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"THE SPLENDOUR OF OUR GOLDEN AGE"

The Duchess of Mazarin and Epicurean Voluptuousness in Late Stuart England

James E. Evans

Writing at the end of Queen Anne's reign, Theophilus Lucas profiled only one woman in *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the Most Famous Gamesters* (1714), a scandal-filled account spanning fifty years after the Restoration: Hortense Mancini, Duchess of Mazarin. He situates her transgressions in a life "lived to the height of voluptuousness in all degrees."¹ While Lucas displays this excess as an example of the corrupt past, Mazarin's fellow exile and friend

¹ *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the Most Famous Gamesters and Celebrated Sharpers in the Reigns of Charles II, James II, William III, and Queen Anne*, rpt. in *Games and Gamesters of the Restoration*, intro. Cyril Hughes Hartmann (London: Routledge, 1930), 250.

Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Évremond evaluates her life in language that echoes his estimate of Petronius as a “nice and learned Artist in the Science of Voluptuousness.”² Their perspectives draw on the discourse about Mazarin that began shortly after her arrival in London, when such observers as John Evelyn, Edmund Waller, the Earl of Rochester, and the Earl of Dorset described her, all but Waller critically; late in her life and after her death Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley wrote favorably about her, while Mary Astell expressed disapproval, but sympathy. For most authors Mazarin epitomized the corruption of the Carolean court; for a few others her conduct signified the desires of an independent woman of taste. Their estimates of Mazarin parallel the period’s discussion of voluptuousness, which I will describe as it was understood by proponents and critics alike to be a term with classical implications. For all, whatever their point of view, Mazarin embodied the kinds of dangerous or attractive manifestations of philosophical and “real life” voluptuousness that were associated both with Epicurean tranquility and libertine frenzy. According to Natania Meeker, the concept of *voluptas* caused interpretive problems from its Roman origins until the Enlightenment: “Despite its overwhelming significance for Epicureanism as both lived practice and materialist theory, the centrality of pleasure...to Epicurean philosophy has conventionally represented the aspect of the doctrine most vulnerable to critical misreading.”³ When the facts of her life and the politics of the English court were added to this problem, it is no wonder that Mazarin became so controversial. This essay, then, considers how Mazarin became a powerful cultural symbol of the Epicurean voluptuary in late Stuart England, whether, as for Saint-Évremond, an embodiment of refinement, or, as to Lucas, the incarnation of vice.

Born in Rome in 1646 of a distinguished family, Hortense Mancini was brought up in the French court. When she was fourteen, her uncle, Cardinal Mazarin, declared her his heir and arranged her marriage to a much older nobleman, the Marquis de Meilleraye, who, as the Duke of Mazarin, became one of Europe’s wealthiest men. Although he proved to be a domestic tyrant and a religious fanatic, his young wife stayed with him for seven years and bore several children. Unable to obtain a legal separation, she fled in 1668 to Italy, and following eight scandal-filled years, she left the continent for

² “The Life of Petronius Arbiter,” in *The Satirical Works of Titus Petronius Arbiter, in Prose and Verse* (London, 1708), iv.

³ *Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary Materialism in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 22.

England, where she became a mistress of King Charles II. He gave her a sizable pension, and his brother, the Duke of York, loaned her a house in St. James's Park, which became a center for sexual intrigue and gambling. During the less hospitable monarchy of William III, she rented a house in Chelsea, where she resided until her death in 1699. Soon after her arrival in London, an account of her adventurous life, translated as *The Memoires of the Dutchesse Mazarin*, was published. In it we are told that circumstances prevented her from achieving "the chief Glory of a Woman...not making her self to be publicly talked of."⁴ While this book added to Mazarin's celebrity, the public spectacle of her life in exile soon captured more attention. Authors were less interested in her past than in the ways it affected her English present.

