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## **“Pox on kindred:” the Anonymous *Counterfeit Bridegroom* (1677) and its Middletonian Source**

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Appearing on stage and in print in 1677, but of unknown provenance, a disguised and revised yet still recognizable version of a nearly forgotten play, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* exhibits a close but complicated kinship to Thomas Middleton’s *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* (1611, pub. 1657).<sup>1</sup> While *The Counterfeit Bridegroom’s* plot and structure is very close to that of Middleton’s play, with large chunks of verbatim dialogue, the 1677 version is condensed, written with more polish, and includes a number of revisions and additions that serve to create a darker, colder tone than is found in the earlier work.<sup>2</sup> The anonymous comedy, which has a tradition of being linked to Aphra Behn, has received little scholarly attention,<sup>3</sup> but a close examination of the ways in which an old Middleton play was dusted off and transformed for a new era contributes to our understanding of the cultural, intellectual, and dramatic preoccupations of the Restoration playhouses. This article challenges Gerard Langbaine’s dismissal in 1691 of *Counterfeit Bridegroom* as “only an Old Play of Middleton’s,”<sup>4</sup> demonstrating instead that the various modifications, both to text and to stagecraft, render it as much a product of 1677 as of its earlier Jacobean moment.

The emotionally generous, at times sentimental, register of *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* is revised into a darker play, in which familial bonds are frequently abused and dismissed. In both plays, families reunite, new unions are created, and relationships between characters are unsettled and reorganized into unexpected configurations. And yet, I will argue, in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* the principles of kinship and kindness that ultimately underpin Middleton’s play are replaced by the individualistic desires of characters who enact various cruelties and deceptions, many of which remain unexamined (if superficially resolved) by the play’s end. This new focus privileges intellect over emotion, the individual over community, and appetite over reason, resulting in a more threatening and dangerous vision of social and sexual interaction. After exploring the key differences between the plays and examining the creation of this more ruthless play world, I will concentrate on two specific areas in which *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* diverges from its source material: the expansion and intensification of the treatment of incest, and the introduction of an attempted rape in the final scene. These modifications alter the play’s tone and through these intersecting themes, Middleton’s comedy is twisted to bear the weight of transgressive (male) libertine desires that threaten to overwhelm social and moral convention.

*The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* portrayal of intimate interactions and, particularly, its expanded treatment of incestuous feeling and the introduction of an act of sexual violence exposes a more brutal vision of society and the family than in Middleton. One character's dismissal of family—"Pox on kindred"—echoes throughout *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, muddying the various attempts to establish likeness and affinity (4.1; p. 38). The wider effects of this Restoration remodelling become apparent through an exploration of the relationship—and especially the discontinuities—between the anonymous 1677 comedy and its Middletonian source: the starkest changes occur in the final act, where we find an entirely new scene of male revelry (5.2), which leads, thematically and structurally (with the utilisation of the Restoration discovery scene) into a final scene that begins with a threatened rape. These newly introduced elements also have implications for the later play's unknown authorship. By investigating *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* dramatic parenthood of *Counterfeit Bridegroom*, it is possible to unpick the specific interventions of the unknown Restoration dramatist, and I conclude by considering issues of adaptation, attribution, and the possible involvement of Aphra Behn. I examine internal evidence, particularly surrounding the treatment of the play's female characters, that complicates (even if it need not entirely frustrate) a possible ascription to Behn. Ultimately, I propose a more complex parentage for *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* than is usually assumed, one that acknowledges the complexities of a compositional process spanning nearly seventy years and the involvement of multiple playwrights and dramatic voices.

### I. *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* and Restoration Individualism

When *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or, The Defeated Widow* reached the stage in 1677, its source, Middleton's *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, was largely forgotten. Middleton's works had a limited presence in the Restoration playhouses, and theatrical records give no indication that this comedy (first published posthumously in 1657) had been acted since James Shirley revived (and probably revised) it in the 1630s.<sup>5</sup> Performed by the Duke's Company's second-tier actors over the summer months when the two London theaters were at their quietest,<sup>6</sup> *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* was published anonymously that autumn, with no reference to either the identity of its adaptor or its close relationship to *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*. In 1832 the theater historian John Genest suggested (with little evidence) that Aphra Behn may have assembled the adaptation, but her involvement remains uncertain.<sup>7</sup> The play could be the work of Behn, of another unknown dramatist, or, as is perhaps more likely given the uneven nature of the adaptation—at times conservatively following Middleton verbatim and elsewhere incorporating significant chunks of

original material, some of which seems strikingly Behnian—the product of a collaborative process involving more than one reviser. Ultimately, however many hands were involved in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, I suggest that the play should be regarded as multi-authored, patching together as it does dramatic voices across the century. And despite these competing voices, the revised play betrays the hard glint of cynicism familiar from some of the darker comedies of the later 1670s.<sup>8</sup>

The 1677 adaptation follows *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* in focusing on two new marriages, both sexually transgressive: one is bigamous and same-sex, the other (apparently) incestuous. The main plot focuses on Mrs. Hadland's determination to regain the estate that was "couzen'd" from her father by the late husband of Widow Landwell (Mistress Low-water and Widow Goldenfleece in Middleton) (1.2; p. 10). Cross-dressing as a young gentleman, the "counterfeit bridegroom" Mrs. Hadland sets about removing Gazer, Noddy, and Sir Gregory Lovemuch, the widow's unappealing suitors, to marry the Widow herself. Having arranged her bigamous same-sex marriage, Mrs. Hadland is helped by her husband and her brother Noble (counterpart to Middleton's Beveril) to blackmail her enemy out of the fortune, before finally orchestrating the marriage of the widow and Noble. A second plot follows Peter Santloe (Philip Twilight in Middleton), who has secretly married a young woman he encountered in Antwerp, where he was traveling with the intention of rescuing his long-lost mother, Lady Santloe. Ten years before, Peter's mother and sister were attacked by thieves on their way to a nunnery on the continent and have not been seen since. Back in London, desperate to evade the anger of his father (Sir Oliver), and having failed his mother and wasted the rescue money, Peter pretends that his new wife is instead his sister, the lost Clarina. Peter's marriage is threatened when Lady Santloe unexpectedly reappears and recognizes the bride as her daughter.

As might be expected from a comedy, by the end of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* everything is—apparently—resolved. In the final scene, Clarina is revealed by the widow to have been swapped at birth with her friend, Eugenia, whose name (meaning "well born") hints at her true parentage, and Clarina's marriage to the man who had seemed to be her brother is allowed to stand. Mrs. Hadland regains her fortune and the widow, having discovered her bridegroom to be a woman, instead agrees to marry Noble. Superficially, the play ends well for the major characters, with a series of unions and reunions following Middleton's comedy. But the way in which the 1677 work arrives at its conclusion is more troubling, and the various new or restored familial bonds are uneasy. Departing from Middleton, in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* the mother's eventual return transpires despite (rather than because of) her family; Peter is defiantly undaunted by the prospect of continuing a marriage to his sister and is prepared to ignore its incestuous complications; and the humiliated Widow agrees to marry Noble only after having been threatened with rape and blackmail. While the bare bones of the plot deviate little from Middleton, it is in the ways that the

characters either respond to others' tribulations or contrive their own victories that a new hardness can be identified.

