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James Grantham Turner. *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. vii + 343 pp. $65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-78279-1.

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Problems with Pornography

The author of any monograph expects, or at least ought to expect two questions about his or her work: does the work fulfill its own claims; and, does the work enhance, modify, advance, challenge, alter, or otherwise participate in the conversation about its professed topic? Meeting the first criteria is critical to a work's internal integrity. Fulfilling the second criteria is equally important to the integrity of the particular field that a given work helps to build but often more difficult as it insists that each of us engage and synthesize a large, often disparate body of research and theory. On both counts, *Libertines and Radicals* falls short of the mark.

James Grantham Turner's *Libertines and Radicals* is the culmination of several articles on the relationship between pornography and the novel, and the author's most recent foray into the sexual politics of seventeenth-century England. It is an attempt to enter a conversation about early modern English political pornography outlined primarily during the 1990s by literary critics and historians including Susan Wiseman, Ann Hughes, Lois Potter, Rachel Weil, Sharon Achinstein, and myself.[1] With the publication of *Libertines and Radicals* Turner's thinking on seventeenth-century pornography has become more consistent with this body of literature which has foregrounded the anti-democratic dimensions of these political satires, a dimension largely absent in his earlier work on the subject.[2] Turner is perhaps best known as a Miltonist and, again, in this work, Milton "defines [Turner's] historical and social trajectory" (p. xii).[3] Here, however, Turner ventures further afield from his literary roots to excavate the intersection between representation and practice. As such, *Libertines and Radicals* claims to be a work of cultural studies rather than literary analysis. The central claim of his study, as Turner puts it, "is that in the troubled area of sexuality texts provoke actions, that literary effects are inextricably linked to questions of attitude and behavior" (p. x). Turner claims that the pornographic texts he studies provoke the eruption of public shaming rituals originally used to chastise sexually errant women. To make his case, Turner focuses on pornography "in the literal sense, the sexually explicit discourse of prostitution and its appli-

cation to social institutions and social events" (p. xii). Turner contends that pornography exposes the class confusion that attended the civil wars and afflicted the Restoration, "show[ing] how the two cultures of sexual transgression [aristocratic and plebeian] intermingle and define one another: the gross material substratum of 'whoring', reconstituted in court records and 'porno-political' pamphlets, meets the upper-class gallantry that 'gives the greatest Countenance to Libertinism'" (p. xi).

Turner's introductory chapter justifies his neologism "pornographia," a word he coins to "distance" his subject from "modern debates" (p. xii) as it foregrounds what he takes to be pornography's constitutive feature: the conflict between "a woman's autographism or self-representation" and "efforts by the narrator/defamer to pry open or cut into her respectable exterior, to reveal the expected story of sexual exposure and conquest." "Successive chapters explore the carnivalesque dimension of the social upheavals of 1640-1660, anticipated in the riots and charivaris of earlier decades, the fusion of political and sexual themes in both anti-Puritan and anti-royalist satire" (p. xiii). The array of texts that Turner offers his readers is staggering and impressive, and his argument is ambitious. However, as this review suggests, *Libertines and Radicals* would have been better off as a literary history of pornography. As it stands, the work is most generously understood as an early meditation on a very complex cultural and political dynamic, rather than the last word.

By far, the darkest clouds hanging over *Libertines and Radicals* are its surprising paucity of work with archival records and its inadequate engagements with political history and gender theory, which together wreak methodological and conceptual havoc with an argument that, had it been more carefully constructed, might indeed have changed the way we think about seventeenth-century culture. The dearth of scholarship primarily affects *Libertines and Radicals* on two scores: it causes Turner to undertheorize pornography; and, it deprives Turner of key historiographical evidence that would otherwise ground and clarify his vaunted but unsubstantiated interest in pornography's material effects.

