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**FROM LIBERTINE TO INCEL:
HOW THE “MANOSPHERE” HAS FOSTERED THE CONTINUATION OF
GENDER VIOLENCE IN WESTERN CULTURE**

by

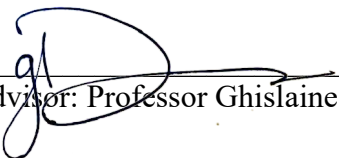
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A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council


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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the similarities between the ideologies of the Restoration libertine and the present-day beta-male, the social and cultural forces that shape those ideologies, and the practices of flirtation and seduction shared by the libertine and beta-male. This thesis addresses the expansion of female agency and power in the mid-eighteenth century and twenty-first century, as well as how this expansion of power threatens the social, cultural, and economic privilege held by the Restoration libertine and beta-male respectively. In the eighteenth century, this expansion of power manifests in the emergence of the bourgeoisie class and the development of the Enlightenment salons. In the twenty-first century, this expansion of power manifests in growing public acknowledgment of the social, political, and economic rights of women and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Both the libertine and beta-male enact misogynistic tactics as means of retaliating against this perceived threat to their privilege. I discuss these tactics at length, comparing the similarities in misogynistic suppression enacted by the Restoration libertine as well as the beta-male. I conclude by asserting that the gender violence perpetrated by the beta-male community has existed long before the development of the “manosphere” – that this violence actually made its debut among the libertines of the Restoration period and persisted through the centuries.

Introduction

“I have boasted that I was once in love before: and indeed I thought I was. It was in my early manhood – with that quality-jilt, whose infidelity I have vowed to revenge upon as many of the sex that shall come into my power.”

– Robert Lovelace, *Clarissa*

Statement of Intent

“The ultimate evil behind sexuality,” notes Elliot Rodger in his manifesto, *My Twisted World*, “is the human female... Women are flawed creatures, and my mistreatment at their hands has made me realize this sad truth” (Rodger 136). On May 23, 2014, shortly after uploading his final, 137-paged memoir, alongside a video on YouTube emphasizing similar sentiments, Rodger set out to murder the women belonging to the Alpha Phi sorority at the University of California, Santa Barbara – an act later known as the Isla Vista Killings. According to Rodger, this shooting spree was his retribution for being cruelly rejected by the female sex socially and sexually. Much of the twenty-two-year-old’s articulated resentment toward the female sex stemmed from the notion that he was forced into a life of “involuntary celibacy,” meaning that in his mind, his lack of sexual encounters with other women was due wholly to their “unjust” rejection of him. As Rodger himself writes, “All I ever wanted to do was love women, and in turn to be loved back by them. Their behavior towards me has only earned my hatred, and rightfully so!” (Rodger 137).

Rodger’s instigation of a rebellion against the female sex has earned him notoriety among the growing online community of other involuntary celibates (incels) and self-proclaimed beta-males – that is, men who perceive themselves as victims of unfair sexual selection carried out by women. Consider, for example, Alek Minassian’s last Facebook post before killing ten pedestrians with his van on April 23, 2018: “The Incel Rebellion has already begun... All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!” (Wendling). Minassian’s Facebook post references Rodger’s final YouTube video, uploaded immediately before the Isla Vista Killings. In this

disturbing, 7-minute video, Rodger outlines his plans for, what he terms, the “Day of Retribution,” claiming he will “slaughter every spoiled, stuck-up, blond slut” in Alpha Phi for giving her sexual attention to “obnoxious brutes” rather than to him, the “supreme gentleman.” (“Retribution”). By publicly referencing Rodger, Minassian makes no effort to conceal the motivation behind his attack. Like many other members of the beta-male community, Minassian believes he is carrying out Rodger’s unfinished task: reaffirming dominance over those women who are deemed responsible for beta-male celibacy. With increasingly frequent reports of members of this online community committing similar acts of grotesque violence in the media, it is becoming more and more difficult to turn a blind eye to the dangerous rhetoric generated on these members’ favorite online forums. As made evident by Rodger’s shooting spree and Minassian’s automobile attack, this “casual” rhetoric is capable of shifting to violence, this violence has a target, and that target is often gendered. Author of *Kill All Normies* Angela Nagle summarizes this point best in her article “The New Man of 4chan” when she asserts, “Every dead body on 4chan is a joke, unless it isn’t” (Nagle 67).¹

It is within the context of these recent mass murders that I aim to compare the philosophies of the contemporary beta-male community to those of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century libertines. In doing so, I seek to establish an evolving archetype and reveal the ways in which similar enactments of misogyny and gender violence have remained consistent over time. I focus specifically on the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries because both periods see considerable sociopolitical and socioeconomic growth among women in the Western world.

¹ Here, Nagle is referencing 4chan user David Michael Kalac’s strangulation of his intimate partner Amber Coplin in 2014. Once she died, Kalac uploaded images of her body to a 4chan discussion board, writing, “Turns out it’s way harder to strangle someone to death than it looks in the movies...Her son will be home from school soon. He’ll find her then call the cops. I just wanted to share the pics before they find me...” (Nagle 67). The point Nagle makes here is that amid all this seemingly exaggerated talk of an “incel rebellion” on 4chan and other discussion boards, there are a number of beta-males willing to make the jump from rhetorical violence to physical violence.

As I argue in coming pages, the misogynistic backlash enacted by the libertine and beta-male is much more visible during times of expanded female power. Thus, studying these two periods alongside one another reveals important information regarding what cultural, political, and economic factors coax misogyny from its dormancy. Of course, this is not to say that there were no major periods of female advancement between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries (and, consequently, no major periods of misogynistic backlash). Indeed, there were – and many at that. However, the prominence of the libertine archetype in eighteenth-century literature has accrued vast scholarly attention, providing me with an ample number of resources to draw from when drawing comparisons between these two figures. I find that having an established literary and critical history of the libertine allows me to draw more accurate and meaningful comparisons between him and the critically overlooked beta-male. Although, if I were allocated more time for this project, I would consider bridging the gap between both figures and providing a more wholesale look at Western misogynistic extremism in action.²

On the surface, the misogyny of the Restoration libertine and the misogyny of the beta-male community appear to be two distinct styles of hatred. However, there exists evidence that the resentment expressed in the prior case study has existed long before the development of online hate sites. Like the beta-male, the Restoration libertine is afflicted with a sense of aggrieved entitlement that accompanies his privileged status. Both figures tend to be middle-to-upper class, white-passing men that have long been accustomed to the privileges they reap within Western, patriarchal society. When these privileges are threatened – particularly, when these privileges are threatened by women – both figures retaliate against the individuals and

² Clement Knox's recently published book, *Seduction: A History From the Enlightenment to the Present*, does important work piecing together this gap. A self-proclaimed "motivated dabbler," Knox rejects a scholarly label attached to his name. Nonetheless, *Seduction* is a worthy place to begin understanding sex and courtship in the Western world from 1740 to the present day.

institutions that challenge their male hegemony. This paper focuses specifically on the degradation of expectations regarding who provides and who is owed sex. Both men perceive the withholding of sexual attention as an attack on their dominance. Both men (as Elliot Rodger did) retaliate against those women who withhold their sexual attention as means of reaffirming their male dominance. The misogynistic practices of these figures are not distinct phenomena. The goal of this paper is to highlight this broader pattern of gender violence that connects them both. That being said, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the Restoration libertine, as I have done with the beta-male.

The Restoration libertine is characterized by his extreme acts of hedonism that transgress bourgeoisie notions of morality and sexuality in Europe during the late Restoration Period through the Age of Enlightenment. His performance of the “good-natured” gentleman (Potter 406) often serves as a means of deceitfully encouraging virtuous women to engage in sexual encounters with him. However, as demonstrated in Samuel Richardson’s two major novels *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, when deceit fails, force becomes a desperate resort. Although he does not have the ability to remain behind a screen of anonymity, as members of the beta-male community have on internet discussion boards, the libertine has proven to be no less dangerous. To the common rake, another notch in the bedpost represents something more than a mere sexual conquest; sexual licentiousness is his means of displaying and defending masculine domination over the female sex. Disturbingly, he is sometimes so determined to achieve this end that he will not disregard rape and other acts of sexual violence as means of carrying out his schemes. It is my hope that by the end of this paper, my audience will recognize that the libertine has not gone away; he has simply changed shape. His perpetuation of misogynistic practices that target women, and potentially rivalrous men, has simply transitioned to the digital realm.

Critical Conversation

Throughout this paper, I rely on Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University Kate Manne's definition of misogyny, as outlined in her groundbreaking work *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, to better elucidate both the libertine and beta-male's rationale for waging physical, mental, and social violence against those women who they perceive as a threat to their male dominance. In her book, Manne answers in eight chapters the seemingly daunting question: How do we define misogyny in our contemporary, Western society? At its most basic, "misogyny should be understood primarily as the 'law enforcement' branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of *policing* and *enforcing* its governing norms and expectations" (Manne 78). Thus, misogyny, as Manne defines it, serves as a means of punishing women who deviate from expectations of femininity, while simultaneously rewarding women whose behavior molds to those expectations. She juxtaposes her definition of misogyny with what she frequently terms the "naïve conception" of misogyny – that is, the wholesale hatred of women without any reason other than the fact that they are women. Through this juxtaposition, Manne hopes to demonstrate misogyny "as a relatively unmysterious, epistemologically accessible, phenomenon," whereas the ambiguous, "naïve conception" of misogyny makes it much more difficult to recognize violence based on prescribed gender scripts (Manne 21). With the help of Manne's work, we now recognize misogyny as *active* – in that encompasses those verbal, physical, mental, emotional, and financial methods of punishing women who deviate from patriarchal norms – and misogyny as *specific* – in that it punishes those women who are *doing the deviating*.

Contrary to the claim that gender violence is carried out due to the notion that men perceive women as subhuman, Manne argues just the opposite. Instead, she asserts that gender

violence is carried out because men perceive women as all-too-human – that is, equally as competent and capable of social mobility as men. As she herself writes, “Many of the nastiest things that people do to each other seem to proceed in full view of, and are in fact plausibly *triggered* by, these others’ manifestations of their shared or common humanity” (Manne 149). Because accomplished women are considered political, economic, and social competitors with men, it follows that accomplished women threaten the privileged status of men in the gendered hierarchy (Manne 155). Thus, out of concern for his loss of power, man will target “threatening” women with such misogynistic forms of punishment as “ridiculing, humiliating, mocking, slurring, vilifying, demonizing, as well as sexualizing or, alternatively, *desexualizing*, silencing, shunning, shaming, blaming patronizing, condescending” and the like (Manne 68). As I argue in my second chapter, some men may also go as far as revising or restructuring a woman’s narrative, or using sexual and physical violence to achieve their ends. Those who generally endure the worst of this policing are women who do not provide, what Manne terms, societally prescribed “feminine-coded goods and services.” These include “attention, affection, admiration, sympathy, sex, and children...also mixed goods, such as safe haven, nurture, security, soothing, and comfort” (Manne 130). In addition to those women who refuse to provide these feminine-coded services, women who attempt to grasp “masculine-coded perks and privileges” are equally as likely to face some sort of hostile punishment. These masculine-coded privileges include “power, prestige, public recognition, rank, reputation, honor, ‘face,’ respect, money and other forms of wealth, hierarchal status, upward mobility, and the status conferred by having a high-ranking woman’s loyalty, love, devotion, etc.” (Manne 130). In the following pages, I hope to communicate to my reader how this understanding of misogyny, which relies on a gendered

economy of female giving and male taking, clarifies the tragic fates of women who fall victim to the libertine and beta-male's lust for power.

While sorting through the copious texts documenting major social and political shifts at the beginning of the eighteenth century, I found the works of Terry Eagleton³, Tiffany Potter⁴, Erin Mackie⁵, and Carol Houlihan Flynn⁶ to be particularly useful. Each of these scholars not only offers a detailed account of the rise of bourgeoisie power in England at the turn of the century, but centers this historical account on the effects of emerging bourgeoisie values on the libertine of the Restoration period. Eagleton's *The Rape of Clarissa* provides an in-depth account of the emergence of bourgeoisie values at the end of Charles II's rule and, consequently, the fall of the sociopolitical hegemony of England's aristocracy. As it gained cultural dominance following the dissolution of Charles II's reign in 1685, the bourgeoisie sought to oust the historically powerful aristocracy in order to spread its own supposedly morally superior values throughout fashionable society. Accordingly, the nascent bourgeoisie initiated the "feminization" of the public sphere – trading the brutishness of masculine values for the sentimentality and benevolence of feminine ones. This historical context emphasizes the cultural threat the Restoration libertine faced as his ideologies became increasingly outmoded by the end of the seventeenth century. Eagleton's work also highlights the ways in which the sexual politics of *Clarissa* are illustrated through the epistolary form, which is particularly useful for my discussion of the novel in the second chapter. Through the exploitation of letter-writing, the

³ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982).

⁴ Tiffany Potter, "'A Certain Sign That He Is One of Us': Clarissa's Other Libertines." In *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. (Vol. 11, No. 4: 403-20. 1999).

⁵ Erin Mackie, "Boys Will Be Boys: Masculinity, Criminality, and the Restoration Rake." In *The Eighteenth Century*. (Vol. 46, No. 2: 129-49. 2005).

⁶ Carol Houlihan Flynn, "A Lovelace in Every Corner: The Rake Figure in Richardson's Novels." In *Samuel Richardson: A Man of Letters*. (Princeton UP, 1982).

libertine seeks to take advantage of the female narrative and body – considered by Eagleton to be entwined.

It is against the historical background established by Eagleton that, in her article “‘A Certain Sign That He Is One of Us’: Clarissa’s Other Libertines,” Potter highlights the evolution of the libertine from the violent, ego-centered brute living under Charles II to the “good-natured” individualist of the Enlightenment period. The Restoration libertine, Potter asserts, often uses violence or force as means of gaining power and control over his female victims. The “good-natured,” Georgian libertine, on the other hand, maintains most of the core principles of Restoration Libertinism, excluding the use of cruelty or other behaviors that may interfere with the agency of another individual. Unlike the Restoration libertine, the Georgian libertine, though an adamant seeker of physical pleasure, carries out his pursuits with gentlemanly tact (Potter 407). This “good-natured” style of Libertinism, emerging from an emphasis on individual autonomy in the eighteenth century, challenges the barbarous characteristics of Restoration Libertinism, as popularized by the notorious Restoration rake and poet John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. The essence of Potter’s argument is that both the Restoration- and Georgian-style libertines claim philosophical superiority over people who subscribe to the common social dogma of their respective periods. Relatedly, Restoration- and Georgian-style libertines “revel in their triumph over the limitations of ordinary people” (Potter 419). Potter’s historical and literary analysis of the libertine figure aligns quite seamlessly with my examination of the beta-male movement. Likewise, the beta-male movement celebrates its “triumph” over “ordinary people” (otherwise known as “normies”) for having discovered a philosophical plane – known as “Red Pill” – that others have not yet reached.