The diarist Evelyn noted the arrival of "the famous beauty & errant lady the *Dutchesse of Mazarine*" immediately. When she died twenty-three years later, he described her as "an extraordinary Beauty & Witt, but dissolute, & impatient of Matrimonial restraint." While her unwillingness to accept "restraint" would seem more favorable to some interpreters, as a libertine pursuit of freedom, it could only lead Evelyn to judge her severely. If she was "errant," in the sense of wandering, this was moral as well as physical, a matter of "error." Evelyn included Mazarin in his description of an evening at Whitehall Palace in February 1685, just before the King's death. In this passage she has a central position in the Carolean court, as a figure of luxury, a term synonymous with voluptuousness in the Restoration.

I am never to forget the unexpressable luxury, & prophanesse, gaming, & all dissolution, and as it were total forgetfullnesse of God (it being Sunday Evening) which this day sennight, I was witnesse of; the King, sitting & toying with his Concubines Portsmouth, Cleaveland, & Mazarine: etc: A french boy singing love songs, in that glorious Gallery, whilst about 20 of the great Courtiers & other dissolute persons were at Basset round a large

⁴ *The Memoires of the Dutchesse Mazarine* (London, 1676), 2. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith points out that Mazarin and her sister are among "the first instances in France of women publishing their life stories" ("Publishing the Lives of Hortense and Marie Mancini," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995], 32). Goldsmith argues that Mazarin's memoirs "read more like a novel than a historical account" because of the influence of her friend Madame de Villadie's novel (33). On the other hand, Alison Conway declares the book to be "epistolary fiction," written by César Vichard de St-Réal ("The Protestant Cause and a Protestant Whore: Aphra Behn's *Love-letters*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25 [2001]: 1).

table, a bank of at least 2000 in Gold before them, upon which two Gent: that were with me made reflexions with astonishment, it being a sceane of uttmost vanity; and surely as they thought would never have an End: six days after was all in the dust.⁵

Susan Shifrin calls Evelyn's description an example of "the rhetorical 'si(gh)ting'" of women, which pictures them "as transgressive in their natures and in the power they wielded over their monarch."⁶ In one sense, her transgressions are very predictable, for, as Ros Ballaster writes, "The figure of woman functions as a 'sign' of a dangerous excess" since "the earliest representations of luxury." In a statement pertinent to Evelyn's passage, she adds, "Early modern English representations of a feminine luxury also associate her with 'foreignness,' most often French or Ottoman, the two cultures of the period with powerful and magnificent courts."⁷ On this memorable Whitehall evening the presence of Mazarin (along with the Duchess of Portsmouth, also French, a "french boy," who was Mazarin's page, and a French game), foregrounds the "foreignness" that so troubled some other courtiers.

According to John Spurr, in the "eroticized institution" that was the Carolean court, writers of "coterie verse, designed...to be enjoyed by the small and self-regarding circle of courtiers and hangers-on" focused especially on the foreign mistresses; these poets' satires "converge in their portrayal of Charles II as an impotent, effeminate, slave to lust."⁸ For them, the King's frenzied voluptuousness weakened the nation; but politically they could more easily attach blame to Mazarin and other mistresses as cause or symptom of the problem, especially in their displays of unchecked voluptuousness. Among early examples of courtiers' scrutiny of Mazarin are two poems on the rivalry of the beautiful new arrival with other royal mistresses, Waller's "The Triple Combat" and Rochester's "Dialogue." The former shares the more

⁵ *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 4: 97, 413–14; 5: 330.

⁶ "At the end of the Walk by Madam Mazarines Lodgings: Si(gh)ting the Transgressive Woman in Accounts of the Restoration Court," in *Women as Sites of Culture: Women's Roles in Cultural Formation from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Shifrin (London: Ashgate, 2002), 195.

⁷ "Performing *Roxane*: The Oriental Woman as the Sign of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century Fictions," in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, eds. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 165.

⁸ *England in the 1670s: "This Masquerading Age"* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 197, 198, 209.

positive tone of his friend Saint-Évremond's subsequent writings about her, while the latter evidences the lewd attack characteristic of many court satires. Waller's couplets introduce the "new invader":

When through the world fair Mazarin had run,
Bright as her fellow-traveller, the sun,
Hither at length the Roman eagle flies,
As the last triumph of her conquering eyes.

