

debates and issues at the turn of the seventeenth century in its pages.

James Grantham Turner. *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xxii + 343 pp. + 10 illus. \$65.00. Reviewed by MATTHEW J. KINSERVIK, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE.

*Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* is an ambitious and innovative book. As the subtitle indicates, Turner aims to bridge periods normally kept apart by academic convention, and he does so by discussing the very things that seem to have been fundamentally changed by the Civil Wars and Interregnum: sexuality, politics, and literary culture. To be more precise, he reads sexual literature from 1630 to 1685 for what it says about the class and gender troubles that persist throughout this particularly troubled period. As a result, Turner challenges the liberationist claims about libertine literature of the Restoration era by linking them to very different earlier texts under the rubric of "pornographia." This faux-Renaissance term signifies "the sexually explicit discourse of prostitution and its application to social institutions and political events," including not just literary texts, but also church court records, obscure lampoons, and graphic prints (xii). The scope of "pornographia" goes beyond printed matter and includes other sexual signifying practices, such as charivari demonstrations and the infamous naked mountebank sermon performed by Sedley and Dorset.

Given so ambitious a scope, what is the precise goal of the book? Turner explains, "My goal throughout is to reveal common 'porno-political' preoccupations across widely different decades, and to embed illicit sexual discourse in the material life and rituals of the metropolis, relating them to the ambivalent mixture of festivity and violence expressed in charivari, carnival, and apprentice

riots" (xiii). To "reveal" and "embed" and "relate" is not to answer or to solve any specific critical or historical problem. As a consequence, the book is highly descriptive. But if that might be regarded by some as a weakness, it is also the book's greatest strengths. Turner discusses a truly impressive array of pornographic texts, acts, prints, and other representations, noting the continuities between such different texts as Puritan satires on women's petitions to parliament in the 1640s and 50s and Wycherley's dedication to *The Plain-Dealer*. Uniting such disparate material is the tendency of English writers throughout the period to use the figure of the prostitute to define or mark other people and institutions (and sometimes themselves) as whores. The aims and goals of this "pornotropism" vary widely, but as Turner shows, the terms remain remarkably stable.

The source of most pornographic motifs is Italy, so Turner starts there. Texts like Ferrante Pallavicino's *La retorica delle puttane* (Englished as *The Whore's Rhetoric*) establish the two paradigms of the prostitute that recur throughout seventeenth-century "pornographia": the noble courtesan (*cortegiana honesta*) and the common whore (*puttane errante*). While both are types of prostitutes, the former particularly troubles class and gender boundaries with her pretensions to honor, riches, and rhetorical sophistication. If the binary system of classifying women distinguishes only between the chaste and the unchaste, the honorable and the infamous, then what does one do with an oxymoron like the noble courtesan?

This figure presents a dilemma not just in terms of literary representation, but also in actual fact, given the ennobling of some of Charles II's mistresses. It suggests a graduated system of sexual categorizing that is incompatible with the binary. This presented a problem for women because the figure of the noble courtesan could be invoked to describe any woman with pretensions to honor or agency: any active woman is a whore. Turner convincingly shows that female social action is not just a theme of libertine literature in the seventeenth century, but is "its motive and core" (xvi). The desire to mark active women as whores is one of the animating principles of "pornographia." Indeed, women faced a

further problem of sexual representation because the binary system could trump the graduated at any time. Using an unfortunately mixed metaphor, Turner explains: "The simple designation *whore*, then cuts through this aura of paradoxical qualification and nails the errant woman in the coffin of abjection" (8). The result is a rhetorical instability that could be exploited to bring the highest down to the level of the lowest.

The figures of the wandering whore and the noble courtesan introduce a high/low tension that is at the heart of "pornographia," whether it concerns the actions of female whores or male whoremongers. Is a Skimmington ride a sanctioned expression of moral disapprobation of errant sexuality, or is it an excuse for the display of prurient symbols and the release of sexual energy? Is Rochester's "mannerly obscenity" a strategic and privileged appropriation of low-class debauchery, or is it evidence of a breakdown between the high and the low? Are the apprentice riots of 1668 an assault on the many common whores of London, or do they actually aim at the noble courtesans at Whitehall? Specific answers to questions like these are, of course, impossible, but Turner is not much interested in them anyway. He is more interested in linking the supposedly high libertinism of Charles II's court to the "low-libertine" practices that persist throughout the period.

Among the most valuable sections of the book are chapters two and three. Drawing on the work of social historians like Martin Ingram, Turner analyzes the semiotics and rhetoric of the subculture of sexual "festive violence" in Chapter Two. He convincingly shows urban and elite participation in a subculture that is conventionally thought of as exclusively plebian and rural. Whether it be the actual mingling of classes in a designated "zone of misrule" like Bartholomew Fair or the high literary appropriation of a low-libertine practice like the charivari, the high and the low mingle promiscuously. In chapter three, he looks at "porno-political" writing that addresses political concerns in sexual terms, explaining that during times of crisis, "the division between sexual and national politics dwindles away, and figurative correspondences become literal" (76). As sexual behavior becomes politicized, so does

political behavior become sexualized. Female political action during the Commonwealth, such as petitions to Parliament, is ridiculed as a form of (manly) sexual aggression while male rulers are too sexually promiscuous, and therefore effeminate. As a result, writers as different in their politics as Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Hutchinson, and John Hall all “link the chaos of gender-confusion directly to political events” and worry that “the world is now dominated by lady-like tyrants of both sexes” (112).

The chief virtue of *Libertines and Radicals* is its comprehensive scope. By casting so wide a net in terms of years covered and types of representations considered, Turner reveals a remarkable continuity in sexual and literary culture between decades that seem to be fundamentally different on these very grounds. I think it would be very difficult to discuss the upper class courtesan and libertine after 1660 without taking into account the connections Turner makes between these Restoration figures and their pre-1660 antecedents. In that sense, then, “pornographia” is a term that usefully unifies cultural practices and periods that are usually kept apart. I’m less convinced that some of Turner’s other neologisms are of much use, such as “pornosphere” (175), “pornotopian” (202), and “pornocracy” (255). If he sometimes strains verbally, he also stretches some of his claims a bit. Is “Cinderalla” really a cognate of “Fuckadilla” from *Sodom* (10)? And was Edward Kynaston a “transgendered” actor (216) or just an occasionally transvestite one? The discussion of plays like *The Rover* and *The Country Wife* are surprisingly readerly and untheatrical for a book that considers gesture to be equivalent to text and calls Rochester a “performance-artist” (233). And a quick look at the English Short Title Catalogue reveals that the 1684 *Parliament of Women* does not bring “to a sticky end a long tradition of imagining such female gatherings” (265). There are such publications in 1685, 1686, 1708, 1710, and 1750.