Mackie builds on Potter's definition of the Restoration libertine by analyzing the effects his aristocratic status in the seventeenth century had on his ability to get away with a myriad of criminal activities, including "homicide, rape, murder, sodomy, assault, libel, vandalism, and so on" (Mackie 137). Mackie emphasizes that the Restoration libertine's enactment of violence was seldom labelled "criminality." Rather, such violence was often rebranded as simply "frolic" or "upper-class *debauchery*" (Mackie 137). This deliberate choice in wording both stems from and reinforces the sociopolitical privilege of the libertine during Charles II's reign. While, to use Mackie's examples, the criminality of the lower-class pirate or highwayman is worthy of legal punishment, the criminality of the Restoration libertine is often overlooked or, in some cases, considered alluring. Like Mackie, Carol Houlihan Flynn argues that the libertine's criminality is an assertion of his sociopolitical prestige. In her chapter "A Lovelace in Every Corner: The Rake Figure in Richardson's Novels," Flynn writes, "Disaffected, the rake sought power, but power on a personal level...on a 'higher' physical level...and on a more esoteric level" (Flynn 202). Thus, the libertine's "upper-class *debauchery*" becomes a mechanism of domination. Each act of criminality solidifies his "personal, physical, and esoteric" privilege.

Flynn then transitions to a discussion of Richardson's character Lovelace and the role performative masculinity plays in his attempt to deceive and seduce his beloved Clarissa. Through a number of villainous schemes, ranging from feigned illness to drug-induced rape, Lovelace generates an "invented world" for himself, as well as Clarissa, in order to maintain power over her and, consequently, the entire female sex. Flynn writes,

Without a moral imperative, Lovelace creates such a convoluted world of fantasy that he eventually loses himself in it. Once he manages to convince Clarissa of the authenticity of his invented world, he can never return her or himself to reality without exposing his

own lies and thereby destroying himself, the self that exists in that fictive world. (Flynn 209)

The only means by which Lovelace can ensnare Clarissa are through the construction of a false narrative. Without deception, Lovelace could neither conquer Clarissa's body nor achieve that sense of power derived from this sexual conquest. Perhaps most relevant to his connection to the beta-male community is Lovelace's unfulfilled desire for "public recognition of his greatness" (Flynn 233). Like Elliot Rodger, whose memoir and numerous YouTube videos call for recognition of his alleged mental superiority, Lovelace is constantly seeking validation for his contrivances, only to be reminded that "in the drawing room, he is only the rakish Bobby Lovelace" (Flynn 233). Thus, in order to reap that public recognition he strives for, Lovelace must make his fantastical methods of deception all the more fantastical – and, as a result, all the more dangerous. With the help of scholars like Eagleton, Mackie, Potter, and Flynn, there exists a bevy of academic resources available regarding the development of the libertine beginning in the Restoration period and continuing through the Enlightenment. I hope to have provided my reader with a relatively cohesive overview of some of their more informative works.

While an extensive amount of scholarly work has been done on the libertine, little has been done on the developing beta-male movement up to this point. Among popular news outlets, growing interest in the beta-male movement surfaced only after Minassian's van attack in 2018. Since this attack, however, public interest and concern seems to have lost its initial momentum. Discourse among academics has proven to be even less promising. Among the limited amount of scholarly work done on the beta-male movement, I find that of Angela Nagle and Debbie Ging to be the most informative. Both women do crucial work introducing topics such as online misogyny, involuntary celibacy, and Red Pill philosophy to academic spheres. In her article

article “Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere,” Ging examines the “manosphere” – the online antifeminist network that has “established complex connections with a myriad of interconnected organizations, blogs, forums, communities, and subcultures, resulting in a much more extreme and ostensibly amorphous set of discourses and ideological positions” (Ging 2). Ging attempts to give her audience a detailed understanding as to who contributes to the manosphere, how it exists on-and-offline, and how the movement defines its central philosophy, known as Red Pill philosophy. Her work also unveils some of the ways in which this complex network of antifeminist communities remains influential and durable. Above all, Ging makes clear that “the technological affordances of social media have radically increased the flow of antifeminist ideas and information across groups, platforms, and geographical boundaries” (Ging 7). One of the factors that contributes to the danger of this community is the rate at which it spreads antifeminist sentiment, as well as the geographical distance it surmounts due to its location online. Ging does an excellent job detailing the effects of internet culture on the maintenance of toxic masculinity. It seems that the violent sentiment of the Restoration libertine has not only endured through the centuries, but can now be spread among a broad network of antifeminist communities at an unprecedented rate.

In her article, “The New Man of 4chan,” Nagle documents a number of fatal incidents in which the sentiments expressed by the beta-male community moved from the digital realm – specifically from Reddit and 4chan discussion boards – to the physical world. She recounts the shooting perpetrated by beta-male Chris Harper-Mercer at his community college in Rosenberg, Oregon in 2015 (Nagle 64). Like Elliot Rodger, Harper-Mercer wrote a brief manifesto before his shooting spree. She also recalls the time beta-male David Michael Kalac strangled his intimate partner in 2017, uploading images of her body to 4chan (Nagle 67). Nagle discusses

Rodger as well, the very beta-male whose words introduce my paper (Nagle 67). Both Harper-Mercer and Rodger, Nagle notes, directly attributed their violent rhetoric, and eventual actions, to sexual rejection and frustration. She quotes Rodger in his chilling video uploaded to YouTube shortly before his attack on the women of the Alpha Phi sorority house: "...I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it..." ("Retribution"). As made evident by Rodger's threat, in addition to the content Nagle provides in her other two case studies, the motivation behind these three attacks seems to be a desire to avenge one's self for feeling betrayed, or otherwise unsatisfied, by a lack of female attention. More disturbingly, Nagle suggests, beta-males who perform these acts of violence are often martyred by the beta-male community online, envisioned as leaders in the beta "uprising" or the beta "rebellion" (Nagle 64). Nagle's work is particularly important because it invokes a sense of necessary urgency regarding the beta-male community and forewarns its potential uprising. Notably, as evidenced by the epigraph I have selected, the libertine, too, often acts out of revenge for feeling betrayed by the female sex.

Rationale for Texts

My analysis focuses on the libertine as a literary archetype. While I discuss the libertine as he is invoked in literature, it is essential to note that the libertines of such novels as Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela* or Frances Burney's *Evelina* were not written in a vacuum. Robert Lovelace, Mr. B., and Sir Clement Willoughby were all conceived within the social context of their respective eras. Each character is based on a style of Libertinism that dominated a particular period. This is especially true of *Clarissa's* Lovelace, whose manipulative and sexually violent style of Libertinism is reminiscent of that which flourished during the Restoration era. With the ultimate goal of possessing her body, Lovelace ensnares the young and

virtuous Clarissa Harlowe in a scheme that separates her from her family and places her under his protection. Having isolated her from her loved ones, Lovelace refuses to leave Clarissa's side, hinting false promises of marriage and familial reconciliation. His desire to get revenge on the Harlowe family for its resentment of him, as well as prove his masculine domination to the female sex, leads to Clarissa's rape, mental and physical deterioration, and eventual death.

Richardson's *Pamela* has been especially useful for my purposes because of the sexual politics involved in Mr. B. and Pamela's relationship. After the death of Mr. B.'s mother, the woman Pamela served and cared for, Mr. B. becomes Pamela's new master. Among his servants, Mr. B. treats Pamela with particular interest. It is quickly revealed that he lusts after her. His feigned interest in treating her as a friend rather than a servant is simply his means of attempting to seduce her. In reality, Mr. B. seeks to maintain power over Pamela. Their master-servant relationship, fraught with inequality, allows him to maintain this power. As her wealthy, white employer, Mr. B. already possesses more economic and social capital than the impoverished Pamela. Like Lovelace, Mr. B. uses his power and inventiveness to keep Pamela under his control. He isolates her from her family, hiding her location in a letter to her parents. He uses a combination of trickery and force to seduce her. Above all, he refuses to accept her rejection, accusing her instead of intentionally using her cunning to "make [him] more eager in pursuing [her]" (Richardson 230). For especially wicked libertines like Lovelace and Mr. B., mere sexual disinterest is no valid reason for denying men sex.

Burney's *Evelina* is an excellent resource for reading the libertine as a literary archetype because of the attention Burney pays to characterization. *Evelina* recounts a young ingénue's transition from her quiet, countryside home to the fashionable circles of London. As she navigates her way through the public assemblies of that bustling city, she meets a myriad of

characters starkly unlike anyone she had known in the country. Among these is Sir Clement Willoughby, the ardent libertine whose outward and persistent desire for Evelina fails to win over her admiration. The dichotomy between the socially inexperienced Evelina and the rakish Sir Willoughby exemplifies the quintessential libertine-ingénue relationship. Though not quite as dastardly as Lovelace or Mr. B., Sir Willoughby is no man respected women should be caught engaging with. As Sir Willoughby's attempts to seduce Evelina become more and more conniving, Evelina often finds herself unwillingly entwined in his trickery. Unlike Lovelace, however, Sir Willoughby fails to conquer the body of the woman he pines for.

Of the texts used for my discussion of the beta-male community, I relied most heavily on Elliot Rodger's *My Twisted World* and pick-up artist (PUA) Roosh Valizadeh's *Game*. *My Twisted World* was the document that sparked my interest in this topic. Having discovered Rodger's manifesto while concurrently reading *Clarissa*, I was struck by how strongly Rodger's desire for vengeance echoed that of Lovelace. For many who stumbled upon *My Twisted World* online, the manifesto is nothing more than something to sneer or raise eyebrows at. But I was frightened. I was frightened by Rodger's detailed plan to kill his roommates, the women of Alpha Phi, his younger brother, stepmother, and random people in the streets of Isla Vista. I was frightened by the fact that he named a specific date in which his shooting spree would occur and nobody took heed of his warning. Above all, however, I was frightened by the fact that this warning had come far before Rodger uploaded *My Twisted World* to the internet. I was reading it in *Clarissa*. I was reading of Lovelace's desire for vengeance on the female sex because his former lover had given her sexual attention to another. I was reading of the way he stalked Clarissa, of his plans for kidnapping and eventually raping her. Reading *My Twisted World* and *Clarissa* simultaneously made me realize precisely how urgent the issue of violent misogyny in

Western culture is. It also made me realize how blatant this issue is among members of the beta-male community like Rodger and his successors. Yet, somehow, this community has garnered little academic attention. *My Twisted World* is so important to this research because it is, arguably, a piece of literature with direct authorial intent. The resentment, desires, and plans of the beta-male community are explained in graphic detail in this single document and very few are using this text as a means of preventing similar acts of violent misogyny from occurring in the future.

Roosh's pick-up guide *Game*, banned from *Amazon* in 2018, provides insight as to what tactics members of the beta-male community use to seduce (or, more accurately, coerce) women. As Roosh himself puts it, *Game* is written for men who want to meet women "in an age where smartphones, feminism, and anti-masculinity propaganda have made connecting with the opposite sex harder than ever" (Roosh). Roosh claims to have spent several thousands of hours piecing together his pick-up guide "all while fending off defamatory attacks from mainstream feminists and fake news journalists who want to criminalize healthy masculinity" (Roosh). Roosh allegedly teaches men how to navigating the dating world, which has, much to their disadvantage, become populated with women who are "lesbians, morbidly obese, or green-haired man-haters" (Roosh 9). Aside from writing a number of pick-up guides, Roosh also hosts his own discussion board, *Roosh V Forum*, as well as a webpage dedicated to rants and observations regarding topics such as masculinity, feminism, and dating. Roosh is, like many other pick-up artists like him, the beta-male community's ringleader.

Chapter Summaries

My thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter, "Restoration Libertinism as a Preface to Red-Pill Philosophy," compares the ideologies of the

Restoration libertine and the beta-male. It tracks the development of both ideologies as responses to greater shifts in the sociopolitical values of each figure's time period – shifts that ultimately encourage female consciousness of and desire for individual autonomy. Beginning with the evolution of the Restoration libertine, I highlight his conception during Charles II's reign in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. With the turn of the century came the rise of the bourgeoisie class. This newly emerging class sought to temper the boorish tendencies of the aristocracy, emphasizing new, feminine values in opposition to those selfishly hedonistic customs under Charles II. The rise of the bourgeoisie, and its emphasis on feminine sensibility, threatened the hegemony of the Restoration libertine. His acts of hedonism and criminality became a means of backlash against bourgeoisie values during the Enlightenment period. I then shift into a discussion of the beta-male, beginning with a comparison of Red-Pill philosophy to some of the key elements of Libertinism. I examine Red-Pill philosophy within the context of contemporary feminist-centric movements – particularly digital-born campaigns such as #MeToo and #BelieveWomen. Like those libertines of the eighteenth century, members of the beta-male community enact certain forms of misogynistic violence as backlash against those cultural shifts that threaten their dominance. Both figures seek to maintain a strict, idealized conception of patriarchy in which their masculine superiority goes unquestioned. This conception cannot be actualized, however, without the foundation of those ideologies that maintain group cohesion.

The second chapter, “Performative Masculinity: ‘Gaming’ the Sexual Selection Process,” applies Richard Kaye's interpretation of Darwin's sexual selection theory to eighteenth- and twenty-first- century courtship processes. Specifically, I discuss the ways in which the Restoration libertine and beta-male respond to the loss of control over the sexual selection process. While my first chapter focuses more narrowly on the ideologies of the libertine and

beta-male, my second chapter examines the means by which these ideologies are put to practice. In order to restore that idealized conception of masculine superiority mentioned in the first chapter, the Restoration libertine and beta-male implement a number of misogynistic tactics to police those women who usurp control over the sexual selection process. These tactics range from effectively silencing the female narrative, to performing a “more attractive” style of masculinity in order to achieve sexual consummation through deceptive means. Through these means of seduction, both figures seek to uphold the patriarchal sexual expectations that have customarily allowed them access to sex on their own terms. In Western patriarchy, readily available sexual access is the vehicle to which male hegemony over women is maintained.