*No Wit/Help Like A Woman's* can itself be dark—Philip has squandered on prostitutes the money intended to rescue his mother, and the widow's suitors are spiteful—but elsewhere the characters exhibit a generosity of spirit and a concern for suffering.<sup>9</sup> Beveril rescues Lady Twilight from the continent; Lady Twilight consoles her dejected children; Mistress Low-water praises her defeated former enemy at the play's end. Such evidence of unselfish behavior is removed from *Counterfeit Bridegroom*; the privileging of appetite becomes more deeply entrenched, and beneath the mannered Restoration veneer, a libertine attitude of what Anna Bryson terms "anti-civility" is introduced.<sup>10</sup> The ending's revelations and reconciliations are clouded by the memory of the deceptions, neglect, supposed incest, blackmail, and threatened violence that disrupted the characters' relationships. Middleton's play is updated with a set of more selfish priorities that sacrifice familial and social duties (in instinct if not necessarily in deed) to personal interest, and a commitment, above all, to individual desires.

The 1677 play is shorter and more energetic, with Middleton's blank verse rewritten as prose, characters' names altered, and some key plot points modified. *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* is around two-thirds the length of Middleton's work, and when cutting material, the adaptor excised some of *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* more genuine and intense moments of feeling. Before the vogue for sentimental drama in the 1690s, which David Roberts memorably describes as demonstrating "the benefits of having a soft heart rather than . . . a hard penis,"<sup>11</sup> much popular comedy of the mid-1670s betrayed an aversion to emotional sincerity. The Restoration play is more tightly crafted, but its sleekness often elides the original's more empathetic nuances. In *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, Mistress Low-water's heartfelt lamentation of her penury; Widow Goldenfleece's dismay at Sir Gilbert's betrayal; Philip's remorse for neglecting his mother; the reunion between mother and son after a decade's separation; and Lady Twilight's forgiveness of Philip's abandonment, are all enacted and explored. While often melodramatic, these moments of pathos imbue *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* with a humanity that punctures its veneer of careless cynicism, as characters articulate and contemplate their griefs, joys, and humiliations. Such demonstrations of sentimentality, however superficial, occasionally move Middleton's play into tragicomic territory: Sir Oliver Twilight marvels at "How soon the comfortable shine of joy | Breaks through a cloud of grief!" (3.34–35), and characters often veer between affective extremes.<sup>12</sup> These intense responses to events are flattened in 1677 into something more detached. The emotional landscape of *Counterfeit Bridegroom* is bleak, and characters often demonstrate not an excess of feeling but an absence of it. When sentiment is expressed it is perfunctory and insincere. While it is apparent that many

characters have suffered and do suffer similar (if not worse) misfortunes to their Middletonian counterparts, the later play is unconcerned with examining the psychological strains of these experiences. To some extent this is symptomatic of 1670s libertine comedy; as Warren Chernaik asserts, “the rake-hero . . . remains uninvolved emotionally, unperturbed by the chaos he creates around him,”<sup>13</sup> but in *Counterfeit Bridegroom* this affective detachment permeates the wider play, as characters remain incurious about the emotional lives of themselves or others. While Middleton’s play balances witty endeavor with compassion, in *Counterfeit Bridegroom* value is placed not on emotion but on intellect.

The link between kindred and kindness (ultimately) established by Middleton is undermined in *Counterfeit Bridegroom* and shown to be elusive, through the perpetuation of small acts of selfishness and in larger cruelties. If several of the play’s familial relationships bear the mark of negligence, the closest ones can verge on the inappropriate. Aside from the uncertain kinship of Peter and Clarina, echoes of similar impropriety appear elsewhere. Sir Oliver is able to identify Clarina as his daughter since she and his wife have “the same way of kissing” (3.2; p. 35); this comment might raise questions as to whether money was the only consideration that stoked Sir Oliver’s enthusiasm for the prospects first of marrying his daughter to the sexagenarian Gazer (who may “prove impotent”) and then to Sanders, whom he mistakenly believes to be a eunuch (1.1; p. 5). Mrs. Hadland congratulates herself for having “procur’d” her brother for her new bride, offering him her place in the widow’s bed, and Noble refers to his sister as both “kind” and “obliging” (5.1; p. 48), words that playfully recall the apparent incestuousness of the comedy’s other sibling relationship. Familial intimacy is often framed as unusual if not inappropriate, apparently burlesquing the familial closeness lacking elsewhere in the play.

Kinship is shown to be uncertain and shifting, and the family institution is not treated with any great reverence. Both comedies work upon the interchangeability of family constructions, and the inability of family members to understand, even to recognize, one another. The sense of estrangement between relations is emphasized in 1677, where close domestic relationships are particularly strained and the essential interchangeability of characters is exaggerated. The Santloes have difficulty in ascertaining the identity of the newly returned supposed Clarina. Noble fails to recognize his sister in her male disguise, and she mocks her “dull, dull, Brother” for not knowing his “own flesh and blood” (4.1; p. 46). The changelings Clarina and Eugenia have no characteristics to distinguish them (fewer even than Middleton’s Grace and Jane); the final romantic revelation that they were swapped as babies neatly solves Peter’s marital problem but only emphasizes the characters’ similarity. Sir Oliver’s regret for his wife’s reported death is assuaged by the return of Clarina and his reverie on his wife is brief: she was “a good Soul—but why should I grieve, since I

enjoy her Picture in my daughter” (1.1; p. 8). In this post-Restoration world, individuals are replaceable. Most notably, in the final scene Noble literally takes his sister’s place in the widow’s marital bed, and the ease with which one sibling is substituted for another to satisfy the demands of a heterosexual marriage offers a menacing twist on *Twelfth Night*’s final arrangements. The instability of relationships suggests a sense of estrangement woven into the fabric of the two families.

Partly responsible for the loosening of familial and social moral ties and responsibilities is that *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* is injected with a moral and sexual libertinism, betraying the Hobbesian influence apparent elsewhere on the Restoration stage.<sup>14</sup> “Justice” has proved inadequate in Mrs. Hadland’s attempts to regain her family estate, and so she takes the law into her own hands, placing faith in her own “Wit.” The inventiveness—and ultimate cruelty—of her revenge is, supposedly, warranted: “All ways are just, when we our Rights pursue” (1.2; p. 14). This line, not found in Middleton, see Mrs. Hadland adopt an individualistic approach that sidesteps civil methods of redressing wrongs. Such ruthless rhetoric, endorsing self-preservation, is noticeably absent from Middleton but it sets the tone for *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*. It underlies much of the activity within the 1677 play, seen particularly in the ways in which leading characters express contempt for the moral codes that regulate society. These attitudes, with which *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* does not grapple, result in a justification of incest and in sexual coercion.

## II. Supposed Incest

An incestuous marriage is one of both plays’ main sources of conflict. Philip/Peter has married a young woman he met abroad but has presented her in London as his sister. To conceal the fact that he spent all his money in an Antwerp inn and abdicated his filial responsibilities to the mother he was sent to rescue, Philip/Peter has also told his father the mother is dead. When Lady Twilight/Santloe actually appears, she initially upholds her son’s pretence that Grace/Clarina is her daughter, but swiftly comes to the problematic conclusion that she might be her missing daughter after all. Some critics of *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* have read Philip’s behavior at their reunion (Scene 5) as disingenuous, citing his calculated attempts to manipulate the mother whom he has already wronged into supporting his deception.<sup>15</sup> But Philip’s prior behavior, and the way in which it has impacted his mother, seems careless rather than callous. He recognizes that he has treated Lady Twilight poorly, acknowledging his “share of sin and a foul neglect” (4.16), later regretting that “my wild youth has led me | Into unnatural wrongs against [her] freedom once” (5.116–17).