The simile that follows from the adjectives "fair" and "bright" makes a virtue of her roving, rather than viewing it as a wife's transgression; the eagle is an image of freedom. In Waller's gentle mock heroic verses Mazarin then confronts the Duchess of Portsmouth: "Venus had been an equal friend to both, / And victory to declare herself seems loth." When a third combatant, presumably the Duchess of Cleveland, enters, "Love" declines to choose among them. The poem concludes with an implicit tribute to an era of voluptuousness, "the splendour of our golden age": "Where Love gives law, Beauty the sceptre sways, / And, uncompelled, the happy world obeys." While glancing at criticism of Charles for subordinating himself to his mistresses, the poem wittily deflects this fault. The "sweet" Waller, after all, was a favorite court poet, quoted by stage libertines like Dorimant in Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode*.

In "Dialogue" Rochester expresses a more sardonic perspective. His poem features four speakers, the royal mistresses Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn, the King, and the People, each of whom speaks a quatrain. Nell attacks Portsmouth and declares of the other French Catholic, "Mazarin may kiss mine arse." Portsmouth asks that the "great whore Mazarin be damned." While the King doesn't mention Mazarin, the People have a final word about "that new pretender" and her court sponsor.¹⁰ No longer figured as an elegant rivalry, the competition among mistresses becomes the occasion for obscene abuse. Such poetry, James Grantham Turner argues, transforms the popular mockery of "over-assertive 'whores,'" as "low-libertine elements work themselves upward" into the more elite Court culture. However, he concludes, "such slumming scenes still enforce rather than dissolve social hierarchy."¹¹

⁹ *The Poems of Edmund Waller*, ed. G. Thorn Drury (London: Routledge, 1893), 2: 77, 78.

¹⁰ *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 129, 130.

¹¹ *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 245, 247.

In Rochester's poem, the people's voice restates one of the king's proper roles: "Now heavens preserve our faith's defender / From Paris plots and Roman cunt."¹² Mazarin's threat also manifests the Protestant rhetoric that Alison Conway describes in other contexts: "That Charles II's mistresses were almost all Catholic gave a singular significance to perceptions of the threat of the Whore of Babylon—i.e., the Roman Catholic Church—to the monarch's interests, personal and public."¹³ Rochester's lines are a nasty version of such rhetoric.

His fellow courtier, Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset may have written two other obscene satires that circulated a few years after Mazarin's initial prominence. In "Colin" (1679), published at a time when the Popish Plot increased apprehension about the King's Catholic ties, a shepherd visits Whitehall and observes an allegedly discredited mistress.

Then in came dowdy Mazarin,
That foreign antiquated quean,
Who soon was told the King no more
Would deal with an intriguing whore:
That she already had about her
Too good an *equipage de foutre*;
Nor was our monarch such a cully
To bear a Moor, and swingeing bully.¹⁴

Unlike Rochester's poem, "Colin" represents the king as having properly rejected the voluptuous excesses of the "foreign" and therefore "intriguing" Mazarin, who possesses her own sexual retinue; Dorset ridicules this excess by using her own language against her in an obscene French pun. In "Rochester's Farewell" (1680), also possibly by Dorset and published in the year of Rochester's death, the eponymous speaker takes leave of court, a "dull farce...Where rogues, whores, bawds all the chief actors are." Midway through the poem he rails at Mazarin's "experience'd and well-travel'd lust." Without Waller's wit, this satire mocks her roving and compares the "imperial whore" to Alexander the Great.

¹² Rochester, *Complete Poems*, 130.

¹³ Conway, "Protestant Cause," 4.

¹⁴ *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714, Volume 2: 1678-1681*, ed. Elias F. Mengel, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 172.

Thou world of lewdness, to whose boundless womb
All climes, all countries do with tribute come;
Thou sea of lust, that never ebb dost know,
Whither the rivers of all nations flow.

Dorset thus lampoons the sexual conqueror, whose fluids threaten to overwhelm the nation, and he calls the thirty-four-year old duchess as a "monstrous thing" for transgressions unbecoming "old age."¹⁵ Examining texts by and about the prostitute, Vivien Jones remarks that "her body both exemplifies and speaks back to the use of the figure of the prostitute as sign of luxury and excess."¹⁶ Her words apply well to the "imperial whore" Mazarin, whose voluptuous life these courtiers attacked so vehemently as part of their political agenda.

