship rituals as disingenuous codes of behavior; more to the point, it is the female who projects her gaze upon the male. In a brilliant inversion of the amatory template, the female Yahoo possesses the power to both commodify the male and to brand herself as a desirable commodity.

Swift also subverts the amatory seduction scene to further demonstrate the ways in which the desire for materiality (in this case, it is Gulliver’s flesh that is commodified) trumps the most fundamental of moral codes. The scene itself is furnished with multiple allusions to amatory seduction scenes: the weather is “exceeding hot” (225); it takes place outside in a fertile setting; and the vulnerable object of sexual desire (a naked Gulliver) is voyeuristically pursued by a sexual predator. The behavior of the young female Yahoo is especially unnerving: “Standing behind a Bank, [she] saw the whole proceeding, and enflamed by Desire . . . came running with all speed, and leaped into the Water . . . She embraced [Gulliver] after a most fulsome manner” (225). Not only is

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Gulliver nearly raped, the girl’s youth points to an unfathomable sexual taboo in which a child, whose innocence is assumed, is attempting to molest an adult. The Yahoos possess no moral ethos; they are driven solely by the desire to satisfy their material appetites.

With respect to Gulliver’s psychological trauma, Rawson notes of Gulliver a “pattern of a reluctant male [who] parries the advances of a lustful female” (93). The pattern begins with the Maids of Honor at Brobdingnag, but it becomes darker, more disturbing, as Gulliver is undressed by the farmer’s daughter in Part II and is now attacked by a young Yahoo—such examples reiterate the dismantlement of old-world values and the emergence of unstable, dangerous new identities.

The psychological ramifications of this near-rape profoundly affect Gulliver. The brutish lust of the young Yahoo is to mate with a human in what Rawson describes as a “traditional litmus test of biological kinship” (95). The realization of his genetic compatibility with the very creature he most abhors unhinges Gulliver: “For now I could no longer deny, that I was a real Yahoo, in every Limb and Feature” (225). To once again reference Locke’s concept of “real essences,” both shape and rationality are signs of the human. Swift reverses this idea through his irrational Yahoos and rational horses. Upon realizing his kinship to the Yahoos, Gulliver’s concept of the “real” is entirely upended; he now understands that the self-pride he once exhibited was a farcical set of self-told lies.

Gulliver now sees himself as more wretched than even the Yahoos because they at least do not pretend to possess a moral code. In a scene that echoes Gulliver’s previous philosophical discourses at Lilliput and Brobdingnag, his discussion with the Houyhnhnm he know calls “Master” covers Yahoo (or human) brutishness in all its
forms: genocide, theft, sexual violence, exorbitant material greed, gluttony, sloth, deception, religious corruption, and especially ideological hypocrisy. Of course, the difference between this conversation and previous ones is that Gulliver has no rebuttal; he is thoroughly convinced of his own innate inferiority. His only method of response is to assimilate by mimicking the superior race of the hyper-rational Houyhnhnms: “I trot like a horse [and] in speaking I am apt to fall in the voice of the Houyhnhnms” (235). This admission, which is preceded by a scene in which Gulliver is horrified upon seeing his reflection in water, aligns with the notion that the subaltern transfers self-loathing into imitation and desire for assimilation: “The question of identification is always the production of an ‘image’ of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (Bhaba 117). Gulliver later swoons when he learns he must return to England, a culture whose modern values of commodification and consumption disgust him. When kissed by an “odious animal” (244)—his wife—he also swoons. In what is perhaps the ultimate irony in a narrative which features the physical and psychological dangers of travel, Swift concludes with further descriptions of Gulliver’s pained re-assimilation as a permanently displaced outsider inside his native country.