Philip's and Peter's responses to the suggestion of incest differ significantly. When Middleton's Philip learns that his marriage is apparently incestuous, his horror renders him inconsolable. His first thought is to exile himself: "O, to what mountain shall I take my flight, | To hide the monster of my sin from sight?," he cries, as his mother attempts to comfort him (8.246–47). Lady Twilight assures him that contrition and prayer will atone for his three-month marriage to his sister:

Repent yet, and all's saved. 'Twas but hard chance.  
Amongst all sins, heaven pities ignorance;  
She's still the first that has her pardon signed.  
All sins else see their faults; she's only blind.  
Go to thy chamber, pray, leave off, and win.  
One hour's repentance cures a twelvemonth's sin. (8.251–56)

For Lady Twilight, the pair's "ignorance" of their transgression absolves them of blame, and Christian penitence (found nowhere in *Counterfeit Bridegroom*) is offered as a solution to salve their suffering. Unconvinced, Philip contemplates killing himself: alone with Saviourwit, he instructs his trusted servant to "Commend me to thy prayers" as he attempts to leave the stage (8.269). This melodramatic recourse to suicide might be played for comedy in performance, but it nevertheless demonstrates a seemingly genuine despair and an unquestioning submission to the social and moral codes that govern proper behavior. For Philip, conventional morality cannot accommodate his problem and so the marriage—if not his life—must end.

What had been an insurmountable obstacle in *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* is reconfigured into a mere annoyance in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, in which a libertine ethos offers a solution by allowing—even encouraging—the rejection of conventional morality. Gone is Philip's heightened sensitivity, and in its place is cool detachment. Peter Santloe is irritated that his mother has "nipt" his "blooming joys," for her disclosure means that his "Courtship, Expence and Constancy, ay, Constancy" have been wasted (3.2; p. 36). His mind turns immediately to the monetary loss incurred and his pointless (and clearly unusual) fidelity, demonstrating that he is less concerned by the revelation itself than by having needlessly exerted financial and amorous effort. He swiftly decides, however, that it cannot be true: "I find no alteration in me, I am in good temper, and my mind's not shook at that dreadful name of Sister" (3.2; p. 37). Refusing to dwell on the matter, Peter departs for the widow's nuptial celebrations. When he is next seen, his surprise has hardened into a refusal to submit to any social convention that demands the restraining of his appetites. His considered

response, so unlike Philip Twilight's, is unashamed: "Pox on Kindred—like noble Savage, I wou'd range and choose my Mistress where I pleas'd—now must sacred Love be curb'd, and pleasures lost, and all long of dull fantastick Law" (4.1; p. 38). The cursing of "Kindred" exemplifies his attitude to family. Although speaking specifically of his and his wife's apparent blood relationship, his words articulate a perspective that can be traced throughout the adaptation, one that allowed him to leave his desperate mother abandoned abroad and to lie to his father about her death.

The appeal of the primitive, unshackled "noble savage" is evident in other contemporary drama, and was usefully employed by libertine-minded characters determined to operate outside of accepted norms, including, as here, in the pursuit of incestuous relationships. By calling on the figure of the noble savage, Peter constructs a fantasy of a wild and uninhibited existence, unencumbered by social and moral stricture, placing himself in a tradition of free-thinking, rule-breaking stage libertines. Introduced in English drama in Dryden's two-part heroic drama, *The Conquest of Granada* (1671),<sup>16</sup> the noble savage is alluded to by its libertine hero Almanzor who, facing death, asserts his personal autonomy and in the process rejects the authority of his sovereign:

I alone am king of me.  
I am as free as nature first made man,  
Ere the base laws of servitude began,  
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.<sup>17</sup>

For Peter, his "pleasures" are in conflict with the "dull fantastick Law" that prohibits sexual involvement between family members and represents an arbitrary intrusion onto his personal rights. Just as Mrs. Hadland earlier rejected "Justice" in favor of a more effective personal revenge, Peter channels threatened sexual disappointment into a statement of radical intent.

Such attempts to defend, even to normalize, incest enjoyed a new comic articulation in Restoration comedy. They nevertheless had an earlier precedent in John Ford's tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (pub. 1633), which sees Giovanni, brother and lover of Annabella, railing against the social convention that forbids their love:

Shall a peevish sound,  
A customary form from man to man,  
Of brother and of sister, be a bar  
Twixt my perpetual happiness and me?<sup>18</sup>

The construction of Ford's play is of course tragic, whereas Restoration comedy often approaches the subject with a new casualness. *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* includes more salacious depictions of attempted adultery and transgressive erotic endeavor than its source,<sup>19</sup> and in this context incest thus becomes another, though more controversial, sexual sphere in which libertines might assert their defiance of social convention. In the wider context of Restoration literature's (non-tragic) incestuous complications, Peter's attitude is unremarkable. Drama often presents incest as a political act, becoming for Ellen Pollak a "figure for rebellion against traditional forms of authority," which establishes a libertine freedom resistant to the restraints that society imposes upon the individual.<sup>20</sup> In a number of works, then, one sees male characters constructing arguments to defend their incestuous inclinations. In Behn's comedy *The Dutch Lover* (1673), Silvio attempts to seduce his (supposed) sister, Cleonte, with the words: "Can you believe it sin to love a Brother? it is not so in nature."<sup>21</sup> The anonymous novel, *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684–87), often attributed to Behn, sees Philander recalling the Garden of Eden when wooing his sister-in-law: "let us love like the first race of men, nearest allied to God, promiscuously they lov'd, and possess't, Father and Daughter, Brother and Sister met, and reap'd the joys of Love without controul."<sup>22</sup> In such cases, unnatural desires are justified by citing a precedent that would bring those involved closer to man's natural, primitive state. Silvio and Philander, while making similar arguments, nevertheless struggle with their complicated lusts in a way to which Peter is not inclined. Although a sentiment not uncommon in sex-focused Restoration comedies, the assertion that he would "choose" his "Mistress where I pleas'd," when applied to a sister, draws Peter closer to the dangerous extremities of libertinism satirized in Shadwell's tragedy *The Libertine* (1676), in which Don Antonio explains that he has impregnated his two sisters because it "pleas'd my appetite."<sup>23</sup> Such a pledge is a long way from the moral despair of Philip Twilight.

Peter's commitment to satisfying his lusts is unchallenged in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*. He jokes to Eugenia that "my Sister here has bin more kind"—meaning sexually available—"to me, than hitherto you have prov'd to [Sanders, Eugenia's fiancé]" (4.1; p. 38). Lady Santloe, Peter's mother, betrays little dismay, or indeed interest, at the revelation of her (supposed) children's marriage, and in contrast to Middleton's Lady Twilight's speech (quoted above), her counsel is dispatched in one line. Repentance is neither encouraged nor required: "But now your love must end as to Marriage, and with a Brothers Eyes you must look upon her" (3.2; p. 36). Clarina's later brief contribution to the discussion (she is allowed two lines), stating that she and Peter "must submit" to social sanction, receives no response (4.1; p. 38). The prospect of incest does little to dampen Peter's spirits. After attending the masque celebrating the marriage of the widow, Middleton's Philip heads to bed alone; following *Counterfeit Bridegroom's* equivalent masque, Peter is next seen carousing with the male

characters in the play's only entirely original scene (5.2). Far from pondering the implications of his incestuous marriage, Peter is found singing, "the Pollitick fool | Live dully by Rule | While our Wits we refine in our Liquor" (5.2; p. 50). This conviviality mocks the cautious who allow themselves to be governed by externally imposed strictures, affirming his earlier denunciation of "dull fantastick Law." While the marriage of Peter and Clarina is ultimately confirmed to be legitimate and the fears of incest are expediently dissolved,<sup>24</sup> it seems marriage to a close blood relation would have made little material difference to Peter. In the final scene, he implies that he intended to continue a sexual relationship with Clarina: "for notwithstanding what my Mother said, yet love retain'd its native heat, and bad me still love on" (5.3; p. 58). Gone are the overwrought emotional states that Middleton's characters battle; instead, the desire to satisfy lusts and appetites, however aberrant, is presented as the primary driver of male behavior.