As I have stressed previously, and will stress again in coming pages, I hope that this thesis not only informs my readers regarding the endurance of misogynistic violence in Western patriarchy, but that it also generates a sense of urgency among scholarly and non-scholarly conversation circles. The beta-male community does not consist of merely a handful of male extremists. Thousands of men log onto these complex networks of discussion boards and forums every day for the sole purpose of propagating misogynistic rhetoric that is easily accessible to the general public. What this research has made me aware of is that this rhetoric has persisted for much longer than I previously understood. Those libertines of the Restoration period sought the same violent ends that members of the beta-male community continue fighting for on and offline in the present day. I invite my audience to deeply contemplate the institutional structures and individual failures that have allowed these similar patterns of misogynistic rhetoric and behavior to perpetuate over the course of centuries.

Chapter 1: Restoration Libertinism as a Preface to Red-Pill Philosophy

“I hated all those obnoxious, boisterous men who were able to enjoy pleasurable sex lives with beautiful girls, but I hated the girls even more, because they were the ones who *chose* those men instead of me. It was their choice. They are the ones who deprived me of love and sex.”

– Elliot Rodger, *My Twisted World*

The epigraph I selected to begin this chapter is merely one of many instances in Rodger’s memoir where he expresses searing disdain for couples he observes walking the streets of Santa Barbara. Disturbingly, Rodger makes clear that his hatred is more fiercely directed at women than men in these relationships. He justifies this hostility towards women by claiming that “they were the ones who *chose* those men instead of [him].” He later argues, as I will further discuss in coming paragraphs, that women should have their ability to choose romantic partners stripped from them. The resentment Rodger harbors against the women who chose to withhold from him their sexual attention stems from a sense of entitlement inherent to the beta-male community. This sense of entitlement is grounded in a long-standing history of male dominance over women in Western culture, and an expectation that this supremacy will be reinforced by female subservience consistently and enthusiastically. Rodger does not hate women altogether. Rodger hates women who do not choose him as a romantic partner.

However, as a result of increasing public support for the goals of contemporary, feminist-centric, sociopolitical movements, the future of male hegemony faces looming uncertainty. Perhaps most concerning to the beta-male, in this era of #MeToo, is the potential loss of those privileges which accompany his position as a member of the historically dominant sex. Like the Restoration libertine, who responds to threats against his hegemonic status in the eighteenth century through socially deviant behavior, the beta-male is arguably responding to feminist attacks on masculine dominance with a transgressive social code of his own: Red Pill

philosophy. In this chapter, I argue that fundamental aspects of Restoration libertinism construct the foundation for Red Pill philosophy, and that both of these ideologies serve as retaliation against increased recognition of female agency. Through their rejection of emerging, reformed notions of gender roles and performance, both the Restoration libertine and the beta-male attempt to reassert their dominant status as hegemonic and return to a period when this dominant status was both recognized and accepted. In order to fully understand this connection between philosophies, their respective characteristics must first be established.

Although there are a number of unique identities that might be defined by the term “libertine” – ranging anywhere from the ill-reputed “scoundrel” or “sadist” to the respected intellectual or “dilettante” – the single, unifying characteristic of this archetype is the libertine’s desire to transgress the social conventions of its era in the ultimate pursuit of individual freedom and sensual pleasure (Flynn 199). According to Potter, the libertine often follows a “Hobbesian view of humanity, by the privileging of the Natural over artificial limitations constructed by society, and by the anti-rationalism that challenged the assumption that moralism is dependent on reason and rationality, qualities that libertines were reluctant to ascribe to humanity” (Potter 405). In other words, as opposed to adhering to the “artificial” restrictions imposed by the social and legal institutions of his time period, the libertine calls on his own sovereign judgment as means of directing his actions. Among some of the flaws inherent to this “Hobbesian view of humanity” is the criminal extent to which it was taken.

During his glory days in the Restoration era, the libertine engaged in, what Erin Mackie entitles, “fashionable” criminality – that is, criminal activity such as that asserted by a common murderer or rapist, but enacted by a man of prestige and, therefore, condoned or otherwise written off as mere boyish “frolic” or “hijinks” (Mackie 130). The hub of this fashionable

criminality in the Restoration era existed in Charles II's royal court – notorious for its extravagant enactments of violent debauchery and extreme licentiousness. Through their engagement in fashionable criminality, Charles II and his courtiers establish the unpunished enactment of criminal behavior – including manslaughter, sexual assault, adultery, and vandalism – as a manifestation of aristocratic elitism and power. “With his every frolic,” Mackie asserts, “the rake sets in contest his prowess, his potency, and, by implication, the potency and authority of the elite order of masculinity on which his personal prestige ultimately depends. In extravagant fashion, then, the rake's masculinity asserts criminality as a status privilege” (Mackie 132). Importantly, the ability to engage in fashionable criminality unpunished was a status symbol of aristocratic men exclusively. It was a privilege enjoyed only by those who belonged to this specific intersection of gender and class identity. However, with the emergence of a new, competing style of masculinity during the transition between the Restoration and Georgian eras, the Restoration libertine found that his criminal projection of sovereignty – once encouraged by his aristocratic peers – faced increasing public disapproval.

This is not to say that libertinism dissolved altogether at the end of Charles II's reign; it simply took on a new guise, “remaining consistent in its core values, but mediated by the culture of sensibility with which it coexisted” (Potter 403-404). With the introduction of the Age of Enlightenment came an emphasis on the autonomy of the individual, in addition to the widespread recognition that each person is free to pursue a life of happiness, granted that that person does not hinder the ability of others to do the same (Potter 406). According to Terry Eagleton, this shift in sentiment can be attributed to the “deep-seated ‘feminization’ of values which are closely allied with the emergence of the bourgeoisie” (Eagleton 14). Recognizing the toxic masculinity encouraged by Charles II and his courtiers, the bourgeoisie “[unfurled] a

banner of humanitarian benevolence” as a countercultural attack against England’s boorish aristocracy (Eagleton 15). Widely-construed “feminine” values – such as an emphasis on “spiritual companionship within marriage,” “proliferating cults of ‘sentiment’ and ‘sensibility’,” and “a ‘moderation’ more traditionally associated with the mildness of women than with the aggression of men” – all challenged aristocratic security in a historically masculine public sphere during the shift into the Enlightenment period (Eagleton 14-15). The Restoration libertine found that the class privilege he once enjoyed had been made obsolete by the established bourgeoisie. Suddenly, it seemed, a new class dominated the moral customs of the public sphere.

The feminization of the public sphere “required from all ‘gentleman’ a degree of consideration, respect, decency, and restraint at odds with the assertion of those extravagant forms of status-linked privilege most jealously preserved and zealously performed by the libertine rake” (Mackie 133). The new, sentimental style of masculinity existed in tension with the philosophies of the traditional, audacious form of masculinity that thrived in the Restoration period. Those men who enjoyed the privilege of unpunished criminality under Charles II’s reign began facing challenges for their inability to adapt to the new civil code. In this transitional period, then, the Restoration libertine became more than a mere hedonist. He became an embodiment of sociopolitical retaliation – an “agent of a nostalgic modern masculine fantasy” that yearned for the unchecked debauchery that permeated Charles II’s court (Mackie 134). His criminality became inextricably “linked through nostalgic compensation to aristocratic ideals of peerless privilege and through competition to emerging ideals of the polite gentleman” (Mackie 132). Through his criminal behavior, the libertine endeavored to restore those “perks” his socioeconomic status afforded him under Charles II – the very same perks that the emerging bourgeoisie sought to undermine at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Thus, the

establishment of the bourgeoisie destabilized the hegemonic status of the aristocratic class.

Emphasis on feminine values had now threatened the hegemonic status of that rakish masculinity practiced by the aristocracy under Charles II.

From these competing sects of masculinity came a fundamental split in libertine philosophy. As noted in the previous paragraph, while the Restoration libertine did not disappear in the eighteenth century altogether, some of his brothers turned to a new style of libertinism: “These are the culturally empowered libertines of the Georgian period: attractive, passionate, and empowered by their status above the limitations of daily cultural exchange to do good or evil as they choose, but driven by a sense of ‘good nature’ to seek their own pleasure at their own expense” (Potter 404). Whereas the Restoration rake pursued pleasure at the expense of those around him, the Georgian libertine, behaving according to the new, bourgeoisie sentiment of the period, pursued pleasure at the expense of only himself. In an era characterized by the recognized autonomy of all, the Georgian libertine was still determined to transgress the social conventions of his time period in the name of ultimate pleasure, but he only did so under the condition that his actions do not harm the sovereignty of another. Those libertines who preferred the Restoration philosophy to the emerging Georgian style of rakishness continued with their criminal “hijinks.” In the Age of Sensibility, however, these “hijinks” served not only as means of asserting aristocratic prestige, but also as a method of protest against the “good-natured” form of masculinity that threatened the hegemony the Restoration libertine acquired under the rule of Charles II. “For while extravagant transgression and violence certainly can signify nothing more complex than brute masculine dominance,” Mackie asserts, “in this period they become heavily inflected through aristocratic ideology’s lost dreams of heroic glory” (Mackie 134).

Ironically, the emerging emphasis placed on individual autonomy during the Enlightenment seems to have maintained the Restoration libertine's egotism during this era. It is crucial to note that despite the Enlightenment's emphasis on individual sovereignty for all human beings, those who truly had access to this sovereignty still remained among the elite few. The Restoration libertine often used this emphasis on individualism to fulfill his selfish, libidinal desires. It appears to be the case that the Restoration libertine veils his twisted sexual fantasies under the guise of moralism – particularly, that all individuals have the right to sovereign determination. As Christopher Lasch contends in the following example, the problematic nature of individualism, as it is exploited by the Restoration libertine, is that the autonomy of one person typically inhibits the autonomy of another. Consider, for example, the notorious libertine and self-proclaimed moralist the Marquis de Sade. In writing his four libertine novels – *120 Days of Sodom*, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, *Justine*, and *Juliette* –

Sade imagined a sexual utopia in which everyone has the right to everyone else, where human beings, reduced to their sexual organs, become absolutely anonymous and interchangeable...In the resulting state of organized anarchy, as Sade was the first to realize, pleasure becomes life's only business – pleasure, however, that is indistinguishable from rape, murder, unbridled aggression. In a society that has reduced reason to mere calculation, reason can impose no limits on the pursuit of pleasure – on the immediate gratification of every desire no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral. (Lasch 69)

The “sexual utopia” that materialized in Sade's work was considered by many the logical conclusion of an “enlightened” society's obsession with individualism. As Western society moved away from the Age of Reason, it became hyper-focused on material pleasure. Sade's

sexual fantasies exemplify a future in which all human beings, stripped of their logical capacities, are reduced to an existence in which the fulfillment of these sensual desires takes precedent. Individualism becomes not merely the right to govern oneself, but the perpetual search for sensual gratification “no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral” (Lasch 69). The irony in this, as I will further detail in the following paragraph, is that this chase for gratification is often pursued at the expense of the sovereignty of others. Contradicting the Enlightenment’s emphasis on the autonomy of *all* individuals, the Restoration libertine’s quest for individual freedom often results in the loss of another person’s actualization of it.

Sade himself was imprisoned and tried on several occasions for engaging in deeply problematic sexual behavior. According to John Phillips, on Easter Sunday in 1768, Sade convinced a middle-aged beggar named Rose Keller to work as a maid in his small country house in Arcueil, France. Once they arrived, however, Sade “locked the woman up, ordered her to strip and whipped her, pouring what felt to her like molten wax into her wounds” (Phillips 8). This violent encounter between Sade and Keller reveals the grossly unequal gender politics underlying the Enlightenment’s idealized portrayal of individual autonomy. Herein lies the irony regarding the bourgeoisie’s emphasis on feminine discourse, behavioral moderation, and individual agency. While these emerging social codes were intended to police the exploitative nature of the Restoration libertine’s violent sexual endeavors, they seemed only to bolster his criminal debauchery. In spite of all the bourgeoisie’s touting of individual agency, it appears only those who could take full advantage of this agency were wealthy men.

This is not to say that women did not benefit from bourgeoisie emphasis on individualism. Undoubtedly, the Enlightenment awoke in the collective (white) female consciousness a recognition that women, too, deserved the right to govern themselves. This

desire for female sovereignty likely began among the Parisian salons of the 1760s. Indeed, as Dena Goodman asserts, the “initial and primary purpose behind salons was to satisfy the self-determined educational needs of the women who started them” (Goodman 333). It was within the salons of the Enlightenment that self-educated women – those salonnières – could not only engage in, but lead literary, philosophical, and cultural discourse among other women and men, thereby shedding their private, domestic affairs in order to engage in public ones. Despite the relative egalitarian atmosphere of the Enlightenment salons, the identification of women with the public sphere was not accepted by all male philosophes. Among these were Rousseau, who viewed female entry into the public sphere as “the basis of corruption in society,” arguing that in these salons, “men try to please women, and in doing so they become womanish, effeminate” (Goodman 336). Salonnières, on the other hand, in taking on a customarily masculine role, undermine their prescribed domestic duties. As Madelyn Gutwirth claims in her book *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolution Era*,

At the extremes of this discourse, women, permanent representatives of nature within culture, safeguard the warmth and coherence of men’s private sexual and procreative existences and must be preserved from contamination by culture’s artifices: they are now failing in their natural task, ruining culture itself, and must be restored to the purity of their conjugal and maternal functions. (Gutwirth 116)

In rejecting their cultural roles as the guards of “men’s private sexual and procreative existences,” women of the Parisian salons threaten the very gender scripts on which Western patriarchal society is based. They are no longer acting in regard to the “centrality of men” (Goodman 332) – that is, their actions are not dictated by their subservience to men’s needs and desires. Rather, the salonnières of the Enlightenment act according to their own intellectual

curiosities – directed not by gendered expectations, but by personal interest. It is through this self-direction that bourgeoisie women experience the awakening of a desire for individual sovereignty – particularly, sovereignty that is wholly separate from male control.

This awakening is particularly troubling for the libertine, whose reliance on those masculine-coded perks under Charles II's reign – including the ability to engage in nonconsensual sexual encounters without obtaining criminal status – is threatened by the emergence of female agency. The libertine, then, out of an act of resistance to developing female autonomy, uses his “criminal hijinks” as means of reinforcing patriarchal standards. In doing so, he resurrects those “lost dreams of heroic glory” inherent to the very period he wishes to return to. Women may begin to recognize their desire for agency in the eighteenth century, but the Restoration libertine will do all he can to prevent the actualization of this desire. In this way, the Restoration libertine acts out of backlash towards emerging female autonomy.