Swift deploys amatory tropes throughout *Gulliver’s Travels* to express the ways in which human beings are commodified as goods to be valued, used, abused, hoarded, or even *traded*—all veiled allusions to his indictment of the culture of consumption and commodification brought on by finance capitalism and global luxury trade. On many occasions Gulliver is cast as a traded commodity. Swift reverses the amatory trope of the male schemer at Brobdingnag when Gulliver is enslaved by the greedy farmer and sold to Queen for her amusement. In Part III, he is rendered powerless and taken captive by a
Dutch pirate. Of course, the text is also abundant with references to other examples of enslavement—Gulliver’s initial shackling by the Lilliputians; the Lilliputians’ desire to enslave the Blefuscus; the binding of the Yahoos by the Houyhnhnms. In *Gulliver as a Slave Trader* (2006), Eleanor L. Robinson posits that Gulliver himself may have been a participant in mercantile slave trade—the very worst form of trans-global commerce and commodification. Robinson’s evidence is conjectured at best. Her argument is not that such references to Gulliver’s role in slave trade are explicit, but rather that they are silently encoded in the text due to their lack of palatability for Swift’s contemporary audience. In consideration of Swift’s rhetorical goals, the slave trade theory is at least supported by the narrative’s loaded references to racial guilt. Consider, for instance, a pivotal moment which occurs after Gulliver has returned from his last voyage. He declares that he will break from his sovereign duty and not reveal the location of any of his discovered territories; his desire is to thwart a certain expedition of an “execrable Crew of Butchers” who would dispossess the natives of their land with “Acts of Inhumanity and Lust” (249). Naturally, there exists a lingering ambivalence regarding Gulliver’s transformation from a representative of hegemony to a self-loathing subaltern: in one respect, his devolution is tragic, particularly in light of his repulsion towards his family; then again, Gulliver sees *clearly*—and for the first time—the corruption of values in modern British society. With the façade of modern values stripped away, Gulliver now perceives the absurdity and self-destructive nature of a society which defines itself not by its values and actions but by the materiality it desires and consumes. Such a truth devastates Gulliver’s psyche, but at least he finally sees it.
In Chapter Three, I have argued that the activity of travel greatly informs Swift’s satirical objectives and his engagement of the amatory template in *Gulliver’s Travels*. Travel, of course, was closely linked during Swift’s lifetime to imperial conquest, transnational trade, and the continuous rise of capitalism. For Swift, the activity itself facilitated multiple modes of corruption, commodification, and consumption. In an effort to provide a framework for Swift’s indignation towards the new ideological and institutional shifts in Britain, I have positioned Swift as a Christian Humanist whose belief in old-world values were in direct discordance with modern sensibilities that supported finance capitalism and global luxury trade. Similarly, I have argued that Swift sensed and served witness to a collapse of classical notions of selfhood, to the emergence of new identities in possession of dangerous moral codes.

I have also explored how Swift’s prolific parodying of the amatory template facilitates the author’s anxieties about modern Britain’s culture of commodification and consumption, one brought on by finance capitalism and global luxury trade. Swift deploys amatory tropes to demonstrate the ways in which human beings are commodified as goods to be valued, used, abused, hoarded, or even traded—and Gulliver, over the course of his many journeys, is displaced and commodified as the permanent outsider. The psychological impact upon Gulliver is considerable. His exposure to vast cultural ideologies initially confirms his self-constructed identity and his personal moral code (at Lilliput, for example), but he soon becomes overwhelmed with alternate perspectives that clash with his modern British sensibility. Part II of *Gulliver’s Travels* features an ancient’s perspective—one closely aligned to Swift’s own beliefs—and one that condemns modern customs of British law, politics, economics, and Britain’s history of
imperialism and warfare. Part III is a romp of Menippean satire in which Swift attacks the “bad thinking” associated with European triumphalism and modern vices (luxury, political corruption, and philosophy). Of course, it is Gulliver’s encounters with the hyper-rational Houyhnhnms that finally shatter his previous understandings of the “real essences” of human identity. In this respect, his newfound existence as a self-hating subaltern seems like an inevitability. The amatory trope of inquiry, in particular, pervades Swift’s rhetoric and serves to dramatize the dangers of travel (both for the traveler and the native); moreover, the trope of inquiry shows how curiosity can lead to violations of not only geographical but also moral boundaries.