### III. Attempted Rape

Peter Santloe's pronouncements on incest and sexual freedom punctuate the play and set the tone for the violence of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* final scene. One of the most notable introductions into the 1677 adaptation is the undercurrent of aggressive male sexuality and the celebration of such predatory behavior. Defending the near-seventy-year-old Gazer's virility and suitability to marry Clarina, Sir Oliver recalls that "a tough old Fox of Three-score and Nine got a Girl of ten with Child" (1.1; p. 4); Sir Gregory is chased onstage by an incensed maid for attempting to "invade [her] Honour" (5.2; p. 51); and the widow's screams from her bedchamber in Act 5 are placidly interpreted by the male revellers to be the sound of a "ravishing" (5.2; p. 52). Such attitudes again indicate the potentially dangerous prioritisation of individual desire, most evident in the character of Mrs. Hadland's brother, Noble, who plays a crucial role in the play's altered denouement. Noble becomes a parallel character to Peter Santloe, with both demonstrating wilful, selfish, and menacing facets of the libertine character. In *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*, sexual assertiveness is the preserve of the widow's ineffective suitors, made humorous by their obvious incompetence, and the young Philip and Beveril stand in contrast to these grotesques. But by 1677, the erotic entanglements of Peter and Noble, the two romantic heroes, become more troubling: *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* culminates in an attempted rape.

In Middleton's work, Beveril is the brother of Mistress Low-water. A chivalrous scholar just returned from traveling, he first enters the stage having paid the ransom to rescue Lady Twilight from her kidnappers on the continent, performing the act that the irresponsible Philip failed to carry out. He meets the widow after her marriage and immediately falls in love before being unwittingly

drawn into his sister's revenge plot. The cross-dressed Mistress Low-water rejects her new bride on their wedding night, before penning a letter to Beveril, purportedly from the widow, summoning him to the widow's bedchamber. The enamored Beveril is delighted and makes his way to the widow. When Mistress Low-water bursts into the (offstage) room, both the widow and Beveril, who believes he is there by invitation, are surprised. Before an audience of the awakened wedding guests, Mistress Low-water pretends fury at her new wife's apparent infidelity and demands a separation as well as the widow's fortune in recompense. The injustice of this sees the widow wish for a marriage to the "worthy gentleman" Beveril (9.461), and she chooses him as her new husband when Mistress Low-water divulges that she is already married and that their union is therefore bigamous. The passive Beveril remains largely silent throughout these various revelations.

In 1677, Middleton's bed-trick becomes an attempted rape. Beveril is given a Restoration makeover, becoming Noble, an impoverished gambler and predatory would-be rapist whose new name recalls the noble savage, the ideology of which Peter had earlier evoked as a model for his own behavior. The two characters exemplify a clear shift in approaches to courtship. Until receiving the counterfeit letter inviting him to the widow's chamber, the infatuated Beveril has no intention of disrupting her new marriage. Adopting the role of the melancholy Renaissance lover, he vows that "though a tree be guarded from my touch, | There's none can hinder me to love the fruit" (8.328–29). When Beveril later learns of his rival's poor treatment of the widow, he is shocked since his assessment of the groom's character had been generous: "How much am I beguiled in that young gentleman! | I would have sworn had been the perfect abstract | Of honesty and mildness" (9.329–31). Noble, on the other hand, has the immediate instinct to cuckold the new bridegroom (not realizing it is his disguised sister), and plots to seduce the widow on her wedding night. His intentions are unsettling: "I'll wheadle him to drink, make him damnably drunk, so consequently impotent, and a widow disappointed, turns Devil, will sue a divorce, and then she's mine" (4.1; p. 43). Noble's is the aggressive and competitive disposition of the Restoration stage libertine, for whom women are a prize to be seized from other, weaker, men. What transpires is a duel, original to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, that sees Noble taunting his adversary (his disguised sister) with jibes about his/her youth, effeminacy, and promises of cuckolding. It is at this point that Mrs. Hadland reveals herself to her brother and he—who "cannot avoid laughing to think how surpriz'd the widow will be" (5.1; p. 47)—is drafted into the final stage of her revenge. The widow, meanwhile, retires to her chamber, anticipating that her new husband will join her.

The scenic and technical capacities of the Restoration playhouses had a clear impact on updated plays, and *The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* darkening tone is complemented by the structure and stagecraft of its final scenes. While Middleton's work sees the guests heading to bed after the

wedding masque, in 1677 the male characters partake in a bawdy drinking session (5.2). The accompanying songs, banter, and revelry create a hedonistic atmosphere which is interrupted by the widow's offstage "*Shreiks*" (5.2; p. 52). An inebriated Sir Oliver dismisses the noise as "nothing but her being coy, and yfaith the young Bridegroom seems a man of Mettle, and will put her to't" (5.2; p. 52). The men exit the stage to witness the "ravishing" and the shutters draw back for the final scene to reveal "*The Widow discovered sitting on a Bed in a Night-Gown, Noble in Bed, holding her by the Gown*" (5.3; p. 52). Utilizing the theatrical possibilities (and potential shock-value) of the discovery scene and moveable scenery, the 1677 adaptor constructs a striking visual tableau, markedly different from the discretely offstage bedchamber of Widow Goldenfleece. Throughout the play, men—Gazer, Sir Gregory, Noddy, the disguised Mrs. Hadland—competed for marriage to the widow and access to her bedroom; that the final scene unfolds in this contested space establishes that Noble has gained ultimate control. This scene, and the use of the discovery space to reveal a bed and the struggling figures of Noble and the widow upon it, demonstrates the adaptor's (or at least one of the adaptors') astute understanding of the mechanical and dramatic opportunities available. While it has been remarked that Restoration theater's depictions of sexual brutality are rarely erotic (at least from a modern perspective),<sup>25</sup> it seems unlikely that Noble's scuffle with the widow did not capitalize on the spectacle of the semi-dressed body of the actress. The sudden change in location—from reception hall to bedchamber—and in tone—from all-male revelry to attempted rape—establishes implicit links. The conditions that enable this attack are created, the play seems to suggest, by the kinds of male behavior and attitudes apparent in the drinking scene. Besides "sustaining continuity and pace,"<sup>26</sup> this discovery might be considered an example of what Tim Keenan identifies as "an integrated scenic dramaturgy" whereby the scenery becomes fundamental to the dramatic trajectory of the play.<sup>27</sup> That the assault has been plotted by another woman, one who recognizes the advantages of male disguise and who emulates the swaggering mien of the men around her, is also troublesome. But it is not only Mrs. Hadland and the male characters who are implicated: the audience, who may well have enjoyed or participated in the songs, are invited into this apparently carefree atmosphere. In the hall, the men carouse and boast, and it is these amusements that lead structurally and thematically into a stark scene of sexual and emotional abuse that accentuates female vulnerability.