This awakening of female desire for autonomy is portrayed most prominently in the beginning of Richardson's *Clarissa*, when Clarissa is confined and abused by her family for refusing to marry Roger Solmes – the laughably pompous suitor they have arranged for her. Clarissa is acutely aware that accepting Solmes as her husband means that she is succumbing to patriarchy. In a letter to her Uncle Harlowe, she writes:

Marriage is a very solemn engagement, enough to make a young creature's heart ache...to give up her very name, as a mark of her becoming his absolute and dependent property: to be obliged to prefer this strange man to father, mother – to everybody: and his humours to all her own – Or to contend, perhaps, in breach of a vowed duty for every innocent instance of free will: to go no-whither: to make acquaintance: to give up

acquaintance – to renounce even the strictest friendships perhaps; all at his pleasure, whether she think it reasonable to do so or not. (Richardson 149)

In writing these words, Clarissa shows that she is critical of the patriarchal structures inherent to marriage – especially marriage as it is arranged by one’s parents. The gendered language in her letter is not unintentional: the bride suffers for her husband “at *his* pleasure, whether *she* think it reasonable to do so or not.” Although Clarissa laments her fate, as well as the fate of many young brides during the eighteenth century, she is not yet aware that she has the agency to pursue a partner outside of her parents’ choosing. At this point in the novel, she is simply lamenting the few options patriarchy allots for her. In fact, she resolves to stay entirely inactive – to pursue no option and remain single. Her sentiment shifts when her confidante Anna Howe awakens her desire for agency, writing of Clarissa’s mother, “She who has, for so many years, and with such absolute resignation, borne what she has borne, to the sacrifice of her own will, may think it an easier task, than another person can imagine it, for her daughter to give up *her’s*” (Richardson 212). It is in this moment that Clarissa is made aware of the generational difference between the way she and her mother react to marriage as a patriarchal structure. Clarissa’s mother, as Anna points out, has given up her free will entirely for the sake of pleasing Clarissa’s father. Mrs. Harlowe resigned to marriage without a word of complaint. Clarissa, on the other hand, is not only becoming aware of her disapproval of marital customs, but also that this disapproval should be taken seriously by her family.

Wendy Moore details this shift in sentiment regarding marriage in her article “Love and Marriage in 18th-Century Britain.” Moore explains that in the early half of the eighteenth century, “the vast majority of marriages among aristocratic, wealthy, and middle-class families were arranged by parents with prospective bride and bridegroom having little or no say”

(Moore). These arranged marriages were generally “designed to cement powerful alliances and exchange or acquire land or property” among family patriarchs (Moore). Anna is especially critical of this marital custom. Regarding Mr. Harlowe’s choice of the wealthy Roger Solmes for Clarissa’s suitor, Anna writes, “Is true happiness any part of your [Clarissa’s] family-view? – So far from it, that none of your family but yourself could be happy were they not rich” (Richardson 68). Clarissa’s father seeks a wealthy husband for Clarissa because this husband would bring the Harlowe family status and wealth. However, by mid-century, a major shift in marital sentiment was well underway. In part due to “the emphasis on self-expression, free will, and personal feelings in early eighteenth-century novels,” marriage based on romantic love gradually supplanted the traditional, financially arranged marriage. Herein lies the tension between Mrs. Harlowe and Clarissa. Mrs. Harlowe belongs to an era that emphasizes marriage as an investment carried out between two families. Clarissa belongs to an era that slowly begins to deny parental control over the marital process in order to grant young brides the freedom to select their suitors. Unlike her mother, Clarissa exists in a transitional period between absolute resignation to patriarchy and active resistance to it. Anna’s letter represents a period in time in which primarily white, wealthy women are becoming conscious of the fact that they, too, deserve the right to govern themselves.

Undoubtedly, Clarissa’s brother James is aware of Clarissa’s newfound desire for agency. As a man whose dominances lies in the maintenance of patriarchy, James steps into the role of policing Clarissa’s potential transition from desiring agency to acting on that agency. He writes to her, “The liberty of *refusing* [Solmes], pretty miss, is denied you, because we are all sensible that the liberty of *choosing* to everyone’s dislike must follow” (Richardson 223). James is denying Clarissa her ability to make decisions and, thus, exert her autonomous will.

Interestingly, James does seem to have a point. His response to Clarissa foreshadows her eventual fate – specifically, that when she finally transitions from desiring agency to exerting it, she is punished severely for actively and deliberately making a decision. Clarissa’s tragic fate is sealed when she writes, “You will soon hear...that your Clarissa Harlowe is gone off with a man!” (Richardson 370). Clarissa has actively rejected Solmes and run off with the libertine Robert Lovelace. What she never could have anticipated, however, is that in rejecting patriarchy she will be consequently punished by it. The role of punisher has simply shifted from James and Solmes to Lovelace. Soon after fleeing with Lovelace, Clarissa contemplates whether or not she has “only escaped from one confinement to another” (Richardson 393).

This is precisely the impossible predicament of women in the eighteenth century (And, as will be made clear in coming paragraphs, the exact future the beta-male community seeks to restore for Western patriarchy). Ironically, in the Age of Enlightenment, women may only get as far as becoming conscious of their agency. The moment they act on that agency and reject the patriarchal restrictions imposed upon on them, however, they are punished by the male enforcers of those restrictions. In Clarissa’s case, this enforcer quickly becomes Lovelace. The libertine, now that he has Clarissa “in a state of obligation” (Richardson 398) to him, robs her of that agency she developed in the first third of the novel. He controls where she lives (setting her up in a brothel that he sneakily furnishes as a simple boarding house), whether or not she will marry, and from whom she receives letters (often intercepting the letters she receives from Anna, another woman Lovelace perceives as a threat to male dominance). At the climax of the novel, Lovelace controls the sexual access he has to Clarissa’s body by drugging and raping her. Clarissa’s repeated punishment throughout the novel ties back to the very moment she actively rejects patriarchy. In relying on free will to dictate her actions, Clarissa winds up in an abusive

affair with a man whose main endeavor is to keep her under his control. *Clarissa* is an example of Restoration Libertinism in action: Unruly women are a threat to the status- and gender-linked privileges enjoyed by aristocratic men. To maintain the patriarchal structures that secure male hegemony, active female agency must be restricted. If this agency cannot be restricted, it must be punished.

Those parallels that can be drawn between the Restoration libertine and the beta-male begin with important similarities in their respective philosophies. Like the libertine, the beta-male's behavior is dictated by an ultimate desire to transgress the social conventions of his era. While the libertine deviates from the norms of his time period more broadly – meaning, he wholly rejects dominant sexual, social, political, intellectual, and behavioral customs altogether – the beta-male's philosophy, otherwise known as Red Pill philosophy, has a much more particular focus:

Central to the politics of the manosphere is the concept of the Red Pill, an analogy which derives from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, in which Neo is given the choice of taking one of the two pills. Taking the blue pill means switching off and living a life of delusion; taking the red pill means becoming enlightened to life's ugly truths. The Red Pill philosophy purports to awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing, and is the key concept that unites all of these [subgroups of beta-male] communities. (Ging 3)

In other words, to swallow the red pill is to see beyond those institutions – feminist-centric media outlets, non-governmental organizations, and affirmative action programs – that advocate the advancement of feminist ideals. Although, like the libertine, there exist a number of subgroups that fall under the larger category of “beta-male,” a strict adherence to Red Pill philosophy unifies the community as a whole. Indeed, one can recognize the importance of Red

Pill philosophy within the community by a simple perusal of popular beta-male discussion boards; websites such as */r/TheRedPill*, *Red Pill Philosophy*, *The Red Pill Room*, and *Red Pill Talk* are just a few examples among numerous.

The propagation of Red Pill philosophy in the contemporary, Western sociopolitical environment – like the maintenance of Restoration-style libertinism in the eighteenth century – stems from a reactionary impulse to secure the hegemonic status of the agent. According to Ging, recent changes in the United States’ social, political, and economic climate – such as increasing numbers of women entering the workforce and attaining “white collar” jobs, in addition to “a growing recognition of rights of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender people, and people of color” – challenge the durability of the beta-male’s privileged status as a middle-to-upper class, white, cis-gendered man (Ging 15). Before his own eyes, the beta-male is watching a system that has traditionally placed him on top of the gendered hierarchy dismantle and restructure. Consequently, like the libertine, the beta-male also serves as an “agent of a nostalgic modern masculine fantasy” – a fantasy which returns to the good ol’ days when male sociopolitical and socioeconomic dominance over women remained untouched by feminist critiques. As succinctly theorized by Manne, the beta-male

may experience genuine shock and distress as a result of your [a woman] violating a norm, or refusing to play your assigned part. He may have long been accustomed to expect the compliance or performance of someone in your position. You yourself may have met his expectations dutifully in the past. So when you cease to, he may well be resentful. He reacts as if you are in the wrong because, from his perspective, you *are* in the wrong. You are miss-stepping, or over-stepping, or deviating, or wrongdoing him. (Manne xix).

The “miss-stepping” Manne refers to indicates those instances in which an individual behaves in such a way that subverts traditional mechanisms of patriarchal control – thus, preventing the actualization of the beta-male’s fantastical return to a system that empowered him. Just as the Restoration libertine’s debauchery and licentiousness serve as means of retaliation against a new civil code that threatens his hegemonic status, the beta-male’s adherence to Red Pill philosophy – in addition to the violence he enacts as a devotee to this philosophy – serve as means of retaliation against emerging institutions that challenge his masculine power. In fact, terms such as “beta uprising” and “beta rebellion” are frequently tossed around on popular beta-male discussion boards, indicating that long-anticipated day when the beta-male community will rise up and enact its vengeance “against attractive women, macho jocks, and other ‘normies’ with majority tastes and attitudes” (Nagle 66). This vengeful attitude is a particularly important connection between the libertine and the beta-male, as it exposes an essential catalyst for their resentful behavior: widespread recognition of developing female agency.

Like the Restoration libertine, the beta-male reacts out of resistance to the feminization of the public sphere and the increased recognition of female autonomy that results from this feminization. Just as James Harlowe and Robert Lovelace seek to prevent the actualization of Clarissa’s desire for autonomy, the beta-male seeks to thwart the advancement of those feminist ideals that secure this autonomy. In addition to those contemporary cultural shifts alluded to previously, including growing numbers of women attaining administrative job positions and widespread public recognition of the rights of minoritized groups, there have also been laws established discouraging sex discrimination, as well as policy changes on a systemic level – including the implementation of affirmative action programs (Manne xiv). Among these progressive changes in the legal and cultural status of women in the United States includes

greater emphasis on a meaningful female voice in the public sphere. Much of this emphasis can be attributed to public, online feminist activism – including movements such as #MeToo and #BelieveWomen. Of course, it is precisely the use of this meaningful female voice that serves as the ultimate trigger for beta-male backlash. Suddenly, it seems, the often white-passing, middle-to-upper class man can no longer take those masculine-coded perks he has historically been entitled to – among these being female sexual attention.

Consider the following discussion post written on *Roosh V Forum* lamenting the effects #MeToo has had on beta-male sexual fulfillment: “I swear when this continues, then even a polite invitation to a dinner will be called a #metoo harassment – if the invitation does not come from Mr. Chad” (Simeon_Strangelight). Notice the implicit connection this forum member draws between the #MeToo movement and female sexual agency. Not only does he express frustration with #MeToo for monitoring his potential harassment toward women, but he also suggests his disapproval of female agency by lamenting women’s tendencies to select men (“Mr. Chad”) other than him for romantic partners. A “Chad,” in beta-male terms (sometimes referred to interchangeably as an “alpha”), is the kind of man that supposedly all women sexually desire. As Angela Nagle explains, “Whereas alphas tend to be macho, sporty, and mainstream in their tastes, betas see themselves as less dominant males, withdrawn, obsessional, and curatorial in their cultural habits” (Nagle 64). In other words, alphas/Chads generally display characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, whereas betas typically lack these dominant attributes. For this reason, members of the beta-male community often accuse women of selecting “macho” alphas for sexual partners over “less dominant” (though, in their minds, equally deserving) betas. Thus, the beta-male’s aggression toward feminism, and his consequential transgression of its values, is a result of the autonomy this movement provides women in terms of selecting a romantic partner.

This resistance of female autonomy by the beta-male community is most clearly exemplified in the epilogue of Rodger's memoir:

The ultimate evil behind sexuality is the human female. They are the main instigators of sex. They control which men get it and which men don't...Because of this, the men who get to experience the pleasures of sex and the privilege of breeding are the men who women are *sexually* attracted to... the stupid, degenerate, obnoxious men.⁷

Women should not have the right to choose who to mate and breed with. That decision should be made for them by rational men of intelligence. If women continue to have rights, they will only hinder the advancement of the human race by breeding with degenerate men and creating stupid, degenerate offspring...Women have more power in human society than they rightfully deserve, all because of sex. (Rodger 136)

In these paragraphs, Rodger highlights the notion that female sexual power exists at tension with the expectations of the beta-male community – namely, that women are expected to readily provide men with sexual attention when that attention is requested from them. According to Rodger, women have historically harbored control over whether or not a sexual encounter will occur. Because of this circumstance, he alleges, members of the beta-male community, such as himself, have been deprived of the sexual attention they have customarily perceived as theirs.

This is largely a result of female sexual preference; women would rather go for a “Chad” or an

⁷ Rodger's claim that women are the “main instigators of sex,” and so choose who does and does not have access to this sex, brings to mind Jean-Jacques Rousseau's discussion of the differences between the sexes in *Emile, or On Education*. In “Book V,” when Rousseau shifts from outlining male education to outlining female education, he writes, “For nature has endowed woman with a power of stimulating man's passions in excess of man's power of satisfying those passions, and has thus made him dependent on her goodwill, and compelled him in his turn to endeavour to please her, so that she may be willing to yield to his superior strength” (Rousseau). According to Rousseau, man depends on woman to determine when sex will happen. For this reason, he must constantly stay “on her good side” if he is to be granted sexual access. This process, outlined by Rousseau, is what Rodger laments in the epilogue of his memoir.

“alpha” as opposed to settling for a beta-male. He then criticizes female autonomous choice – and, by implication, those institutions that enable this right to choose – and advocates for the replacement of a woman’s right to choose with the will of “rational men of intelligence.” This line of thinking, outlined in *My Twisted World*, is what subsequently causes members of the beta-male community to swallow the red pill. If those institutions that encourage female agency are not dismantled, the beta-male community will never achieve its fantasy of ultimate masculine control.