Swift subverts the tropes of the amatory male schemer and the female as sexual bait to emphasize Gulliver’s emasculation and commodification. The parody of amatory seduction scenes, which posit Gulliver as a victim of *multiple* near-rapes, helps to explain his psychic breakdown and his self-branding as a subhuman brute on comparable ground with the vile Yahoos. The Yahoos are especially useful in terms of deciphering Swift’s contextual satire of modernity and the culture of commodification and consumption fostered by finance capitalism and global luxury trade. The nakedness of the Yahoos and their voracious appetite for consumptive materiality affirms their symbolic status as materialism incarnate. In the process of depicting the ignorant vulgarity of the Yahoos, Swift exposes the material façade of a modern civilization which perceives luxury items as reasonable markers for self-definition—markers likewise used in the cultural practice of evaluating individuals not on the basis of how they act but by what they own. Swift’s parodic deployment of amatory tropes cumulatively expresses the dismantlement of old-world values and the emergence of unstable, dangerous new identities.
CONCLUSION

In their introduction to *Popular Fiction by Women: 1660-1730*, Paula R. Backscheider and John Richetti provide a wonderful summary of the collective critical efforts aimed to dismantle masculinist views regarding the novel tradition. At the heart of such masculinist views is the narrative that canonical male masters constructed a “culturally superior form of a certain kind of fiction” (Backscheider and Richetti x). Female authors—namely Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Delarivier Manley—achieved exceptional success in the bourgeoning literary marketplace, but they were excluded from serious critical attention on the basis that their products were formulaic recipes designed solely for the entertainment of mostly middle-class female readers. Scholars have since convincingly uncovered how the formulaic aspects of amatory fiction disguise sophisticated critiques of contemporary society, male-female sexual politics, class politics, sexual identity, and certainly a wide number of other topics central to the eighteenth century British experience.

Over the course of three chapters, I have examined the role of amatory conventions in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1717), Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana* (1724), and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1735). My primary purpose in doing so has been to expand amatory studies by introducing three canonical male authors into a body of criticism that has primarily focused on non-canonical female authors. Over the course of my thesis, I have demonstrated the considerable influence of the amatory genre on Pope, Defoe, and Swift, each of whom is commonly referenced as a canonical author. The authors’ awareness and subsequent engagement of the amatory template calls for a
reconsideration of the profound role in which the amatory genre plays in the novel tradition. Not only did the amatory genre facilitate the emergence of important female voices; it also influenced the ways in which canonical authors such as Pope, Defoe, and Swift presented their satirical and rhetorical objectives—this alone is enormously valuable evidence which supports not merely the cultural but also the literary merit of the genre itself.

Like female amatory authors, Pope, Defoe, and Swift were keenly interested in sexual politics—a phrase which points to the methods of role-playing and bullying enacted by both genders in the pursuit of dominance over one another, whether material, intellectual, psychological, or sexual. The amatory template is an ideal means to dramatize sexual politics, and all three authors display a mastery of parodying amatory tropes for this purpose. Moreover, they use amatory tropes in the process of treating sexual politics as symbols of currency, commodification, and exchange. The dramatization of sexual politics is indicative of a larger, shared concern regarding changes already underway during their lifetime. Pope, Defoe, and Swift used amatory tropes to express their anxieties about the growth of commodification and consumption in Britain, a cultural shift enabled by finance capitalism and global luxury trade. They were each reacting to the increased pervasiveness of a modern world capable of producing dangerous, new personalities and corrupt moral codes.

The structure of my thesis has traced a chronological progression in the authors’ use of amatory tropes. It becomes readily apparent that the satiric tone of each successive work darkens; the reason this occurs is perhaps quite simple. Close to two decades separate the final publication of The Rape of the Lock (1717) and that of Gulliver's
Travels (1734); in that time finance capitalism and global luxury trade become larger, more powerful, and more pervasive institutions. Old-world values were diminishing; the ethos of commodification and consumption continued to expand and gain momentum. Reality as such was constantly evolving—and what was once perceived as new and unstable was now more readily accepted, if not embraced by a majority. It would be wrong to suggest that Pope, Defoe, and Swift were exactly alike in their personal ideologies; certainly they were not. They did, however, share a collective indignation towards the kinds of personalities that continued to emerge in Britain; this indignation, which was explicitly expressed in The Rape of the Lock, Roxana, and Gulliver’s Travels, only grew stronger and more severe as the disease of commodification and consumption continued to spread. Each text is a document to a period in which finance capitalism and global luxury trade gradually but permanently altered the individual’s perception of both himself and his surrounding world.
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