As the scene begins, Noble warns the terrified widow that if she does not "yield quietly" he will publicly shame her for an adultery she has not committed (5.3; p. 52). The widow's attempt to flee is prevented by the entrance of Mrs. Hadland, still in her male disguise, who feigns anger and threatens to expose the widow. Whereas Middleton's Mistress Low-water confronts the widow in the company of the guests, Mrs. Hadland engineers a more furtive blackmail. As in *No Wit/Help Like*

*a Woman's*, the disguised bridegroom demands the widow's fortune before revealing that the marriage is illegitimate, but Mrs. Hadland imposes an additional degradation by decreeing that the widow must marry Noble or be made "infamous to the world" (5.3; p. 55). In *Counterfeit Bridegroom*, the widow is alone with her assailant and her enraged (supposed) husband, both united against her, with the guests' insistent hammering on the door serving as an aural reminder of the prospective judgements of a scandal-hungry wider society. Having initially resisted Noble, maintaining that she would "rather dye, than yield" (5.3; p. 53), in this pressurized atmosphere the widow's hand is forced. In her desperation she pleads, "Take half my Estate, my House, Goods, any thing, rather than force me to so rash an Act," and her unwilling final acquiescence—"I yield, I yield"—is far removed from Widow Goldenfleece's relief that she can uncomplicatedly swap a disappointing husband for a more attractive match (5.3; p. 55). Widow Landwell's submission chimes with Laura Gowing's observation upon examining real-life early modern rape cases and legal records, that often "What starts as a violent struggle, with a woman protesting vigorously against male force, ends with acceptance and negotiation."<sup>28</sup> The play's alternative title—*The Defeated Widow*—signals this downfall; the widow is subjected to a combination of sexual, social, and financial degradation, ensuring that her fate is far bleaker than her Middletonian counterpart's.

The match that concludes *Counterfeit Bridegroom* is a hurriedly engineered union, to which the desperate widow agrees in an attempt to protect her reputation. Jowett sees *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* concluding marriage as the reconstruction of a same-sex pairing (the widow and Mrs. Low-water) into a socially sanctioned heterosexual one (the widow and Beveril), achieved through the convenient doubling of sister and brother,<sup>29</sup> but the 1677 play challenges the ease of this substitution. While Middleton's widow is allowed to retain control of her future, declaring of Beveril, "This is the gentleman I embrace and choose" (9.528), Widow Landwell's avowal that "I am assured [Noble] is a Gentleman in all respects" rings false (5.3; p. 57), given what she has just endured. The freedom Widow Goldenfleece secures in *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* is eliminated from *Counterfeit Bridegroom* and Widow Landwell finds herself hostage to the whims of her would-be rapist.

Ultimately, the conclusion of Middleton's comedy is benevolent. The two central women are reconciled and Mistress Low-water predicts a happy future, figuring herself as the widow's fairy godmother:

You wished for love; and, faith, I have bestowed you  
Upon a gentleman that does dearly love you.  
That recompense I've made you; and you must think, madam,  
I loved you well—though I could never ease you—

When I fetched in my brother thus to please you. (9.581–85)

Beveril will fulfil the sexual role which his sister could not, and Mistress Low-water frames the marriage as a reparation, presenting an affectionate new husband to compensate for her own necessary deceptions. The widow is grateful and gracious in return, announcing, “My punishment is gentle, and to show | My thankful mind for’t” she embraces Mistress Low-water and kisses Beveril (9.591–92). The mood is genial as Sir Oliver Twilight interprets the match, the “unexpected blessing,” as a cosmic reward for Beveril’s part in bringing his wife home and restoring his family (9.594). Perhaps surprisingly, given Beveril’s rather subdued role throughout the play, his are the concluding words: “Come, gentlemen; on all, perpetual friendship. | Heaven still relieves what misery would destroy. | Never was night yet of more general joy” (9.688–90). Although he speaks to the male characters, the sentiment of “general joy” is inclusive and forms a fittingly amiable ending. Any cruelties have been rectified or restrained, and the society with which *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* concludes is an altogether fairer, happier, and more honest one, with various wrongs righted and historic deceptions exposed to the benefit of the principal characters.

The concluding lines in *Counterfeit Bridegroom* similarly belong to Noble, but his sentiments are, as we might expect, more complicated. The male impulse for festivity that produced the play’s banquet, masque, and drinking session triumphs and Noble invites the “Gentlemen” to withdraw so that they may “congratulate each others good success and fortunes” (5.3; p. 58). This celebration seems to signal the continuation of an exclusively male community to which women are denied access. The play closes with his observation that, “Thus in the Storms of Fortune you may find, | Where Justice is deficient, Wit proves kind” (5.3; p. 58). His words form a reminder of the tempestuous experiences of many of the characters and of the vagaries of fortune, and they seem to reinforce Peter’s earlier revolutionary dismissal of “dull fantastick Law.” The law may have been unhelpful in settling Mrs. Hadland’s financial disputes, but the ending also reminds us of the various injustices that remain unexamined or unresolved. For Mrs. Hadland and her brother, intellectual agility and a propensity for manipulation have earned them success, yet this victory is deliberately divorced from the principles of fairness and justice. Jowett views Mistress Low-water as a champion “for a relatively egalitarian ethic in an exploitative world,” but the 1677 play populates its own exploitative Restoration London with unredeemed and exploitative characters.<sup>30</sup> The play’s final word may be “kind,” but kindness has proved elusive and illusive throughout; instead, Noble celebrates the cunning which has illuminated, for him and his sister, an alternative, more productive path to achieving their ends, and one that operates outside of moral, social, or legal obligation.

#### IV. Attribution and Restoration Adaptation

*The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* handling of uneasy domestic relationships mirrors the uneasy relationship between the adaptation and its Renaissance source: its interest in obscured and contested family ties replicates the drama's status as the ambiguous descendant of an earlier work. Ultimately, the efforts to determine Clarina's uncertain origins and ascertain her true identity might remind us of the ways in which the Restoration adaptation itself stands in ambiguous relation to Middleton's comedy. Langbaine's disregard for *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*—"only an Old Play of Middleton's, call'd No Wit like a Woman's"<sup>31</sup>—ignores the efforts of the adaptor to update and disguise its source. It also elides the play's innovations, which make it a product of 1677 just as much as of the mid-Jacobean period. The adaptation of old plays was common, with just over half of the recorded performances between 1660–1700 being of pre-Restoration works, many of which were altered to appeal to contemporary tastes.<sup>32</sup> Middleton was not, however, a staple of the Restoration stage: his original works were rarely performed in the 1670s, although several dramatists (including Behn) did plunder his plays for inspiration, usually without acknowledging their source.<sup>33</sup> While much of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* is undoubtedly derivative, its various additions, modifications, and revisions transform its tone, and the much changed, post-1660 dramatic environment of indoor theaters—including actresses and moveable scenery—would have ensured that it became a very different work in performance.<sup>34</sup>

The issue of early modern authorship is more tangled than is often conceded, and the relationship between adaptation, collaboration, and anonymity in the Restoration playhouses demands further investigation. Despite a strong familial resemblance to its source material, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* departs from *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* significantly, bearing the distinct imprint of its own cultural and theatrical moment. That Middleton's name was not attached to the published text is also not surprising; studying the appropriation of pre-1642 plays in the Restoration theaters and the palimpsestic nature of many adaptations, Harbage noted the reluctance of authors or publishers to advertise that a play was "second-hand."<sup>35</sup> Still more interesting is *The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* anonymous publication: it is certainly tempting to try to identify the dramatic fingerprints of a particular Restoration dramatist on the adaptation (an instinct that ignores the possibility of professional collaboration within the playhouses). Aside from an unconvincing suggestion of Thomas Betterton's involvement,<sup>36</sup> the name that has been most frequently attached to the adaptation (often uncritically) is Aphra Behn's. It is this possibility that I would like to investigate before concluding.