Rodger is not the only member of the beta-male community to demand women be stripped of their right to choose. Roosh published an article in 2015 entitled “Women Must Have Their Behavior and Decisions Controlled By Men” on his personal website. Feigning desire to protect women from the vices of a so-called destructive world, Roosh writes, “Men, on average, make better decisions than women. If you take this to be true...why is a woman allowed to make decisions at all without first getting approval from a man who is more rational and levelheaded than she is?” (Valizadeh). Rodgers’ declaration that female decisions be controlled by “rational men of intelligence” is startlingly echoed by Roosh’s rhetorical question. To “[protect] women from their obviously deficient decision making,” Roosh proposes two options: First, designate a male guardian – such as her father – to approve all decisions based on “diet, education, boyfriends, travel, friends, entertainment, exercise regime, marriage, and appearance” (Valizadeh). Roosh emphasizes that if a woman were to disobey her appointed guardian, “an escalating series of punishments would be served to her” (Valizadeh) – an assertion that comprises the central theme of the following chapter. Roosh’s first proposition eerily echoes Clarissa’s initial conflict. It is her father who demands she marry Solmes and, consequently, who confines her to her room when she disobeys.

The second proposition Roosh suggests is the implementation of “rigid cultural rules and sex-specific laws” (Roosh V). This proposition is especially significant because it makes explicit the beta-male community’s direct attack on feminist-centric advancements in legal and cultural reform. Again, these legal and cultural advancements must be prohibited in order to achieve an idealized future of male dominance. The article was received well by Roosh’s expansive mass of followers. One of these followers, under the alias of Angry Young Man, commented, “Equality...sounds cute. Does it work? Are we truly equal now that men are at the brunt of every bad joke, walked on by our corrupt women? This article is so spot on and describes the true role for women- BEHIND the men” (Angry Young Man). This user makes explicit what much of the beta-male community desires: Dismantle those feminist-centric systems that promote gender equality and female agency. If these systems are not dismantled, women will use their agency to gain sociopolitical status over men. Increased female autonomy will only lower men to “the brunt of every bad joke,” “walked on” by “corrupt women.”

When a woman expresses her ability to choose, both the Restoration libertine and beta-male may find a way to humiliate her for exerting this right. This humiliation acts as retaliation against women who are “betraying a sense of *who owns what*, socially, and who is entitled to whose person – not only their bodies but also their *minds*, in their capacity for choice, volition, and agency” (Manne 108). Developing female agency in the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries reverses the traditional understanding of who is entitled to what – including “choice, volition, and agency.” To put Manne’s words more plainly, a long history of male dominance in Western culture has enforced the notion that when women make choices, those choices should prioritize men’s interests above their own. In their nostalgic fantasies of masculinity, both the Restoration libertine and the beta-male feel that they are owed this prioritization. When these

fantasies are challenged by shifting social norms, both figures resort to humiliation as punishment for women who dare make decisions outside the interests of their male counterparts. In doing so, the libertine and beta-male “take back” that agency that traditionally belonged to them. The use of humiliation as backlash is presented rather early in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, when Evelina, still learning the rules of the ballroom and disinterested in dancing with a rake, rejects Sir Clement Willoughby’s dance by claiming she is already engaged. Willoughby, suspecting Evelina’s lie, “looked at [her] as if incredulous; and, instead of being satisfied with [her] answer, and leaving [her]...walked at [her] side and...asked [her] a thousand questions concerning *the partner to whom [she] was engaged*” (Burney 42). In an attempt to catch her in her own lie, Willoughby asks Evelina where her partner is, if he can go and find him, and, eventually, if said partner “is a partner of [her] own *creating?*” (Burney 43). Rather than merely accepting Evelina’s response that she is already engaged, he remains at her side so that she will appear foolish when her alleged partner does not appear. He will not accept refusal purely on the basis of female disinterest. In patriarchal London, Willoughby is owed a dance by Evelina. In rejecting her ability to refuse, Willoughby rejects the emerging values that encourage female autonomy. He is forcing Evelina to act within the boundaries of his nostalgic, masculine fantasy.

A similar method is taught by Roosh in his pick-up guide *Game*. In his chapter on transitioning from flirtation to sex, Roosh provides detailed instructions as to how to decipher whether or not a woman is interested in sex and how a man can initiate the encounter. Some women, he warns his readers, may claim they are menstruating when a man tries to initiate sex. “Many girls are lying when they say they’re on their period,” Roosh claims, “so I act skeptical and ask to see the evidence. If she’s unable to prove it by showing you the tampon string hanging out of her pussy, she may be lying” (Valizadeh 289). Roosh does not consider that a woman

might actually be on her period, nor does he consider her disinterest a valid reason not to have sex. Like Willoughby, Roosh wants to catch women in their lies – to make them feel foolish for using their agency “incorrectly,” i.e. in a way that does not prioritize his sexual desires. Although asking a woman to show him the “tampon string hanging out of her pussy” is a much more vulgar method of humiliation than merely following her around and bombarding her with questions, the sentiment remains the same: Female agency must be undermined in order to maintain male hegemony.

By contextualizing the evolution of Restoration Libertinism and Red Pill Philosophy in the Enlightenment era and contemporary period respectively, we are able to recognize the development of these philosophies as backlash to broader shifts in sociopolitical values – specifically, shifts in values that grant women greater autonomy in the public sphere. This realization of female autonomy exists in tension with the Restoration libertine and beta-male’s actualization of an idealized masculine “fantasy.” While the Restoration libertine finds that his style of cruel, ego-centric masculinity is becoming increasingly obsolete by the turn of the century, the beta-male, too, finds that the brand of masculinity he wishes to achieve is constantly under fire by public acknowledgment of feminist-centric interests. Thus, both the Restoration libertine and beta-male use their respective philosophies as a tool to defend themselves against this assault on their respective styles of masculinity. The following chapter will apply Richard Kaye’s interpretation of Darwin’s sexual selection theory to eighteenth and twenty-first century courtship rituals. I plan to discuss the ways in which both the Restoration libertine and beta-male use methods of manipulation and violence to regain the power they lost as a result of increased public realization of female agency. While the brief discussion of humiliation at the end of this

chapter provides a glimpse of these methods, the following chapter discusses the libertine and beta-male's race to sexual consummation as means of reaffirming their masculine dominance.

Chapter 2: Performative Masculinity: “Gaming” the Sexual Selection Process

“O the unparallel’d Wickedness, and Stratagems, and Devices of those who call themselves Gentlemen...”

– Pamela, *Pamela*

“Women must be punished for their crimes of rejecting such a magnificent gentleman as myself.”

– Elliot Rodger, *My Twisted World*

In the previous chapter, I discuss the ways in which Restoration libertine ideology and Red Pill philosophy are similar in that they share central values – specifically, the transgression of common social and moral codes – while simultaneously serving as reactions to widespread sociopolitical movements that grant women more autonomy. The continuation of Restoration libertinism into the eighteenth century, I would argue, becomes a defensive response to the interrogation of a traditionally masculine public sphere by new feminized, bourgeoisie values. These values, which challenged the aristocratic privilege of the Restoration period, provided women with a new power that existed in tension with the traditional sovereignty of masculine nobility. Similarly, the evolution of Red Pill philosophy in the twenty-first century can be read as a reaction to the increased acknowledgment of the sociopolitical rights of women over the recent decade. This acknowledgement is best exemplified by the #MeToo movement, greater emphasis on affirmative action programs in the workplace and academic institutions, and the implementation of legislation targeting sex discrimination.

In this chapter, I use Richard Kaye’s application of Darwin’s sexual selection theory to Victorian and Edwardian literature for my own analysis of eighteenth-century literature. While Kaye focuses specifically on the effect Darwin’s theory had on the birth of the Victorian dandy, I will narrow my focus on the reversion of gender power during the sexual selection process, as this reversion occurs in the eighteenth century and continues through the twenty-first. I discuss

the ways in which female control over this process evokes a sense of anxiety regarding the loss of masculine dominance within the Restoration libertine and beta-male. Specifically, I aim to discuss some of the sexual and sociopolitical implications of Darwin's sexual selection theory and how these implications are manifested in pre-Victorian canonized literature, as well as within the common discourse of the beta-male community. Although Darwin grounds his theory in the male species' desire for sexual consummation, I suggest that the libertine and beta-male seek something beyond mere sexual satisfaction. Ultimately, I argue that the libertine and beta-male use sexual consummation as a tool for gratifying a personal desire for power over the female sex. The means of achieving sexual consummation – and, through this achievement, the affirmation of power – are enacted in a number of strategic (and problematic) ways. For figures like Richardson's libertine heroes – Robert Lovelace and Mr. B. – these means may include letter-writing or masquerading as someone else. For the beta-male, these means generally include a specific set of guidelines intended to attract women, more broadly known among the community as “game.” Both figures, however, have also been known to use coercion, physical force, and rape to achieve consummation. No matter the means, the goal remains the same: Gain control over a woman's body and, thus, gain control over her entire sex.

While Darwin focuses on “narratives of courtship” among non-human species in his seminal work *The Descent of Man*, Kaye points out the ways in which these narratives mirror courtship rituals not unlike those practiced among Victorian heterosexual couples. According to Kaye's interpretation, Darwin's theory of sexual selection “[posits] narratives of courtship in which females [are] the ultimate decision makers and males [compete] for female approval in order for procreation to occur” (Kaye 86). In other words, courtship among men and women, like courtship among non-human species, is primarily controlled by female desire for a particular

mate. Several men may compete for her attention, but she ultimately decides which of these men will be her suitor and, consequently, be awarded the opportunity to reproduce. This concept is particularly troubling for the libertine (and, as will be discussed later, the beta-male), because, as Kaye asserts, “Darwin had not merely emphasized the role of female choice; he had also suggested that in the heightened sexual contest of courtship, female judgment would determine the fates of particular men” (Kaye 96). While my previous chapter simply asserts that the libertine and beta-male resent female agency, the goal of this chapter is to use Kaye’s interpretation of Darwin’s sexual selection theory to explain *why*. As the previous quote suggests, female choice in the sexual selection process dictates the reproductive fate of potential male suitors. However, as I will argue in coming paragraphs, it is not merely reproductive privileges that the Restoration libertine and beta-male fear losing; it is the achievement of masculine power attained through sexual consummation.

In his chapter “The Flirtation of Species: Darwinian Sexual Selection and Victorian Narrative,” Kaye takes Darwin’s theory a step further by suggesting that not only does the woman determine who has sex and who doesn’t, but she also determines whether or not her selected mate has sex at all. Highlighting Darwin’s emphasis on male sexual drive and female coyness during courtship rituals, Kaye conjures images of the female flirtatiously rescinding her sexual interest from the sexually aggressive male as means of protracting courtship. In Kaye’s words,

...Darwin had highlighted male sexual drive, even noting at one point that the female is ‘less eager than the male . . . she is coy, and may often be seen endeavoring to escape from the male.’ Nonetheless, even this emphasis on female ‘coyness’ and aggressive male behavior raised disturbing possibilities. By refusing to allow for feminine

motivation to participate in sexual selection, Darwin hinted at narratives of never consummated coquetry that females could engineer. (Kaye 86)

This possibility of a never consummated courtship disrupts traditional narratives of heterosexual courtship in which a woman meets her potential suitor (or, more likely, she is paired with a suitor selected for her by her parents), is married to said suitor, and quickly conceives children in hopes of producing an heir to the household fortune. Suddenly, it seemed the negotiation of marriage customarily carried out by the male suitor and the patriarch of his intended mate's family had been replaced by female control over the courtship process. What's worse for the male – this courtship process does not even guarantee eventual sexual gratification. “The *Descent of Man* conceived of female behavior as fundamentally coquettish,” Kaye asserts, “perpetually delaying a procedure that the male, single-mindedly fixed on one erotic plot, speeds to a conclusion” (Kaye 97).

Such “perpetual delaying” of sexual consummation is especially unsettling for the Restoration libertine, whose perceived sexual prowess – and, in tandem, masculine power – relies on his ability to sleep easily with women. If the libertine loses control over the courtship process, he risks losing the very thing that secures his sense of masculinity: sex. As Kaye suggests, “...through the potential for female misbehavior in deciding to prolong courtship or else not to choose a mate at all...men and women might suspend or else altogether resist their evidently preordained roles in sexual courtship” (Kaye 91). In resisting her traditional role in sexual courtship, the female becomes unknowable and, consequently, impenetrable – both mentally and physically. Thus, the libertine must, by one tactic or another, accelerate courtship in order to achieve sexual consummation and make the woman knowable again. As Carol Flynn puts it, the libertine “thinks that if he can ‘know’ a woman physically, he will know her nature”

(Flynn 213). In knowing her nature, he can exert control over her. The libertine's attempt at conquering the female body, then, becomes a sort of cycle. Anxious that his sexual object may be intentionally withholding sexual or romantic attention during courtship, the libertine must implement methods of deception to "beat her at her own game." Among these methods includes the manipulation of her personal narrative. This authentic female narrative – due to the prominence of the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century – is often told through her letter-writing.

In his work *The Rape of Clarissa*, Terry Eagleton discusses the sexual implications of a private correspondence between writer and recipient in the eighteenth century. "For all the ardent immediacy of the letter, for all the traces of the body inscribed on it..." Eagleton notes, "the one contract unattainable in correspondence is the sexual union of bodies" (Eagleton 44). In this way, the letter represents a lack of "physical intimacy in a kind of artfully prolonged teasing, a courtship which is never consummated" (Eagleton 45). Letter-writing in the eighteenth century, then, is an act of flirtation in which the sexual desire between the writer and recipient, emphasized by physical separation, cannot be immediately satiated. Clarissa's agreement to maintain private correspondence with Lovelace, however reluctant she might have been to do so, is perceived by Lovelace as an implicit affirmation of her sexual desire for him. Because of the sexual implications of letter-writing between the sexes during the eighteenth century, a private correspondence between a man and woman is considered evidence of their engagement. Correspondence between the sexes for any reason other than business is considered wildly inappropriate.⁸ Eagleton writes of this fact, "Lovelace begins by exploiting Clarissa's passion for

⁸ In the July 2nd, 1798 issue of *The Lady's Monthly Museum* (essentially, the eighteenth-century version of our beloved *Cosmopolitan*), one response to the "Letter to the Editor" section regarding the etiquette of letter-writing reads, "We speak with familiarity and artless affection to those we love; with more or less of distant respect to strangers; and with conciseness and precision to the man of business," (*The Lady's Monthly Museum* 284). It is

scribbling rather than sexual affections, but the two impulses are intimately allied” (Eagleton 47). It is through their continued correspondence with one another, and Lovelace’s exploitation of that correspondence, that he is able to persuade Clarissa to flee with him.