One recurrent image in these court satires, the threat of the whore triumphing over the monarch, also had historical and dramatic precedent in the figure of Cleopatra, an analogy to which Saint-Évremond calls attention in defending Mazarin. For example, two plays first performed during the season after her arrival, John Dryden's *All for Love* and Sir Charles Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*, both represent Cleopatra's Egyptian voluptuousness and Antony's "failure to subordinate pleasure to power."¹⁷ Richard Braverman asserts that Sedley's play expresses, "through the coded idiom of parallel history," the opposition party's anti-French sentiment, and he suggests that the Duchess of Portsmouth was its likely target.¹⁸ Given the instability of such

¹⁵ *Poems on Affairs of State*, 2: 218, 223, 224, 225. The same scathing tone marks brief references to Mazarin in other published poems. Among these are Andrew Marvell's "A Dialogue between the Two Horses" (1680), Sir Roger Martin's "Advice, or a Heroic Epistle to Mr. Fr. Villiers" (1683), Robert Julian's "Julian's Farewell to the Muses" (1685), and three anonymous poems, "Queries" (1679), "Satire on Old Rowley" (1680), and "The Ladies' March" (1681). In addition, "Astrea's Book for Songs and Satyrs," a commonplace book associated with Behn, includes several more attacks; in one Mazarin is "presiding over a Bartholomew Fair economy of meat and sperm, extracting sexual liquid from a whole 'Crew' of lovers" (Turner, *Libertinism*, 244–45).

¹⁶ "Luxury, Satire and Prostitute Narratives," in Berg and Eger, *Luxury*, 178.

¹⁷ Jessica Munns, "Images of Monarchy on the Restoration Stage," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 118.

¹⁸ *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 136, 138. Shifrin describes a famous portrait of Mazarin as "Cleopatra with the pearl," as signifying her being "a transgressor of gender boundaries, ranging into the territories given exclusively to male prerogative." Completed in Italy before Mazarin came to London, the painting served as "an iconographical precedent for

parallels, theatergoers could also have applied this analogy to the newcomer Mazarin. Similarly, readers could have connected Dryden's portrayal of Antony and Cleopatra (for example, when a character declares that she "hath quite unman'd him" and transformed him into "a Woman's Toy") to Charles and Mazarin without difficulty.¹⁹

Having such interpretive possibilities in mind, Saint-Évremond explicitly distinguishes Mazarin from Cleopatra, "*whose Actions, Life and Rage*" were "*Subjects of the Tragick Stage*." Gallantly, he deconstructs the parallel:

Caesar and Anthony would ne'er have strove
For a base, false, perfidious Woman's Love;
Had they but known your Charms, your Beauty seen,
You would have sav'd their Lives, and been their only Queen!

Rather than portraying voluptuousness as a threat, either because of its "Rage" or its foreign associations, as the playwrights and court satirists had done, Saint-Évremond deploys the complimentary style of his friend Waller. He promises to tell others "*That all your Lovers nothing less desire, / Than on your Lips their panting Soul's t'expire*."²⁰ Elizabeth C. Goldsmith points out that the much older Saint-Évremond was Mazarin's "most outspoken admirer," who often made "a philosophical virtue" of her "itinerant life-style." His works allowed sympathetic readers to see that she "exercised her right to freedom and showed others the kind of society that such freedom generates."²¹ This society he closely associated with Epicurean voluptuousness, properly understood.

Saint-Évremond wrote numerous poems to Mazarin, many of which were soon translated and published in England. "The Fragment of an Idyl set to Musick," in which the author and three shepherds praise "Divine *Hortensia*," provides a perspective on gambling as one part of her voluptuous life. In a Waller-like Chorus the speakers celebrate "The Glory of her conquering Charms" and agree that her "Noblest Victory" is "conquering of our Hearts." The shepherds' only criticism is Mazarin's addiction to the fashion-

several other portraits of her that appear to have found their way into English collections during her lifetime or shortly thereafter" ("At the end of the Walk," 196-97).