No one who is seriously interested in exploring the social and political deployments of sexually explicit representation can afford to ignore the serious theoretical work that has been produced during the past decade. Nowhere in *Libertines and Radicals*, though, do we find any reference either to Walter Kendrick or Frances Ferguson, let alone the numerous other theorists and cultural critics who have weighed in on the matter.[4] Instead, Turner is keen to distance himself from these "modern debates," apparently even when those debates might help him theorize precisely the class-based abjection he sees inherent in the "lower-class 'whore'" (p. xii). The result is that Turner falls back on the literal definition of pornography--writing about prostitutes--at the same time he seeks to obscure that fact by rewriting pornography as pornographia. Why exactly we need this neologism remains unclear since the urge to write and thereby expose prostitutes' degradation, which Turner identifies as pornographia's constitutive feature, has underwritten pornography at least since the nineteenth century when social scientists adopted the term. In fact, Turner's neologism is arguably more akin to modern pornography in its salacious fixation on the prostitute's genitalia. After all, as Turner himself points out, pornographia, even renamed, is "still about 'lust' in action, genital conquest and its discontents, fear of female domination, loss of control in passion" (p. xiv). These contradictions put the execution of *Libertines and Radicals* at irreconcilable odds with its claims to be a work of cultural studies. Deprived of an effective rationale for its central term of discussion, *Libertines and Radicals* cannot answer cultural studies' foundational questions: "How did [this definition of pornography's] dominant discourse warrant itself as the account, and sustain a limit, ban or pro-

scription over alternative or competing defintions?"[5]

Undertheorizing pornography leads Turner to conflate the figures of prostitute and whore, and this cannot be done for seventeenth-century culture without careful explanation. As Robert Shoemaker points out in his study of urban crime during the seventeenth century, women who were engaged in what we understand as prostitution, that is the exchange of sex for money, were understood in moral terms as lewd or loose women. "Whore" was one name that might apply colloquially or appear in defamation complaints, but it had no legal standing. Indeed, prostitution was not illegal until the middle eighteenth century. Because Turner seems unaware of this aspect of "the gross material substratum of 'whoring'," he cannot fully articulate the complex relationships between women who were occasional prostitutes, women who gained their livelihood by that means, women who were involved in adulterous relationships, or women who were kept mistresses.

Turner's failure to differentiate among the varieties of relationships in which women exchange sex for some form of compensation may also explain what is otherwise a shocking oversight on his part. His evidence of women being prosecuted for sexual transgressions comes almost exclusively from two sources: Ian Archer's *Pursuit of Stability* and Laura Gowing's *Domestic Dangers*.[6] These are fine studies of Renaissance history, but neither of them extends significantly into the era that Turner investigates. *The Pursuit of Stability* focuses on Elizabethan London while the records Gowing used in *Domestic Dangers* extend only to 1640. Moreover, both Gowing and Archer would likely be the first to admit that the court systems for prosecuting vice changed significantly after mid-century, if only because the consistory courts, upon whose records Gowing bases much of her argument, were abolished by Parliament, never to regain their former glory under the Stuarts. Although Robert Shoemaker's *Prosecution and Punishment* (1991) appears in Turner's study, he makes far less use than he should of Shoemaker's arguably more applicable historiography, which specifically addresses the legal system in London between 1660 and 1714. One further point needs to be made here. The synopsis that introduces *Libertines and Radicals* claims that Turner examines sex-crime records. An examination of his endnotes, though, reveals that he does not. Rather *Libertines and Radicals* reads other scholars' transcriptions of sex crime records usually with no contextualization of those records. For example, in his sole reference to Shoemaker, Turner misses the important point that while Shoemaker does say "adultery, prostitution, and, solicitation of chastity," were unindictable at sessions (p. 30), he does not say, they were unpunishable or unindictable in other courts.[7] Had Turner bothered to read this passage more carefully, he would have learned that Shoemaker observes many of the recognizances were removed to King's bench by a writ of certiorari, which gave the superior court the right of review.[8] Moreover, Shoemaker himself is guarded in the conclusions he draws from his selection of the Middlesex sessions records. But Turner uses Shoemaker to substantiate his claim that high-brow pornography imitated public shaming rituals like the charivari and Skimmington rides. In this case Shoemaker provides the archival evidence of what Turner earlier refers to as the aristocratic propensity to "flaunt ... privilege" (p. 120). For it is Shoemaker who points out that Charles Sedley's outrageous exhibitionism in 1668 became the standard by which all subsequent charges of "public lewdness" were judged. Yet, Shoemaker's point actually undercuts Turner's claim. Inasmuch as Sedley set the precedent for prosecutions and was himself convicted he can hardly be said to exemplify privilege. Moreover, that the attempt to control "public lewdness" cannot be understood as disinterest in private vice. For an offense had to be deemed criminal in order to be subject to indictment. Un-

less sexual misconduct was discovered in a bawdy house, the patronizing of which was indictable, it was always handled at petty sessions, where offenders were treated to summary justice at the hands of two or more magistrates. Petty sessions were still courts of law and thus public in an institutional sense and magistrates and statutes alike understood perfectly well that even private vices had public implications.