Writing to his fellow rake, John Belford, Lovelace recounts, “She [Clarissa] blames herself for having first corresponded with me, a man of free character; and one indeed whose *first* view it was, to draw her into this correspondence; and who succeeded in it, by means unknown to herself” (Richardson 427). These “means unknown” to Clarissa which Lovelace refers to include his deliberately ignoring the letters she wrote to him in which she rescinds her decision to escape with him. When the day arrives that the two are to flee, Lovelace feigns ignorance, claiming he never saw the letters Clarissa left for him and, with the help of “a little innocent contrivance” – as he calls it – persuades her to flee with him notwithstanding (Richardson 383). Thus, not only does Lovelace use letter-writing to entrap Clarissa in what he perceives as courtship, but he displays his mastery over her by ignoring the content of her letters for his own deceptive purposes. He writes to Belford of this event, “How it swells my pride to have been able to outwit such a vigilant charmer! – I am taller by half a yard, in my imagination, than I was! – I look *down* upon everybody now!” (Richardson 402). Importantly, Lovelace’s immediate reaction to abducting Clarissa is not a celebration of having sexual access to her body. Rather, he boasts of his trickery, claiming it “swells [his] pride to have been able to outwit” his victim. This fact suggests that Lovelace’s abduction, and eventual rape, of Clarissa speaks more to his inflated ego and desire for power than sexual gratification. Lovelace’s euphemistic

later noted that to speak to a stranger with the same intimacy as one would with a close friend is “impertinent” (The Lady’s Monthly Magazine 284). At this point in the novel, before Clarissa flees with Lovelace, the two are considered practically strangers. This is why Lovelace’s perception of their letter-writing is highly sexual. This is also why, as we see in the following example between Sir Clement Willoughby and Evelina, Evelina is so embarrassed by “Lord Orville’s” letter.

language – his sense of “swollen pride” and feeling “taller by half a yard” – suggests that ensnaring Clarissa actually reaffirmed his masculine dominance. Thus, Lovelace’s exploitation of Clarissa’s correspondence serves as the first step towards usurping her position as controller of, in Kaye’s terms, “the frenetic game of sexual selection” (Kaye 98). The libertine, who now has Clarissa in his physical power, can begin the process of “[inscribing] Clarissa with his penis rather than his pen” (Eagleton 48).

A similar move is made by Frances Burney’s unceasingly ardent libertine, Sir Clement Willoughby, in her novel *Evelina*. Willoughby, convinced that his desired Evelina prefers the company of the respected Lord Orville, equips letter-writing as a mechanism of uncovering Evelina’s true sexual nature and conquering the female body. Unlike Lovelace, however, Willoughby ultimately fails in this endeavor. One reason for this failure might be that Willoughby never quite reveals Evelina’s true sexual nature. In an attempt to determine Evelina’s bodily desires – whether they be for Lord Orville, himself, or another – Willoughby deceives Evelina by fabricating a letter, allegedly written by Lord Orville, expressing his deep admiration for her and his wish to continue private correspondence. Willoughby, under the guise of Lord Orville, writes to her

The correspondence you have so sweetly commenced I shall be proud of continuing, and I hope the strong sense I have of the favour you do me, will prevent your withdrawing it. Assure yourself that I desire nothing more ardently, than to pour forth my thanks at your feet, and to offer those vows which are so justly the tribute of your charms and accomplishments. (Burney 257)

As Eagleton writes of the letter, “Nothing could be at once more intimate and more alienable, flush with desire of the subject yet always ripe for distortion and dishonour” (Eagleton 54).

Indeed, Willoughby's contrived letter distorts and dishonors Lord Orville's respected reputation in the eyes of Evelina. Posing as Lord Orville, Willoughby writes Evelina these flattering words fully aware of the scandal inherent to this invitation to continue correspondence. The fraudulent letter produced the ideal effect – at least in terms of Willoughby's desires. Evelina, though initially proud of "Lord Orville's" flattery, quickly becomes appalled by what she believes is his wildly inappropriate conduct.

This revulsion turns to suspicion when Evelina considers that the might letter be inauthentic. Her suspicion, of course, threatens the efficacy of Willoughby's scheme. Still unsure about Evelina's true feelings for Lord Orville, Willoughby confronts her regarding the letter, still pretending he is not the author. Snatching the letter from Evelina's hands, Willoughby asks, in feigned horror, "Good God, Miss Anville, is it possible you can value such a letter as this?" (Burney 356). Evelina hardly stammers an answer before Willoughby questions her again: "Why such solicitude about this hateful letter? can it possibly deserve your eagerness? tell me, with truth, with sincerity tell me; Does it really merit the least anxiety?" (Burney 357). Willoughby's interrogation seeks to get to the bottom of Evelina's sexual nature: Does this letter from "Lord Orville" ignite her desire? If so, does this make her a coquette? A coquette, in the eyes of the libertine, is not worth the chase. Evelina's stammers and blushes are simultaneously revealing and concealing. It seems, based on her initial excitement at receiving the letter, as well as her decision to keep it as a sort of "token of love," that Evelina desires Lord Orville but recognizes the need to restrict this desire so as not to appear coquettish. Willoughby perceives her blush as not only signifying that Evelina is a desiring woman (and, thus, a coquette), but a desiring woman who does not desire him. In an act of aggrieved jealousy, Willoughby tears the letter from "Lord Orville," making clear that Evelina's desire must be confined to Willoughby only –

that her modesty and purity cannot be wasted on Lord Orville (Burney 357). It is not her desire for Lord Orville, however, that foils Willoughby's attempts at sexual consummation. It is her eventual recognition that Willoughby forged the letter that puts an end to his plot.

Perhaps the clearest example of the intimate relationship between sexual control and letter-writing can be found if we return to another novel of Richardson's. Just as Clarissa's letters are used by Lovelace as "weapons in the end-game of rape" (Eagleton 54), so, too, are Pamela's letters perceived by her master, Mr. B., as a key to unlocking Pamela's sexual nature. Throughout the first half of the novel, Mr. B. often expresses his distrust toward Pamela for "always scribbling" letters to her parents (Richardson 23). With the help of his servant John, Mr. B. intercepts each letter Pamela writes to her parents to proofread its contents. Of course, Mr. B. shares a secret with Pamela that could tarnish his reputation if it were exposed – namely, he has accosted her, with wicked sexual intentions, on more than one occasion. In a sense, his anxious obsession over Pamela's letter-writing is not ungrounded; she is, in fact, writing to her parents about the sexual confrontations she has experienced with her Master. When Pamela is restricted from sending letters, she recruits the covert assistance of the young pastor Mr. Williams to bring a packet of her letters to her parents. Upon discovering this secret correspondence, Mr. B.'s distrust toward Pamela increases. "What a Shape! what a Neck! what a Hand! and what a Bloom in that lovely Face!" he sings of Pamela's beauty, "But who can describe the Tricks and Artifices, that lie lurking in her little, plotting, guileful Heart!" (Richardson 186). Despite her attractive appearance, Pamela's innermost thoughts are unknowable to her Master – at least, these thoughts are "unknowable" in that they deviate from Mr. B.'s expectations of Pamela's sexual nature. She is "plotting" and "guileful" not merely because she is unreadable, but because Mr. B. cannot read her *as desiring him*. In actuality, Pamela makes clear her feelings of

disapproval toward Mr. B.'s sexually aggressive behavior. She has, up to this point, fervently rejected his advances. When Mr. B. accuses Pamela of being duplicitous, then, he is actually accusing her of hiding a desire that he wishes and expects her to feel for him. This, then, is where discovering her letters becomes important to him. In discovering some fragment of desire for him in her letters, Mr. B. may have a better chance at conquering Pamela physically.

Once Mr. Williams is jailed under the command of Mr. B., Pamela's correspondence with her parents ceases. She continues writing letters nonetheless, ensuring her voice does not get lost in the narrative Mr. B. has imposed upon her.⁹ To prevent them from being seen by her master, Pamela sews the unsent letters in her petticoat. Mr. B., however, soon suspects Pamela of writing and hiding letters, and confronts her about the matter directly. Having already a number of her letters in his possession, Mr. B. desires to see those Pamela has written to Mr. Williams. He asks her, "But tell me, *Pamela*...since I have seen *these* [those letters already in his possession], Would you have voluntarily shewn me *those* [those letters written to Mr. Williams], had they been in your Possession?" (Richardson 231). At this point in the conversation, Mr. B. is aware that the remaining letters are sewn about Pamela's hips and waist in her petticoat. His question – to see Pamela's remaining scribblings – is fraught with sexual connotations. If she agrees, Pamela is willingly allowing Mr. B. access to her private thoughts and, quite literally, her body around which they are sewn. In penetrating Pamela mentally, Mr. B. comes closer to penetrating her physically. Pamela notes, "I was not aware of his Inference, and said, Yes, truly Sir, I think I

⁹ This is also why Clarissa employs Belford to collect and arrange her letters – so that Lovelace's narrative cannot supplant hers. She writes in her will that Belford should "collect the particulars of [her] sad story...in order to do [her] character justice with all [her] friends and companions" (Richardson 1418). She requests "a compilement to be made of all that relates to [her] story" so as to expose the "justice done [her] by Mr. Lovelace" (Richardson 1418). In a similar way of ensuring her narrative be told, Pamela summarizes the contents of those letters she is forced to relinquish to Mr. B. on separate, hidden sheets of paper. In this way, Pamela still has a written account of her story, despite giving the original documents to Mr. B.

should, if you commanded it” (Richardson 231). Only after Mr. B. repeats his request more clearly does Pamela become aware of his desires. She rejects his demand to see her letters. Despite this rejection, Mr. B. perseveres. This is when the “intimate alliance” – as Eagleton calls it – between letter-writing and sex becomes most apparent. “Now...” Mr. B. begins, “...it is my Opinion they are about you; and I never undrest a Girl in my Life; but I will now begin to strip my pretty *Pamela*; and hope I shall not go far, before I find them” (Richardson 235). Pamela resists, at which point Mr. B. stoops to “examine” her garters. Mr. B.’s forceful search for Pamela’s letters becomes a display of his sexual power over her. As Flynn argues, “Absolute control over a woman's body becomes especially important to a man who cannot attract a woman with his sexual prowess” (Flynn 221).

Kate Manne does a brilliant job of outlining this gendered phenomenon – male desire to access a woman’s innermost thoughts – in a contemporary context. “In public settings,” she notes, “she is told to smile or ask what she’s thinking by many a (male) stranger – especially when she appears to be ‘deep inside her own head’ or ‘off in her own little world,’ i.e., appearing to think her own thoughts, her attention inwardly, rather than outwardly, focused” (Manne 176). Mr. B.’s fervent desire to see Pamela’s letters stems from his anxiety that she may expose his sexually cruel treatment of her. Broadly, a woman who does not publicly display her emotions or thoughts may be “up to something” – or, perhaps worse, hiding her contempt towards her pursuer. Thus, Manne asserts, “Misogyny tends to punish failures not only to demonstrate the ‘openness’ or legibility of her mind, but also the constancy of her intentions or the strength of her resolve to keep her promises” (Manne 118). Because Pamela kept her letters private – and, therefore, failed to “demonstrate the ‘openness’ or legibility of her mind” – Mr. B. strips her as means of punishing her for not adhering to his expectations. Likewise, because Clarissa failed to

uphold “the strength of her resolve to keep her promises” by rescinding her agreement to flee with Lovelace, Lovelace kidnaps her as a way of reminding her “how she ought to act.” Like Pamela’s, Clarissa’s scenario demonstrates an important nuance in Manne’s argument. Even if the woman he pursues is honest about her intentions, the libertine will punish her if her honesty does not conform to his desires. Clarissa wrote to Lovelace that she no longer wanted to escape from her family. Because Clarissa’s honesty did not align with his plans, Lovelace ignored her letter and resolved to run off with her anyway. Therefore, it is not necessarily female honesty that the libertine desires. It is her transparent openness to his wishes and her impassioned allegiance to him. In persuading her to smile, show him her letters, or run away with him, man has exerted his dominance over woman.

Aside from the exploitation of letter-writing (and -reading), the libertine also uses performance as means of regaining control over the sexual selection process. As Mackie writes, “The sublimation of criminal violence into elegance is first and foremost rhetorical and performative” (Mackie 138). By performance, I mean knowingly behaving in a way that is inventive or inauthentic with the intention of benefitting oneself through that inauthenticity. An example of this performance could be seen in Willoughby’s attempt to charade as Lord Orville in order to sway Evelina’s opinion of him. “Comic invention, dramatic impersonation, and disguise” are all tools the libertine equips to maintain power and control over women (Flynn 210). It must be restated here that female control over the sexual selection process was, during the eighteenth century, a total reversal of prescribed gender expectations. Female protraction of courtship – and the suspension of sexual consummation – was a process that, in Kaye’s terms “feminized the male as it situated the female as the activist in erotic relations” (Kaye 99). Thus, the man’s use of performance becomes a means of taking back that active role from the female

usurper and regaining his masculine position as controller over the sexual selection process. I re-emphasize here that the libertine often reaffirms his masculinity by sleeping with virtuous women. When he consummates that “erotic plot” on his own terms – often through coercion or rape – he has resituated himself as the sexual selector. It is no longer the woman, but he who dictates when any sexual consummation should occur. However, as the following examples suggest, the libertine must sometimes employ stratagem and deceit to achieve this position.