¹⁹ *All for Love*, in John Dryden, *Four Tragedies*, eds. L. A. Beaurline and Fredson Bowers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 213. Antony later laments the disgrace of "inglorious ease" arising from "My careless dayes, and my luxurious nights" (217).

²⁰ *The Posthumous Works of Mr. De St. Evremont* (London, 1705), 3: 42, 43, 47.

²¹ Goldsmith, "Publishing the Lives," 41.

able card game basset. Saint-Évremond gives his friend voice to inform her admirers that a renowned gambler has arrived to entertain her.

Author and Songsters, Friends and Lovers too,
I thank you, Sirs, and bid you all adieu.
Baucher is come, and I this Place must quit,
'Tis he alone can cure my Melancholly Fit.

Since her desire scripts this occasion, a disappointed Thyrsis laments that Mazarin "To *Basset* gives her Heart and charming Eyes."²² This youthful shepherd's replacement by cards was not an uncommon complaint among courtiers. For example, *Etherege* in "Song of Basset" declares that love has been betrayed by a "bewitching Game" and states:

The Time, which should be kindly lent
To Plays and witty Men,
In waiting for a Knave is spent,
Or wishing for a Ten.²³

This recurrent trope gently mocks a lapse in the Epicurean lives of court women by evoking one of the risks involved. In an essay on Epicurus, Saint-Évremond describes the crucial problem in enjoying pleasures: "we must be their *Masters*, and not their *Slaves*; we must not grow *impatient* for 'em, nor be cast down for their loss."²⁴ For Mazarin, basset sometimes became a distracting master, overcoming the Epicurean balance her admirer praises elsewhere.

Saint-Évremond's fullest presentation of his friend's voluptuousness appears in "A Funeral Oration of the Dutchess of Mazarin," an essay written at her request and published fifteen years before her death. It includes this panegyric to refute criticism of her libertine freedom.

²² Saint-Évremond, *Posthumous Works*, 3: 229, 232. The volume also includes these poems: "One the Dutchess of Mazarine's sore Eyes," "The Portraiture of Madam Mazarine," "Being a Dialogue on the Sickness of the Dutchess of Mazarine, between the Old Man, and Death," "To Madam Mazarine upon her Recovery," and "On the Death of Madam the Dutchess of Mazarine."

²³ *Restoration Carnival: Five Courtier Poets*, ed. Vivian De Sola Pinto (London: Folio Society, 1954), 100.

²⁴ *Miscellanea: or Various Discourses*, trans. Ferrand Spence (London, 1686), 75.

All Climes and Countries do adore her,
 Fresh Triumphs on her Beauties wait.
 The World unjustly calls her Rover,
 She only views the Limits of her State.

Italy, Saint-Évremond asserts, owes to her a softening of its manners, a preview of the refinement she brought to England: "Tis she, who has introduced a sweet and innocent Liberty; who has rendered Conversation more agreeable, and the Pleasure more pure and delicate." Writing about her London life, he represents Mazarin's house as a model: "The greatest Freedom in the World is to be seen there, and an equal Discretion: Every one is more commodiously used there than at Home; and more respectfully than at Court." The adjectives of praise—"sweet," "agreeable," "delicate," "equal"—signify success in living the Epicurean life. Saint-Évremond then admires the "Diversion" of gambling and describes the players: "You can neither discover in their Faces the Fear of Losing, nor a Concern for what is lost. Some of them are so disinterested, that they are reproach'd for rejoicing at their own Losing, and afflicting themselves when they are Winning."²⁵ This passage assumes that gambling is suitable recreation when it is play without concern for monetary gain or loss. Mazarin's "disinterested" gamblers demonstrate the necessary tranquility, a calm of mind without passionate display, which characterizes a proper understanding of Epicurean pleasures.