The 1670s saw a developing sensitivity to questions of authorship, with critics increasingly keen to “castigate illicit appropriators,” when “any form of playwriting which compromised or subverted the moral authority of the individual creator was seen as suspect.”<sup>37</sup> Despite a growing tension around the issue of adaptation, it was a common feature of the 1670s playhouses. Of the twenty extant plays that *The London Stage* records as having (probably) received their première in the 1676–77 season,<sup>38</sup> eleven are adapted from an identifiable source or sources: five from continental authors and six from pre-1660 English dramatists (Shakespeare, George Wilkins, Richard Brome, T.B., William Chamberlayne, and Thomas Killigrew). Two of these six plays (*The Town-Fopp* and *The Rover*) are Behn’s and one (the anonymous *Debauchee*) is sometimes attributed to her.

An assessment of Behn’s approach to adaptation is complicated by uncertainty around anonymously published adapted plays that have been linked to her, but for which there is no conclusive evidence of her involvement.<sup>39</sup> Her mid-career works and their sources demonstrate an awareness of lesser-known early seventeenth-century drama (much of which had not been performed after 1660), and a noticeable engagement with Jacobean city comedy in the early 1680s.<sup>40</sup> Behn seems to have been both vulnerable and sensitive to accusations of plagiarism in the late 1670s, which arose around *Abdelazer* (1676, pub. 1677), *The Rover* (1677), and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678).<sup>41</sup> *Abdelazer* was based on the anonymous *Lust’s Dominion* (c. 1600, pub. 1657), believed in the seventeenth century to be by Marlowe but now thought to be the work of Thomas Dekker, John Day and William Haughton. A posthumously published letter, purportedly by Behn, describes how her adaptation “weeded and improv’d” the original “Garden.”<sup>42</sup> There is no evidence that Behn was the author of the letter, published in 1718, but even if the words are not hers, its creation would suggest that nearly thirty years after her death an interest in associating Behn with accusations of (and defences against) plagiarism persisted. In the postscript to *The Rover* (1677) she addressed the play’s very close engagement with Thomas Killigrew’s *Thomaso* (1654, pub. 1664) by pointing out Killigrew’s own use of Brome’s *The Novella* (1632). Examining the extent of Behn’s modifications and additions, Elaine Hobby argues that *The Rover* “transforms [*Thomaso*] into another play altogether,”<sup>43</sup> a strategy that differs from that employed for *The City-Heiress* (1682). This comedy reveals Behn’s familiarity with Middleton and borrows from at least four pre-1642 plays: Middleton’s *A Mad World, My Masters* (pub. 1608) and *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (pub. 1605), Lording Barry’s *Ram-Alley* (1611), and Philip Massinger’s *The Guardian* (1633),<sup>44</sup> fusing multiple works to fashion a distinctive new whole.

This is clearly a much more complex undertaking than *Counterfeit Bridegroom's* relatively straightforward use of one source, and it is difficult to generalize about Behn's handling of source material. She is also linked to two other anonymous adaptations of earlier plays: *The Debauchee* (1677), an adaptation of Brome's *A Mad Couple Well Match'd* (1639, pub. 1653) and *The Revenge* (1680), based on John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (pub. 1605). While Behn's involvement in *The Debauchee* is questionable,<sup>45</sup> attributing *The Revenge* to her is more sound.<sup>46</sup> *The Revenge*, based, like *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, on a single Jacobean source, betrays a similar interest in directing "audiences' critical attention to masculinity and the sexual double standard."<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, the thematic elements that Behn chose to emphasise or introduce in other plays, her flirtation with anonymous publication, and familiarity with Renaissance drama and Middleton, are all circumstantial factors but they do not make her involvement in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* any less likely. Having considered Behn's use of source material elsewhere, we can say little more with certainty than that it remains plausible that she would have had the requisite knowledge of, access to, and interest in, *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* to adapt it.

Thematically, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* attention to brother-sister incest and female vulnerability to male violence are strands in many of Behn's works, and the attempted rape that concludes the play, framed as a discovery scene, demonstrates the astute use of theatrical space often identified as a significant element of Behn's stagecraft.<sup>48</sup> The way in which sexual violence aurally and then visually intrudes upon the newly written all-male drinking scene (5.2), discussed above, could well be an example of what Dawn Lewcock sees as Behn's characteristic attention to "subtle, often ironic, patterning" whereby plot and staging inform one another.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in an analysis of bedchamber scenes in Restoration comedy, Jeremy Webster cites the depiction of "rape, betrayal, and violence" in this space as a recurring feature of Behn's drama, and her fondness for discoveries—particularly those occurring in intimate settings—has been described by Peter Holland as "obsessive."<sup>50</sup> While these factors do not confirm her involvement, they are nevertheless consistent with her signature style.

The reshaped final scene is not itself remarkable in Restoration drama, since a number of playwrights (including Behn) featured scenes of attempted rape in their works. A concentration of comedies featuring threatened sexual assault appeared around this time, including William Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* (December 1676), Behn's *The Rover* (March 1677), and Thomas D'Urfey's *Trick for Trick* and *Squire Oldsapp* (both 1678). Each of these plays offers a critique of the threatening libertine figure, whose sexual transgressiveness and search for erotic gratification is inflected by violence. Such scenes seem also to have been attractive to playwrights engaged in

revising older plays: rewritten Shakespearean tragedies acquired new instances of sexual violence,<sup>51</sup> as did the anonymous adaptation of *The Dutch Courtesan, The Revenge* (1680).

*No Wit/Help Like A Woman's* itself contains no attempted rape, but Suzanne Gossett sees Middleton as one of the first dramatists to experiment—unsuccessfully and elsewhere—with how rape might be enfolded into a (tragi)comic ending. She maintains that after the 1620s, “the decadent Jacobean exploration of rape, with its heretical suggestion that rapists may be heroes and that women may love their attackers, vanished.”<sup>52</sup> If this is in part true, the trope re-emerges later in the century although it is rare, still, in Restoration drama for a female character to marry (however reluctantly) her attacker. When it does occur, such as in Behn’s *The City-Heiress* (1682) (based in part on two Middleton plays) and Charles Sedley’s *Bellamira; or, The Mistress* (1687), pressure is applied to the notion of the happy ending. The attempted rape in *The City-Heiress* is especially comparable to that in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*. Its widow, Lady Galliard, possesses a combined financial and sexual appeal resembling Widow Landwell’s, and the bedchamber scene in 4.1 echoes Noble’s strategy of threatening rape as the prelude to a marriage proposal. When Sir Charles drunkenly barges into Lady Galliard’s chamber, “Pulls her” about and starts to undress, Lady Galliard desperately agrees to marry him.<sup>53</sup> This, unfortunately, is witnessed by Sir Anthony, who insists that her consent to marriage is legally binding. Promising her betrothed revenge and a life of cuckoldom, a furious Lady Galliard does not capitulate so easily as the widow in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, but by the play’s close she too finds herself “vanquish’d” in a bid to avoid “Infamy [and] Scandal” (5.5.237, 5.5.51). Both women withstand physical force but are overwhelmed ultimately not by the individual men who exhibit a capacity for violence, but by wider social pressures.