Consider, for example, Mr. B.’s use of disguise to access Pamela’s bed chamber. Dressed as Pamela’s drunken maid Nan, Mr. B. positions himself in an armchair, apron over his head, waiting for Pamela to undress and climb into bed. Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B.’s cruel servant and accomplice, lays beside Pamela – as she does every night – and calls to “Nan” to come to bed. Mrs. Jewkes is aware of Mr. B.’s scheme and endeavors to assist him. “But, I tremble to relate it,” Pamela recounts, “the pretended She came into Bed; but quiver’d like an Aspin-leaf; and I, poor Fool that I was! pitied her much. –But well might the barbarous Deceiver tremble at his vile Dissimulation, and base Designs” (Richardson 203). It is not until “the pretended She” restrains Pamela and kisses her that Pamela realizes her deceiver’s true identity. Mr. B., enraged with Pamela for refusing to be his mistress, threatens, “You see, now you are in my Power! – You cannot get from me, nor help yourself: Yet have I not offer’d any thing amiss to you. But if you resolve not to comply with my Proposals, I will not lose this Opportunity: If you do, I will yet leave you” (Richardson 203). Here, the relationship between sexual consummation and the attainment of power is at its most obvious. Mr. B. makes clear to Pamela that if she refuses to be his mistress – and, thus, provide him with the sexual attention he demands from her – he will punish her noncompliance by raping her. In theoretical terms, Mr. B. “generously” offers Pamela the (non)decision to be or not be his mistress. In offering her this (non)decision, Mr. B. assumes

Pamela will choose sexual consummation. When Pamela chooses the “wrong” option (i.e. the option to not submit to Mr. B.), Mr. B. threatens to rape her, exemplifying his power to attain sex from her whether or not she consents to it. The (non)decision he proposes to her merely served as the gentle nudge to submit. When this nudge fails, a more threatening tactic must be implemented.

While disguise is one of many tactics used by Mr. B. to assert his power over Pamela, the use of performance is the single-most influential force behind Lovelace’s plot to seduce Clarissa. “A master plotter on the grand scale,” writes Flynn, “Lovelace is driven to exert his control over his world” (Flynn 214). It is through his fantastical contrivances – kidnapping Clarissa, isolating her in a brothel-turned-boarding house, and intercepting her letters with her confidant Anna – that Lovelace maintains a sense of psychological superiority. Consider, for example, Lovelace’s abduction of Clarissa. While, as mentioned previously, Clarissa initially consents to flee from her family and live under the protection of Lovelace, she shows reluctance once the appointed time to leave arrives. Having read Clarissa’s letter expressing this reluctance and anticipating her shift in convictions, Lovelace conceives a plot to ensure her obedience to him. In a letter to Joseph Leman, one of the Harlowe family servants who secretly agrees to assist Lovelace in his scheme to abduct Clarissa, Lovelace asks that Leman stand, disguised, at the garden door from which Lovelace intends to carry Clarissa off:

If you hear our [mine and Clarissa’s] voices parleying, keep at the door, till I cry Hem, hem, twice...Then you are to make a violent burst against the door, as if you’d break it open, drawing backward and forward the bolt in a hurry: then, with another push...cry out (as if you saw some of the family): Come up, come up, instantly! – Here they are! Here they are! hasten! – this instant hasten! And mention swords, pistols, guns, with as

terrible a voice, as you can cry out with. Then shall I prevail upon her, no doubt, if loath before, to fly... (Richardson 383-384)

In his plot, Lovelace demands that Leman act as though Clarissa has been caught trying to escape by her family. He instructs Leman to “make a violent burst against the door,” and shout as if alarming the Harlowe family of Clarissa’s flight. He cleverly adds that Leman should mention the family is supposedly armed with “swords, pistols, [and] guns” in order to heighten Clarissa’s perception of danger. Lovelace’s use of deception in this scenario assumes two outcomes: First, upon being discovered in a supposed rendezvous with Lovelace, Clarissa will feel pressured to flee with him before her family can retrieve and return her to the isolation of her room. Second, for protecting her from the perceived danger she allegedly faces, Lovelace will appear to Clarissa as a sort of hero – one whose bravery and selflessness has potentially saved her life. When Clarissa hesitates to flee, Lovelace declares, “Now is the time – fly with me then, I beseech you, my dearest creature! Trust your persecuted adorer – Have we not suffered the same cause?” (Richardson 375-376). In essence, Lovelace believes that by kidnapping Clarissa, he will, ironically, win her trust. Once he has isolated her physically and made her dependent on him, he can exploit her vulnerability and assert his power over her. “And is she not IN MY POWER?” Lovelace boasts to Belford, “...which I obtained not by her own consent, but against it” (Richardson 401). Nothing boosts one’s sense of masculine dominance like exerting power over a woman who once seemed unattainable.

The beta-male community has a term for the actions of women like Clarissa, who hesitate to succumb to the advances of their sexual coercers: “LMR,” otherwise known as “last-minute resistance.” The abbreviation LMR is often used among the beta-male community when recounting sexual encounters with women to one another. The term describes a situation in

which a woman revokes her consent immediately before a sexual encounter occurs. Those beta-males who study strategies for attracting women, such as those outlined in Roosh's dating guides, consider LMR the final obstacle to overcome before achieving the ultimate goal: sexual consummation. This discussion of LMR, then, serves as a segue to a broader discussion regarding the beta-male's use of performance in order to increase the number of sexual encounters he experiences. Like the libertine, the beta-male seeks to assert his dominance through the sexual consummation of romantic affairs. However, because the beta-male community amassed post-Darwin, *The Descent of Man* provides a rich supply of vocabulary for the community to mine and strategically warp when discussing female sexual behavior and courtship rituals. It is crucial to note that the ideologies of the beta-male community do not rely on true evolutionary discourse. Rather, the community appropriates and perverts this discourse for its own aims. As Debbie Ging posits, "The political rhetoric of the manosphere... is almost exclusively dominated by evolutionary psychology, which relies heavily on genetic determinism to explain male and female behaviors in relation to sexual selection" (Ging 12). Unlike the libertine, the beta-male has the evolutionary terminology available to manipulate in order to justify his sense of aggrieved entitlement with other beta-males.

As indicated by his epithet, the beta-male relies on "confused and contradictory theories" regarding alpha and beta masculinity in order to better understand and control female sexual behavior (Ging 13). "The most prevalent of these," explains Ging, "is 'alpha fux beta bux,' a key MRA [Men's Rights Activist] and PUA argument positing that women seek alpha males for sex" (Ging 13). Like the polite gentleman of the eighteenth century, the alpha-male (otherwise known as the Chad) represents all of the sexual characteristics that women allegedly desire in men. According to "The Red Pill Primer for Boys," "an easy-to-understand guide to Red Pill

praxeology,” alpha-male characteristics consist of “strength, intelligence, position, power, wealth, and ability to protect and provide,” in addition to “driving an expensive sportscar, wearing expensive, well-tailored clothes and being covered in muscles” (“The Red Pill Primer for Boys”). The beta-male, conversely, “often has a strong history as a provider, but...lacks the personal qualities and characteristics that women find most sexually appealing” (“The Red Pill Primer for Boys”). The beta-male community often construes the courtship process as being dictated by female hypergamy, that is, as defined on *The Red Pill Room*, “The tendency for a woman to bind the highest-quality, highest-status male with the strongest Alpha qualities she can find into a lasting relationship...” (“The Masculexicon”). Thus, in order to appear more desirable to hypergamous women and, ultimately, win their sexual attention, the beta-male must perform those characteristics exhibited by the alpha-male. What we begin to recognize among all this talk of female hypergamy and male sexual prowess (or lack thereof) is that the beta-male community consists of men who strategically take “nature’s ‘laws’ to extreme conclusions” (Kaye 86). In reality, this community neither correctly interprets nor applies these “laws” responsibly. Instead, it intentionally misuses them for the sake of reinforcing its own ideologies.

Like the Restoration libertine, who “takes on fantastic, elaborate roles to deliver himself from the world of experience,” the beta-male, too, takes on the role of alpha-male as means of “delivering himself from the world of experience” (Flynn 212). Through their performance “masquerading as alpha controllers,” members of the beta-male community believe they have a higher chance of attracting women and, subsequently, achieving sexual consummation (Ging 13). In achieving sexual consummation, members of the beta-male community reaffirm their control over a courtship process by which they often feel victimized and sidelined. This performance of alpha-male is commonly known among the community as “game.” As mentioned

earlier in this chapter, the libertine, threatened by female protraction of the courtship process, “devoted excessive energy to the game of sexual selection” (Kaye 98). Likewise, the beta-male community, threatened by the evolutionary processes that ostensibly dictate its sexual fate, devotes its energy to “gaming” said processes. Consider the definition of “game” provided on *The Red Pill Room*:

Game is a set of guidelines, skills, and general rules that allow a man to act in such a way as to inspire a positive sexual response in a woman, from attracting her attention to maintaining a sexual relationship. Game consists of a man learning how to present sexually-attractive ALPHA behavior (regardless of your actual status) and exploit common female psychological vulnerabilities in an effort to pursue sexual relationships. (“The Red Pill Primer for Boys”)

According to the definition above, game is an “act” – a performance of a particular brand of masculinity – used to “inspire a positive sexual response in a woman.” This definition makes clear that following game’s “guidelines, skills, and general rules” does not encourage the beta-male to be his authentic self. Rather, the beta-male, by following the rules of game, will learn to masquerade as the “sexually-attractive alpha” in order to “exploit common female psychological vulnerabilities.” Accordingly, game is a method of deception. To follow the guidelines of game is to perform a desirable style of masculinity that, according to the beta-male community, “is designed to get you laid” (“The Masculexicon”). In some cases, however, the beta-male experiences something known as being “black-pilled” – that is, realizing that as a beta-male, he cannot ever truly become an alpha. He may masquerade as one, but, ultimately, he will always have the build and appearance of a beta. A parallel can be drawn between the black-pilled beta and the “reformed” rake; both may appear as though they have assimilated to the hegemonic

masculinity of their eras, but they are always plagued by their true nature. A beta-male will never truly achieve alpha status, and a rake seldom achieves that level of genuine sensibility inherent to eighteenth-century manhood. Thus, their chances of sleeping with women rely heavily on their ability to perform a role they can never inhabit.

Roosh expounds on the prior definition of “game” in the introduction of his pick-up guide entitled, unsurprisingly, *Game*:

The biological justification for game is strong: most women crave alpha males who display strength, confidence, and power, but game is not effective in a Muslim country, for example, where pre-marital sex is forbidden and women are not allowed to choose their marriage partner. The only reason you can use game is because your society is firmly on a path that will lead to a declining population and its eventual death. (Roosh 11)

Importantly, Roosh emphasizes a “biological justification” for using deception as means of achieving sexual consummation. Like the definition provided on *The Red Pill Room*, the one provided by Roosh makes clear that “women crave alpha males” over men who display beta-male attributes. Roosh’s definition, however, seeks to justify game by emphasizing its alleged evolutionary implications: If we, as beta-males living in the United States, do not seduce women, we will see unprecedented population decline that will, eventually, lead to the death of humanity. There is, of course, no scientific data to confirm this claim. Roosh simply warns of this fantastical evolutionary catastrophe as means of encouraging game among his readers. Roosh’s definition is highly reminiscent of an observation made by Kaye regarding those who “lose” the sexual selection process: “More accurately, death is the penalty for failure in terms of the evolution for populations; for individuals, however, the disadvantage is that certain individuals in

a given species are denied the opportunity to reproduce” (Kaye 99). Of course, Roosh’s alleged concern for society’s “declining population” and “eventual death” merely veils the true motive behind encouraging game among young men – that is, to maintain the masculine hegemony pertinent to the survival of patriarchy.

In fact, Roosh’s vision for writing *Game* is made clear in the very introduction of his book, when he encourages his readers to “use the experience of getting sex to build [their] confidence and become stronger, more satisfied men” (Roosh 12). He later adds that gaming women will “challenge you in a way that results in an enhancement to your masculinity” (Roosh 17), though never quite details precisely what this “enhanced masculinity” looks like. Debbie Ging suggests that this masculinity does not take one particular form, but that “multiple and hybrid masculinities are regularly performed in different social contexts in order to maintain male hegemony” (Ging 11). Given Roosh’s motives, game – like the libertine’s exploitative use of letter-writing and performance – seeks ends beyond sexual gratification. Game seeks to solidify the dominant status of men over women – to provide its players with a sense of personal fulfillment in the form of an ambiguous, idealized “enhanced masculinity.” Although, on the surface, members of the beta-male community seem obsessed with the act of getting sex – of grooming themselves to appear more alpha, having a number of alluring one-liners to initiate conversation with, and increasing their notch count – this obsession translates to an unsatiated desire for power. In his manifesto, Rodger frequently complains of being deprived of sexual experiences while other, apparently less-deserving, men seem to constantly be having them. Much of his manifesto recounts his experiences attempting to encounter women who apparently respond with hostility or indifference, watching young couples stroll happily through his neighborhood, and realizing that those around him – including his own sister – were losing their

virginities before he was losing his. When recalling these experiences, he speaks with aggravation and resentment. These emotions are blatantly geared toward women – specifically, those women who never gave him the attention he felt entitled to. During the “Second Phase” of his plotted day of Retribution, the day on which he carried out the Isla Vista killings, Rodger writes that he will “punish all females for the crime of depriving [him] of sex.” His “Second Phase,” he claims, “will represent [his] War on Women” for years of romantic and sexual rejection (Rodger 132).

Rodger’s obsession with women and what he perceives as their intentional and malicious rejection of him sexually, as we see in the following transcript, has little to do with his desire for sexual gratification. This obsession, instead, has to do with a sense of masculine deprivation he feels for not being able to stay “in the game.” If he cannot achieve sexual consummation, how will he attain the “enhanced masculinity” Roosh promises those who successfully game the courtship process? Rodger’s ultimate desire for power – under the guise of sexual desire – is most prominent in his final YouTube video, uploaded shortly before carrying out the Isla Vista attacks. He begins, of course, lamenting the fact that he has never had any sexual experiences: “I’m 22 years old and I’m still a virgin. I’ve never even kissed a girl. I’ve been through college for two and a half years, more than that actually, and I’m still a virgin” (“Retribution”). The video quickly becomes threatening when Rodger claims, “I don’t know why you girls aren’t attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it” (“Retribution”). Already, Rodger’s concern regarding his lack of sexual experiences has transitioned into his desire to get revenge. However, his need for power becomes most apparent when, describing his plan to murder those women who belong to the Alpha Phi sorority house, he announces, “Well now I will be a god compared to you. You will all be animals. You are animals and I will slaughter you like animals”

(“Retribution”). Rodger claims power now, not through the attainment of sex (a route that he recognizes is not open to him), but through the mass murder of those who have deprived him of it. To restore his dominance, he must punish those who, by refusing to provide the sexual attention he insists is owed to him, compromise his position of power and his “manliness.” This fatal means of restoring power ultimately reveals the close association between sex and violent suppression. In the minds of these men, the two are interchangeable.