Not needing to justify Mazarin's gambling, Saint-Évremond connects it to a view of voluptuousness as disciplined refinement. Games at her house are

follow'd by the best Repasts in the World. . . . Even the Common Meats become rare by the exquisite Relish, which is bestowed upon them. 'Tis not such a Plenty as may make us fear a Dissipation; 'tis not a Frugality that shews either Avarice or Penury. The Management of her House is not so niggard and sullen, as to content it self meerly with satisfying the Necessities of Life, and afford nothing to the Pleasures of it. She loves a good Order that furnishes every thing that can be desired, and that wisely manages the Use of it, so that nothing may be wanting.²⁶

²⁵ *The Works of Monsieur De St. Evremond, Made English from the French Original* (London, 1714), 2: 243, 249.

²⁶ *Works*, 2: 249-50.

The balance between "Dissipation" and "Frugality" testifies to Mazarin's wise love of "Order." The "Common" becomes "exquisite" because she is not content with the necessary, but, as a skillful manager, "furnishes" more for her guests.

In a related work Saint-Évremond praises Petronious Arbiter, the famous disciple of Epicurus, as a classical example of such enjoyment. He describes Petronius's style of living this way:

His House was the Rendezvous of the better sort of the People of Rome: He pass'd away his time agreeably with those that visited him, and with others was celebrated for *Intrigues*.... One might then represent him in a continual exercise of Wit in Conversation, in the most charming Pleasures of the Table, publick Sights, Gaming, and in spending his Estate, not like a Prodigal and Debauchee, but like a nice and learned Artist in the Science of Voluptuousness.²⁷

The resemblance between the Petronius and Mazarin house—their conversation, luxury, and gambling—is notable. As an early modern artist of the voluptuous, Mazarin embodies the philosophy practiced centuries earlier by a true follower of Epicurus.

When Samuel Johnson later defined the word *voluptuousness*, he linked it to traditional judgments of vice: "Luxuriousness; addictedness to excess of pleasure." One of his illustrative quotations, taken from Restoration divine Robert South, chaplain to the Duke of York (later James II), declaims: "These sons of Epicurus, for *voluptuousness* and irreligion, must pass for the only wits of the age."²⁸ South's disapproval notwithstanding, some wits sought to restore a more positive view of Epicurus and of voluptuousness as the central feature of his philosophy. Notably, in "Epicurus His Morals" Saint-Évremond defends the philosopher from both late seventeenth-century detractors and false disciples. His position allows him to declare that "our *Philosopher*, following the *Institutions of Nature*, pronounces, that the *voluptuous Life* is the *end of Man*."²⁹

Saint-Évremond's essay demonstrates the "philosophical libertinism," which, according to Harold Weber, insists on "the crucial distinction between the frenzied pursuit of pleasure and its calm enjoyment." During the

²⁷ "Life of Petronius Arbiter," iv.

²⁸ *A Dictionary of the English Language on CD-ROM: The First and Fourth Editions*, ed. Anne McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁹ *Miscellanea*, 120.

Restoration "a tranquility of just appreciation," as described and recommended by Epicurus, became an alternative to the more frenzied pleasure-seeking associated with libertines like Rochester.³⁰ However, Epicurus's distinction between these two kinds of pleasure, the static and the kinetic, continued to vex commentators in the Restoration and after. Static pleasure, which he advocates, is a "difficult concept," according to Julia Annas, who defines it as follows: "*Ataxaria*, then, will be pleasure which is 'static,' not in being a state of arrested movement but in being the pleasure of a state of functioning in which there is no interference." Yet such pleasure is also "natural," for it is "normal untrammelled activity."³¹ Saint-Évremond describes static pleasure as "*possessing absolutely Peace and Repose of Mind*." He goes on to say of Epicurus:

Hereat are levelled all his *Precepts*; here you meet with *pleasure*, and here it is indeed, we ought to seek it, not in the *satisfaction* of the *senses*, nor in the *emotion* of the *Appetites*. It is too *pure* to depend on the *body*, it depends on the *Intellectual* part: *reason* is its *Mistress*, reason its rule, the *senses* are only its *Ministers*. And besides, what *delights* we may hope for in indulging a *revelling Palate*, in the *Pleasures* of the *sight*, in *Perfumes* and *Musick*, if we do not *approach* those things with a calm mind, we shall be *deceived*, we shall fall under the delusion of a *false joy*, and take the *shadow* of Pleasure for its *real body*.³²

While his description does not deny the pleasures of eye, ear, nose, and tongue, he situates them in a context in which one must differentiate the true body from the false.