The largest gap in *Libertines and Radicals* emerges in Turner's failure to consult, cite, or otherwise engage with prominent historians of seventeenth-century national and urban politics. Nowhere will one find Paul Halliday, David Wootton, or Blair Worden, who have worked extensively and most recently on mid-century politics.[9] Nor will one find Gary De Krey's insightful work on urban politics and urban radicalism during the Restoration, which might have helped Turner explain the aristocratic expropriation of shaming rituals from earlier eras.[10] Tim Harris's *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II* plays an appropriately important role in *Libertines and Radicals*, but like De Krey's work, Harris' voluminous studies of Restoration urban politics are also absent.[11] Missing as well are literary scholars who have produced important work on the relationship between literary representations and social practice, including Paula Backscheider's *Spectacular Politics*, which specifically addresses questions of urban politics and public rituals, and Frances Dolan, whose work on Elizabeth Cellier is conspiculously absent from Turner's discussion of the "Popish Midwife."[12] The point here is not to fill in Turner's bibliography. The point is that these omissions and oversights seem to lure Turner away from the politics of mid-century, particularly in their urban manifestations, and into several bizarre claims, including his claim that the "riots and charivaris of earlier decades" alone anticipated the "upheavals of 1640-1660" (p. xiii) and his equally peculiar assertion that "Auden commemorated Freud for discovering 'Eros, builder of cities', whereas I show the city building Eros" (p. xvii).

Libertines and Radicals appears at an important moment in the study of early modern English culture as other scholars are debating what interdisciplinary study means--how, in short, literary scholars and historians might converse with one another. About this, Turner and I are in agreement, "[*Libertines and Radicals'*] dependence on the archival research of historians--notably Elizabeth Cohen, Martin Ingram, Susan Amussen, David Underdown, Tim Harris, Ann Hughes, Ian Archer, Laura Gowing, Anna Bryson, Peter Earle, and Randolph Trumbach--raises further hermeneutic questions endemic to 'historicist' and 'cultural' projects. How can we know if 'operations' had an effect? In other words, are we trapped within textuality or can we construct a historical pragmatics of sexuality?" (p. 276). Sadly, the placement of this question in a note to his preface is symptomatic of Turner's disinclination to deal precisely with the issues at hand, and *Libertines and Radicals*, never fully rises to an answer and remains interesting only at the level of local interpretation.

Notes

[1]. Sharon Achinstein, "Women on Top in the Pamphlet Literature of the English Revolution," *Women's Studies* 24 (1994): pp. 131-63; Ann Hughes, "Gender and Politics in Leveller Literature," in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown*, ed. Mark A. Kishlansky and Susan D. Amussen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 162-88; Melissa Mowry, "Dressing Up and Dressing Down: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Seventeenth-Century English Textile Industry," *Journal of Women's History* 11, 3 (1999): pp. 78-103; Lois G. Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Susan Wiseman, "'Adam the Father of All Flesh,' Porno-Political Rhetoric and Political Theory In and Af-

ter the English Civil War," *Prose Studies* 14, 3 (1991): pp. 134-57.

[2]. "'The Whores Rhetorick': Narrative, Pornography, and the Origins of the Novel," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (1995).

[3]. *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[4]. Frances Ferguson, "Pornography: the Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Spring 1995): pp. 670-95; Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Penguin, 1987).

[5]. Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology,'" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 1050-1064, 1050.

[6]. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Gowing, *Women Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[7]. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in London and rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[8]. J.H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History* (London: Butterworths, 1990), pp. 170-2.

[9]. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns, 1650-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Wootton, "Leveller Democracy and the Puritan Revolution," in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 412-44; Worden, "English Republicanism," in *idem*, pp. 443-75.

[10]. "The First Restoration Crisis," *Albion* 25, 4 (1993): pp. 565-80; "Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667-1672," *Historical Journal* 38, 1 (1995): pp. 53-83.

[11]. "Was the Tory Reaction Popular?" *London Journal* 13, 2 (1987-88): pp. 106-20; "Party Turns? Or, Whigs and Tories Get Off Scott Free," *Albion* 25, 4 (1993): pp. 581-90; "Tories and the Rule of Law in the Reign of Charles II," *Seventeenth Century* 8, 1 (1993): pp. 9-27.

[12]. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Dolan, "'The Wretched Subject the Whole Town Talks of': Elizabeth Cellier, Popish Plots, and Print," in *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 157-211.

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