What I hoped to have suggested by the end of this chapter is not only that the libertine and beta-male struggle for dominance over women, but that they also struggle for an unattainable style of masculine hegemony. Both figures perceive themselves as victims of a ruthless sexual selection process controlled by women. Both figures feel that, in regaining control over this process, they will regain control over the female sex. Both figures enact tactics of deceit as ostensibly “friendly, nonviolent” means of regaining that control. These tactics appear in many forms, but most prominent among these include the use of performance to ensnare women into reluctant love affairs. This performance is precisely where the struggle for hegemonic masculinity arises. Both the libertine and beta-male perform a style of idealized masculinity – based loosely on the hegemonic masculinity of their respective time periods – in order to sleep with women. In sleeping with copious amounts of women, both figures falsely believe that they will achieve the very style of masculinity they perform during the courtship process. Some – like Rodger – recognize that they can neither perform, nor attain, this masculine ideal. Upon this recognition, these men engage in violent behavior directed towards women as a means of punishment for not sleeping with them or recognizing them as masculine enough. Ultimately, the deterioration of female sexual expectations – that she must submit to his sexual desires according to his terms – triggers a sense of panic in the libertine and beta-male. In turn, both figures utilize

methods of punishment to prevent the deterioration of these expectations and, thus, the deterioration of male dominance. Frighteningly, this punishment, as exemplified by the actions of Rodger and Alek Minassion, has become increasingly violent in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Restoration-style Libertinism and Red Pill philosophy are connected by the shared notion that women who achieve sociopolitical mobility are a threat to the gendered hierarchy that deems white-passing, middle-to-upper class men superior. This claim is further supported by Manne's revised definition of misogyny in her book *Down Girl*, which rejects the wholesale hatred of women for the selective hatred of women who behave without regard for those standards patriarchy imposes on them. When women behave outside of these expectations, they display a sense of individual autonomy that threatens to destabilize the patriarchal structures that uphold male hegemony. Specifically, female agency suggests that women have not only become conscious of their oppression under patriarchy, but that such oppression can be broken through active resistance to those institutions that maintain it. With the acknowledgment of their personal agency, women recognize that their status as "human givers" can be surmounted – that they are not born solely to provide men with sexual and romantic attention. What this recognition implies is that women, then, can take on the traditionally male role of "human taker" – that is, one who equally has the right to individually pursue opportunities which reward them with social, political, financial, or personal status. In taking on this traditionally masculine role, women are now perceived as competing with men for these high status societal rewards. As Manne elucidates,

For a fellow human being is not just an intelligible *spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, colleague, etc.*, in relation to you and yours. They are also an intelligible *rival, enemy, usurper, insubordinate, betrayer, etc.* Moreover, in being capable of rationality, agency, autonomy, and judgment, they are also someone who could coerce, manipulate, or shame you. (Manne 147)

It follows that to prevent this coercion, manipulation, and shaming, the Restoration libertine and beta-male must prevent any and all *active* displays of female rationality, agency, autonomy, and judgment. I emphasize *active* because, as noted in my first chapter, it is not necessarily female consciousness of or desire for autonomy that directly threatens male hegemony. Rather, it is female autonomy in action that destabilizes the long-held fantasy of male superiority. This is why Clarissa's severest punishments – her rape, imprisonment, and eventual death – occur when she actively refuses her family's arranged suitor and runs off with Lovelace. This is also why Rodger desired to punish specifically women on his Day of Retribution. Rodger perceived these women as using their agency to actively choose against his own desires.

It is not only the actions of individual women that Restoration-style libertinism and Red Pill philosophy seek to police. Both philosophies emphasize resistance to those institutions and movements that advance a feminist-centric agenda as well. For the Restoration libertine, these institutions include the emergence of the bourgeoisie class, the accompanying Age of Sensibility it ushered in, and growing female presence in the public sphere – best exemplified by the development of the Parisian salon. For the beta-male, these institutions include the present-day feminist movement as it expands from the physical world to the digital, and the attention this movement places on intersectionality and inclusivity. Often times, both figures enforce gender violence on a personal level with the intention of making broader cultural changes. Rodger's intention to murder the women of Alpha Phi was no random one. To best carry out his self-proclaimed "War on Women," he considered it most effective to kill "the very girls who represented everything [he hates] in the female gender" – those are, the "spoiled, heartless bitches" who would "reject [him] cruelly" had he ever tried to ask one on a date (Rodger 132). In Rodger's view, killing a random group of women would not convey a message with the same

institutional force that specifically killing the women of Alpha Phi would. In killing the women of Alpha Phi, Rodger makes clear that it is those members of the female sex *who reject him* – who display sexual agency – who he truly resents.

Of course, Rodger's hatred is not exclusive to the women of Alpha Phi sorority. This resentment spills onto other female individuals and groups of women who use their agency for the "wrong" reasons – namely, to deny him their sexual attention. The Isla Vista shooting spree was not aimed specifically at the Alpha Phi sisters of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Rather, it was an act of violent misogyny perpetrated against individual women with the intention of destabilizing those institutions that promote female autonomy. The same can be, and has been, said of Robert Lovelace, whose control of Clarissa is merely one facet of his desire to "master experience" altogether (Flynn 214). While the class privilege associated with Lovelace's aristocratic status loses its authority during the transition between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "the privilege of outlaw masculinities is preserved" (Mackie 129) – as long as these "outlaw masculinities" are performed with mastery and tact. In other words, the libertine may maintain his boorish style of masculinity as long as this masculinity is tempered (or, at the very least, disguised) by the benevolence inherent to the Age of Sensibility. Thus, in kidnapping and raping Clarissa, Lovelace asserts his masculine privilege while simultaneously and implicitly expressing his desire to return to those days of class privilege under Charles II. Like Rodger, Lovelace targets an individual – and, more specifically, an individual who represents the female population he perceives as a challenge to his power – as means of destabilizing the institutions that threaten his unrestrained autonomy as an upper-class man.

It is important to point out that Lovelace's act of rape and Rodger's mass shooting are not only two extreme examples of violent misogyny, but two tragic conclusions to the ongoing

sociopolitical struggle between men and the women they seek dominance over. When Pamela refuses Mr. B.'s sexual advances, Mr. B. accuses her of robbery, announcing, "...why so you have, Hussy, you *have* robb'd me" (Richardson 58). The robbery she has committed, however, is not one involving money or precious items. To Mr. B., what Pamela has robbed is much more valuable: his masculine dominance. For men like Mr. B. or Elliot Rodger, sexual access is the means by which masculine dominance is achieved. Because these men perceive male hegemony over women to be their natural right, inevitably it follows that they perceive female sexual attention as their birthright as well. When this attention is withheld, as Richard Kaye suggests, men recognize this sexual denial as a threat to their gender dominance. This threat initiates the process of the reclamation of hegemony. For Rodger, this process quickly turned fatal. Assuming he would never be awarded female sexual attention, Rodger attempted the reclamation of his male dominance by attempting to murder the women of University of California, Santa Barbara's Alpha Phi sorority. For other members of the beta-male community, this process includes attempts at performing alpha-male characteristics with the hopes of attracting women through acts of deceit. For the libertine, this process takes a number of forms. Initially, he, too, may perform gentleman-like characteristics, as Lovelace does when he kidnaps Clarissa. When performance fails, he may attempt to rewrite her narrative or impose his voice onto hers, effectively silencing any meaningful attempt to speak for herself. If she still refuses sexual access, the libertine will pursue more forcible measures, such as Lovelace's rape of Clarissa or Mr. B.'s frequent attempts at sexual assault.

Among some of my deepest regrets pursuing this project is the little attention paid to intersectionality in the final product. I attribute this fact to several reasons, including the short period of time provided to pursue this project and the relative absence of major characters with

marginalized identities in eighteenth-century English fiction. Above all, however, I attribute this fact to my own inability to recognize how my privilege as a white woman may have influenced my research and writing until the project was nearly completed. I want to thank those who have either directly or indirectly made me realize that, while misogyny does attack women directly, it does not attack all women in the same ways. I owe those women whose intersecting identities make them more vulnerable to gender violence my deepest gratitude as they patiently allow women like me the time and space to better understand their perspectives. Going forward with this project, I would like to examine how other online hate groups, such as the Alt-Right, interact with, advance the ideologies of, and ingrain racist sentiment within the beta-male community. Additionally, I might consider the importance of representation (or lack thereof) in canonized eighteenth-century English fiction. What might a lack of marginalized female characters in eighteenth-century fiction insinuate about the positionality of these women in relation to the libertine? How might this lack of representation imply that their plight is, according to those white canonized authors, allegedly less important than that of Pamela's or Evelina's? These are questions I urge scholars interested in the perpetuation of misogyny to explore. It is our job to ensure we do not depend on those women with marginalized identities to explore them for us.

While my research focuses on the ways in which the libertine and beta-male interact with women, I may recommend future research be performed on the network of male relationships among groups of libertines and within the manosphere. One major similarity I found between the libertine and beta-male that did not make it in the final draft of this paper is their frequent recollection of sexual conquests, blunders, and schemes to members of their respective, male-populated groups. Lovelace, for example, constantly scribbles to Belford about the plot he has constructed to seduce Clarissa. He assures Belford "that [he] will be as particular as possible in

all that passes between [he] and [his] goddess” (Richardson 399). Belford, himself, is “desirous to know (if [Lovelace] wilt proceed) by what gradations, arts, and contrivances, [he] effectest [his] ungrateful purpose...” (Richardson 560). It is not merely his “gradations, arts, and contrivances” Lovelace informs Belford of. He also boasts of his sexual prowess to his fellow rake: “Many a [woman] have I taught to dress, and helped to undress” (Richardson 399).

Arguably his most well-known letter in the entire novel serves as his ultimate boast – that in which he informs Belford he has raped Clarissa: “And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives...” (Richardson 883). This relationship between the two rakes, grounded in boastings and recollections of sexual triumph, leads me to the question: Who exactly is the libertine proving his masculine dominance to? Sure, as I have argued in this paper, he is proving it to the women he seeks control over. However, it seems, based on the interactions between Lovelace and Belford, that this dominance is not confirmed until other men in the libertine’s “in-group” validate his conquests.

The same can be argued for the beta-male, whose social validation is bolstered by other men within the beta-male community. Even the name “manosphere” implies the community’s exclusivity. Like a childhood treehouse, onto the door of which is posted a sign that warns “No Girls Allowed,” the manosphere seems to be a place in which like-minded men come together and express their thoughts with the utmost comfort and vulnerability. The practice of boasting about sexual conquests is just as ubiquitous within the manosphere as it is between Lovelace and Belford. One discussion post on *The Red Pill Network* entitled “[Case Study] How to Get Laid on Tinder (Pics & Proof) (very long read)” begins with a brief anecdote by the original poster, “Why should you listen to me when it comes to this subject? Because my top achievement so far is that I fucked 3 different (completely random) girls from Tinder in 1 day” (Larson). This is not

the only instance of boasting on *The Red Pill Network*. Under another discussion posted entitled “notch count,” members of the beta-male community reveal the number of women they have allegedly slept with. The answers range from 40 to 374 sexual conquests (Bascon). Some individuals go so far as to recount the experience for their male audience. Again, the question must be asked: Who exactly are members of the beta-male community performing their perceived sexual prowess for? Arguably, these sexual conquests would not matter if they were not advertised to other members of the manosphere. If they are not bragged about, it would be as though they never even occurred.

This brief contemplation regarding male relationships within the libertine and beta-male communities invites Eve Sedgwick to the discussion. As Sedgwick defines it, male homosocial desire “is applied to such activities as ‘male bonding,’ which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality” (Sedgwick 1). On the surface, the beta-male community specifically appears to encourage homophobic sentiment. However, as Ging astutely points out, “While homophobic language is rife, the culture is generally accepting of homosexuality, as it is of any sexual expressions that are perceived to be transgressive” (Ging 14). Male bonding within the beta-male community relies heavily on acquiring gay members. According to Ging’s research, some members of the community celebrate gay men for “[resisting] the lure of pussy” and, consequently, becoming “wealthy and politically active” members of society (Ging 14). For members of the manosphere, gay men serve as living proof that without the distraction of women, men will achieve great success socially, politically, and economically. This is precisely where the intersection of “homosocial” and “homosexual” bonding that Sedgwick emphasizes comes to the forefront. Male homosocial bonding within the beta-male community is inextricably linked to putting its gay members on a

pedestal. Heterosexual members of the mansphere envision allies within the gay community, celebrating its alleged rejection of women for the sake of ostensibly protecting male hegemony. The broader conclusion here is that women hardly factor into the equation at all. They simply serve as a vehicle for strengthening the bonds between members of the mansphere.

I emphasize again that this is all mere speculation. In the event that this research be further pursued, I might argue that examining the intracommunal relationships among both groups of men would better illuminate the ways in which these groups use their collective strength to police women and maintain patriarchy. For the sake of this paper, however, I hope to have conveyed to my reader several key points. First, Libertinism and Red Pill philosophy are fundamentally similar in that both philosophies seek to transgress the social dogma of their respective periods. Both philosophies are conceived out of backlash to societal shifts codes that threaten the hegemony of those men who subscribe to them – among these shifts being developing recognition of female agency. As women become conscious of their agency, they develop the power to choose which men do and do not have sexual access. Thus, the recognition of personal agency among women shifts power over the courtship process from men to women. If women decide which men do and do not have sexual access, men can no longer achieve sexual consummation on their own terms. If men lose the power to dictate if and when sex will occur, the security of male dominance over women becomes endangered. To reclaim this dominance, the libertine and the beta-male must enact misogynistic tactics – some gentler than others – to police those women who withhold their sexual attention. These tactics include silencing and revising the female narrative, performing an inauthentic role as means of seduction, or using physical force to achieve sexual and personal gratification.

Above all, it is essential to recognize the similarities in misogynistic practices enacted by the libertine and the beta-male, as well as the similar reasoning behind the enactment of these practices. As Manne succinctly puts it, perpetrators of misogyny “often target girls and women (in the relevant class) for actual, perceived, or representative challenges to or violations of applicable patriarchal norms and expectations...” (Manne 63). My research focuses primarily on women’s violation of patriarchal expectations regarding sexual submission to male desires. I conclude by urging my reader to realize how little the face of misogyny has changed from the Restoration era to the present. The assumptions regarding who provides and who is owed sexual attention permeate the manosphere just as they do the philosophies of those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century libertines. The sexual threat the libertine posed to women in his hey-day remains equally as pervasive a threat to women today. The only major difference is that the libertine has adapted to the technological advancements of the twenty-first century. He has now swallowed the red pill.

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