The effort of writers to interpret Mazarin's significance over a forty-year period depends, to some extent, on responses to such rehabilitation of Epicurean voluptuousness. Even if they accepted this philosopher's ideas rather than more conventional morality, commentators could accuse Mazarin of indulging in luxury and excess, of pursuing kinetic rather than static pleasure. Saint-Évremond's "Mistress" trope is especially interesting in this context. For the English courtiers who first wrote about her, with one exception, she did

³⁰ *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 94.

³¹ "Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness," *Philosophical Topics* 15 (1987): 8-9.

³² *Miscellanea*, 79-80.

not make reason her mistress, but merely served as mistress to the King's senses. It remained for Saint-Évremond to reinterpret her life just as he defended Epicurean ideas from detractors. Like him, Behn and Manley could view her life positively and accept her pursuit of pleasure.

Both these women writers link Mazarin to their amatory fiction, a genre that assimilated, often without much criticism, aspects of voluptuousness. In Behn's Dedication to Mazarin of *The History of the Nun, or, The Fair Vow Breaker* (1689), she regrets that her status prevented her from being able "to view eternally that lovely Person, and here that surprizing Wit." Unlike conventional dedications to aristocrats, this one allows Behn to identify with a figure maligned for her voluptuous life. Unlike court satirists' obscene ridicule, however, her survey of court women leads her to praise Mazarin's "Grace and Majesty. . . mix'd with an irresistible Air of Sweetness, Generosity, and Wit." As she itemizes qualities like those described by Saint-Évremond in "A Funeral Oration," Behn also offers the dedicatee her prose version of a Waller-like tribute:

I was impatient for an Opportunity, to tell Your Grace, how infinitely one of Your own Sex ador'd You, and that, among all the numerous Conquest, Your Grace has made over the Hearts of Men, Your Grace had not subdu'd a more intire Slave.³³

Mazarin's story surely appealed to the author of *The Rover* (1677), a comedy first performed during the year after her arrival in England. While Behn did not write "parallel history" in Braverman's sense, one of her principal characters was a beautiful, independent Italian courtesan, Angellica Bianca, with whose public display Behn aligned her professional life in the play's Postscript. Far from being a problem for Behn, roving was a sign of a woman's agency. Like one of her earliest dedications—of *The Feigned Courtesans* to Nell Gwyn—this in *History of the Nun* asserts Behn's "sense of briefly occupying an independent space between the ordered worlds of aristocratic patronage and professional letters," which permits her to "flout the conventions

³³ *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 3: 208. Mary Ann O'Donnell calls attention to the discrepancy between Behn's "passionate dedication" and the "vicious pictures" of Mazarin in the commonplace book associated with the author; she attributes this to Behn's "sense of being blocked from the centre of political and social power" ("Private Jottings, Public Utterances: Aphra Behn's Published Writings and Her Commonplace Book," in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Todd [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 294, 295).

of the *ancien régime*.”³⁴ In this late phase of her career, writing fiction after much success as a Carolean playwright, Behn invokes a figure who, following the death of Charles II, was also experiencing a less prominent and less prosperous period in her life. Mazarin, on the other hand, provides a counter-example to the fictional female libertine’s passionate excess, a frenzied pursuit that leads her to break her religious vows and murder two husbands. If Mazarin epitomized Epicurean voluptuousness, properly understood, Behn’s fictional protagonist Isabella did not. Yet, as Warren Chernaik points out, even Isabella’s murderous life follows introductory paragraphs that “comprise a feminist protest against the patriarchal organisation of society, with its ritualised traffic in women.”³⁵ Associating Mazarin with this protest made sense, given the Duke’s relentless claim of authority over his wife, a claim to which even the moralistic Astell objects.