And yet, while many of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom’s* additions, including the final scene, reflect the particular theatrical interests and modalities of Behn, the play’s disinterest in its women characters complicates any potential ascription to a playwright who is always attentive to female characterization. *The Counterfeit Bridegroom’s* lack of sympathy between (and toward) women is stark. The final scene stresses the absence of compassion between Mrs. Hadland and the widow, apparently endorsing the idea that the financial victory of one woman requires the sexual and social humiliation of another. Mrs. Hadland warns, in a sentiment not found in *No Wit/Help Like A Woman’s*, that “Women are by Women best betray’d” (5.1; p. 48); it is striking that, having designed the plot that will culminate in Noble’s attempted rape of the widow, Mrs. Hadland quotes the cynical strategy of the rakes in Dryden’s popular comedy *An Evening’s Love* (1668, pub. 1671), morally aligning her with the male predator.<sup>54</sup> More widely, the 1677 adaptor eradicates female solidarity and networks of support from the text. Mistress Low-water’s familial relationship to Jane (*Counterfeit Bridegroom’s* Eugenia) is removed, as is her admission of sympathy for the widow. Upon

hearing of the “foul” Sir Gilbert’s plot to marry the widow, steal her money, and pass it on to Mistress Low-water (whom he wishes to take as his mistress), Middleton’s character feels moved to “give pity to mine enemy” (2.102). Most tellingly, the threatened rape added to the final scene in 1677 is enabled by another woman. In contrast, the male characters are provided with ample opportunity for bonding. The men may not all be friends, but shared values bind them together in the boisterous homosociality of the drinking party of 5.2. Middleton’s male suitors may be as unappealing as in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, but *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* exposes an understanding between the women that manages to cut through the cynical manoeuvrings elsewhere. It is uncertain whether the 1677 play’s disinterest in female suffering reflects the priorities of the adaptor, or whether—particularly if Behn were involved in revising the work—the removal of these voices is a deliberate effort to expose the harmful attitudes of a male society and the dangers of adopting libertine culture. A clue as to how we might be intended to respond may be found in comments referring to the social makeup of the audience. The prologue addresses a depleted audience of “*honest Tradesmen*,” since the “*Gay Baboon[s]*” of court and Town have left London for the summer (ll. 7, 5; sig. A2r); the tone is mischievous, but it is possible that this atypical, less fashionable crowd, unusually weighted towards citizens and merchants, might have been naturally disposed to censure rather than celebrate stage libertinism.

Behn’s female characters are notable for their richness and psychological complexity, but *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* actively reduces the depth of the original’s female characterization. This is unusual in Restoration adaptations anyway, which generally expanded female roles to accommodate the availability of actresses. Jowett suggests that *No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s* is “a female-oriented continuation of male-oriented city comedy,”<sup>55</sup> but while the adaptation retains two women at its centre (both are referenced in the play’s full title), they are thinly drawn. Female agency is represented by Mrs. Hadland (who cross-dresses in order to correct a past injustice and is rewarded with the restitution of her estate) and, to a more limited extent, by Widow Landwell (who is forced to marry her would-be rapist). Mrs. Hadland’s marriage to the widow (portrayed by two actresses) would of course have taken on a different erotic cast to the more convoluted equivalent union portrayed by two boy actors at the Fortune Theater in 1611, but elsewhere *Counterfeit Bridegroom* demonstrates limited interest in its female characters. Other women characters have reduced roles and are largely silent, uncomplaining of the various abuses they have suffered. The play is, for example, uninterested that Clarina, aged seven, was separated from her mother and “convey’d . . . into a Wood” by thieves (3.2; p. 36), or that Lady Santloe spent nearly a decade looking for her daughter abroad before being forsaken by her son. Nor does *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* feature any of the dramatic elements that allow a focus on female experience, and

which are common in contemporary female-authored plays.<sup>56</sup> It is true that Middleton's voice is often dominant, but even in the play's more original sections there is no interest in expanding the female characterization, and women do not appear at all in 5.2, the play's only entirely new scene. The women are ill-treated—more so than in Middleton—and their various hardships and precarious social, sexual, and legal positions (always a concern of Behn's) are evident but never investigated. This neglect of female characterization mirrors the indifference and sometimes cruelty shown throughout the play to mothers, wives, widows, and daughters.

Ultimately, Behn's involvement is uncertain.<sup>57</sup> As one of the Duke's Company's most practised dramatists, it is conceivable that she undertook the relatively minor project of hastily revising an old Middleton play for the quiet summer period. *The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* circumstances of performance and publication certainly distinguish it from more celebrated contemporary adaptations. Seemingly premièred when theaters were at their quietest and audiences at their least fashionable; starring none of the Company's most accomplished actors; and published anonymously by Langley Curtis, a Whig bookseller who produced a number of plays of uncertain origins in 1677–78, it seems likely that *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* was intended merely to fill a gap in the summer repertory.<sup>58</sup> It is also possible that Behn acted in some advisory or editorial capacity, overseeing or tweaking another (perhaps a hireling) writer's efforts. This might explain the curious combination of newly introduced elements, some of which suggest Behn's distinctive hand and others of which deviate from her *modus operandi*. Furthermore, a growing "hostility" towards formal collaborative playwriting has been identified in the late Restoration period,<sup>59</sup> a stigma that perhaps (at least partially) explains the absence of a name on the title page of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*. The possibility that the decision to publish anonymously may signal some more convoluted process of collaborative revision and adaptation is certainly a topic that merits further study.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom's* anonymous publication may indicate a recognition that—given the many discontinuities with *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* and the consolidation of voices (Middleton, probably James Shirley, at least one Restoration playwright) —attributing *Counterfeit Bridegroom* to one or even two authors would be problematic and inaccurate. Ultimately, the play should be viewed as a composite creation, demonstrating a close kinship to Middleton's work but also having an identity of its own. The work encompasses serious and weighty subjects—incest, rape, familial neglect—with a lack of corresponding emotional nuance; handled with the characteristic irreverence of much of the comedy of the late 1670s, it sits comfortably within the theatrical landscape of its new age.

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<sup>1</sup> This article discusses key aspects of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*'s content and context that I have not been able to address in full in my edition of the play. All references to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* provide both the act and scene number from the forthcoming *Works* and the page number from the 1677 edition. Anon., "The Counterfeit Bridegroom," ed. Jennie Challinor in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn: Plays 1676–1678*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or, the Defeated Widow* (London: Langley Curtis, 1677). Further citations of this work are given in the text.

<sup>2</sup> The most original material is found in Act 5, with 5.2 being an entirely new scene with no parallel in *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's*.

<sup>3</sup> The fullest consideration is Marston Stevens Balch's study of the two plays in *Thomas Middleton's "No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's" and "The Counterfeit Bridegroom" (1677) and Further Adaptations* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford: George West and Henry Clements, 1691), 528–29.

<sup>5</sup> Shirley revived *No Wit/Help Like a Woman's* for Dublin's Saint Werburgh Street Theatre in 1638. See John Jowett, "Middleton's *No Wit* at the Fortune," *Renaissance Drama* 22 (1991): 192.

<sup>6</sup> William Van Lennep, ed., *The London Stage 1660–1800, Part 1: 1660–1700* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 248, 263; see also Headnote to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*.

<sup>7</sup> John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, vol. 1 (Bath: H. E. Carrington, 1832), 213.

<sup>8</sup> See Robert D. Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 299–312, 328–33.

<sup>9</sup> John Jowett identifies the play's ultimate "tolerance." Introduction to "No Wit/Help Like a Woman's," in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 779.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 252.

<sup>11</sup> David Roberts, *Restoration Plays and Players: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Middleton, "No Wit/Help Like a Woman's; or, The Almanac," ed. John Jowett, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, 779–832.

<sup>13</sup> Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>14</sup> See Chernaik's chapter "Hobbes and the Libertines," especially 35–51, in *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*.

<sup>15</sup> Michelle O'Callaghan, *Thomas Middleton: Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 72–73.

<sup>16</sup> Earlier iterations of the "wild-man" existed in European tradition and can be traced in English in works such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. See Kenneth Borris, "Salvage Man," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 624.

<sup>17</sup> John Dryden, "The Conquest of Granada," ed. H. T. Swedenberg, Alan Roper, and Vinton A. Dearing, in *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1–221 (1.1.1.206–09).

<sup>18</sup> John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Sonia Massai (London: Methuen, 2011), 1.1.24–27. Pepys offers the only record of a Restoration performance on 9 September 1661, describing it as "a simple play and ill acted." Samuel Pepys, *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Roger Latham and William Matthews, vol. 2 (London: Bell and Hyman, 1970), 175.

- <sup>19</sup> For example, Sir Gregory's attempt to seduce Mrs. Hadland in 1.2 is more insistent than is Middleton's Sir Gilbert's, and Mr. Hadland's planned interruption (absent in Middleton) introduces the cuckold humor popular in the 1670s.
- <sup>20</sup> Ellen Pollak, "Beyond Incest: Gender and the Politics of Transgression in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 153.
- <sup>21</sup> Aphra Behn, *The Dutch Lover* (London: Thomas Dring, 1673), 29.
- <sup>22</sup> Anonymous, *Love-Letters between a Noble-Man and his Sister* (London: Randal Taylor, 1684), 5.
- <sup>23</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Libertine* (London: Henry Herringman, 1676), 3.
- <sup>24</sup> The sudden and convenient debunking of possible incest follows Middleton and is also a device found in Behn's *Dutch Lover* (1673), which may in part have been influenced by Beaumont and Fletcher's 1611 (pub. 1619) *A King and No King*, ed., Lee Bliss (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), which was extremely popular throughout the Restoration (see William Van Lennep, ed., *The London Stage*, Part 1, cxxviii).
- <sup>25</sup> Derek Hughes, "Rape on the Restoration Stage," *Eighteenth Century* 46 (2005): 232–33.
- <sup>26</sup> J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 29.
- <sup>27</sup> Tim Keenan, *Restoration Staging, 1660–74* (London: Routledge, 2016), 196.
- <sup>28</sup> Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 94.
- <sup>29</sup> Jowett, Introduction, "No Wit/Help Like a Woman's," 780.
- <sup>30</sup> Jowett, "Middleton's *No Wit at the Fortune*," *Renaissance Drama* 22 (1991), 198.
- <sup>31</sup> Langbaine, 528–29.
- <sup>32</sup> Brian Vickers calculates that of 959 known performances, 486 were old plays and 473 were new. Brian Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage, Vol. 1: 1623–1692* (London: Routledge, 1974), 6.
- <sup>33</sup> See Sir William Davenant's *The Wits* (1636; 1663), T. T.'s *The Life of Mother Shipton* (1670), Thomas Shadwell's *Timon of Athens* (1678), John Leaner's *The Rambling Justice* (1678), and Behn's *The City-Heiress* (1682) and *The Luckey Chance* (1686). John Jowett, "For Many of Your Companies: Middleton's Early Readers," in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 294–95.
- <sup>34</sup> For examples of the ways in which original meanings can be transformed through the manipulation of source material, see Kate Aughterson, "'As for Mine': Aphra Behn and Adaptations of Jacobean City Comedies," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, 31 (2016): 37–64.
- <sup>35</sup> Alfred Harbage, "Elizabethan-Restoration Palimpsest," *Modern Language Review*, 35 (1940): 288.
- <sup>36</sup> Montague Summers, *A Bibliography of the Restoration Drama* (London: Fortune Press, 1935), 9.
- <sup>37</sup> Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660–1710* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 228; see also Chapter 2, 32–95.
- <sup>38</sup> Van Lennep, ed., *London Stage*, 247–59. This figure does not include *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, which is tentatively (and I believe, erroneously) included in the 1677–78 season.
- <sup>39</sup> The computational analysis undertaken in the new Cambridge *Works of Aphra Behn* will offer new insights into this vexed issue.
- <sup>40</sup> Aughterson, 41.
- <sup>41</sup> See Kewes, 64–67, and Laura J. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 105–61.
- <sup>42</sup> *Familiar Letters of Love, Gallantry, and Several Occasions*, vol. 1 (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1718), 32.
- <sup>43</sup> Elaine Hobby, "No stolen object, but her own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*," *Women's Writing*, 6 (1999): 115.
- <sup>44</sup> See Rachel Adcock's Headnote to "The City-Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all," in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 12–16.

- <sup>45</sup> Hobby finds little evidence for Behn's involvement, see Headnote to "The Debauchee," ed. Elaine Hobby in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn: Plays 1676–1678*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
- <sup>46</sup> Mary Ann O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (London: Routledge, 2004), 263–64.
- <sup>47</sup> Anon., *The Revenge; or, A Match in Newgate* (London: William Cademan, 1680); Aughterson, 59.
- <sup>48</sup> See Susan Green, "Semiotic Modalities of the Female Body in Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover*," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 138–39; Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 12–13; Keenan, 181, 196.
- <sup>49</sup> Dawn Lewcock, *Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene in the Restoration Theatre* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 202–03.
- <sup>50</sup> Jeremy W. Webster, "In and Out of the Bed-chamber: Staging Libertine Desire in Restoration Comedy," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12 (2012): 87, 89; Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 41; see also Lewcock, 197–203.
- <sup>51</sup> See Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681) and *Coriolanus* adaptation *The Ingratitude of a Common-wealth* (1682), and D'Urfey's *The Injured Princess* (1682), an adaptation of *Cymbeline*.
- <sup>52</sup> Suzanne Gossett, "'Best Men are Molded out of Faults': Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama," *English Literary Renaissance* 14 (1984): 319–24, 327.
- <sup>53</sup> *The City-Heiress*, 4.1.533sd.
- <sup>54</sup> In *An Evening's Love; or, The Mock-Astrologer*, Wildblood and Bellamy plot: "We will attempt the Mistress by the Maid: Women by women still are best betray'd." John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 10, ed. Maximillian E. Novak and George R. Guffey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 193–314 (1.2.158–59).
- <sup>55</sup> Jowett, Introduction, "No Wit/Help Like a Woman's," 779.
- <sup>56</sup> See Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists, 1642–1737* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988), 63–65.
- <sup>57</sup> Computational analysis investigating Behn's involvement has proved inconclusive. See Mel Evans and Alan Hogarth, "Stylistic Palimpsests: Computational Stylistic Perspectives on Precursory Authorship in Aphra Behn's Drama," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* (2020), <<https://academic.oup.com/dsh/article/doi/10.1093/llc/fqz085/5717927>>.
- <sup>58</sup> Curtis's foray into the publication of drama was largely concentrated in 1677–78, when he published seven plays; he was not involved in the publication of any works published under Behn's name. See Headnote to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*.
- <sup>59</sup> Kewes, 130, 136.
- <sup>60</sup> For Kewes, the "steep rise" of admissions of co-authorship in the 1680s is a symptom of a cultural consensus that playwrights "felt they had to acknowledge any contribution by another hand" (141–42). This has intriguing implications for instances of anonymous publication.

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