Twenty-five years later, in the Introduction to her fictionalized autobiography, *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714), Manley evokes the memory of Mazarin in the course of recounting her own life. Katherine Zelinsky suggests that Manley “may have felt both a personal and a literary bond with the disreputable duchess, who likewise engaged in the process of self-fashioning” in her *Memoirs*. Speaking in the complimentary style of Waller, Chevalier D’Aumont introduces Mazarin into this narrative: “What youthful charmer of the sex ever pleased to that height, as did Madam the Dutchess of Mazarin, even to her death. . . . Were not all eyes, all hearts, devoted to her, even to the last?” Another character declares that “one night with Madam Mazarin made him happier, than the whole sex could do besides; which proceeded. . . from her being entirely mistress of the art of love.” Creating a parallel between the Duchess and the author, D’Aumont also identifies Rivella as an artist, who, through her amatory fiction, “carried the passion farther than could be readily conceived”; her work “informs us that we have in our composition, wherewith to taste sublime and transporting joys.”³⁶ As a symbol of the now distant Carolean court, Mazarin receives praise rather than the ridicule directed at

³⁴ Deborah C. Payne, “‘And Poets Shall by Patron-Princes Live’: Aphra Behn and Patronage,” in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660–1820*, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 114.

³⁵ *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 152. Chernaik’s analysis of Behn’s work suggest an interesting link between two praisers of Mazarin; Behn compliments Waller as the poet who “taught the benighted world ‘how to Love, and how to Write’” (170).

³⁶ *The Adventures of Rivella*, ed. Zelinsky (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1999), 45 n.1, 45–46, 44.

prominent court Whigs, enemies of the Stuart ethos, in Manley's best known work, *The New Atalantis* (1709).

Manley also refers to Mazarin in the *Pacquet of Letters*, a separate work appended to the English translation of a text by the French author Madame d'Aulnoy. *Memoirs of the English Court* (1695, translated 1707) promises to inform readers of "the most agreeable Adventures, and private Intreagues." D'Aulnoy praises Mazarin for "Charms, that render her the most agreeable of her Sex, which made her House the Rendezvous of all the Men of Wit and Quality, and the Scene of all the News of the Town, of Gaming, Entertainments, and all manner of Diversions."³⁷ Her word "Rendezvous" could recall Saint-Évremond's praise of Petronius or could evoke a more scandalous life. Shifrin suggests that references to Mazarin in the *Pacquet of Letters* are unambiguously negative, as when a gentleman meets his companion for an assignation "at the Rail that goes into St. James's Park, at the end of the Walk by Madam Mazarines Lodgings."³⁸ In writing this supplement to d'Aulnoy's *Memoirs*, Manley more likely took advantage of Mazarin's celebrity to experiment with settings for amatory fiction. Her later representation hardly registers disapproval.

On the other hand, Mary Astell in *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700) could not overlook or rationalize Mazarin's voluptuous conduct. As Ruth Perry remarks, "History could not have provided a better foil to studious and sober Astell than this flamboyant duchess," who lived only blocks from her in Chelsea. Astell became more cognizant of the details of her neighbor's story when her death renewed public interest and "An alert and enterprising bookseller. . .unearthed and translated the legal briefs of the celebrated lawsuit which her estranged husband, the duke, had instituted against her in order to have her extradited." According to Perry, Astell read these publications before composing her polemical essay.³⁹ Charles Hérard, the Duke of Mazarin's

³⁷ *Memoirs of the Court of England. In Two Parts* (London, 1707), 1, 2.

³⁸ Shifrin, "At the end of the Walk," 201; d'Aulnoy, *Memoirs*, 530. Ros Ballaster connects the *Pacquet*, which she attributes to Manley, with d'Aulnoy's importance as a precedent. "Manley's scandal fictions," she observes, "consistently address and rework the fiction of the French travel and scandal writer." Publishing her *Pacquet* with d'Aulnoy's *Memoirs* "not only increased Manley's association in the public mind with a woman writer famed for her epistolary gifts, but it was also a shrewd marketing venture" (*Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], 123, 125). Volume I of *The Selected Works of Delarivier Manley* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), includes the *Pacquet*.

³⁹ *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 151, 153.

lawyer, centered his brief on a husband's legal authority over his wife; so the Duchess's conduct in England became Hérard's justification for demanding her repatriation with her fortune. "Has Madam *Mazarin*," he asks, "since her Elopement, liv'd with that Modesty, and Retirement, that Decency requires of a Woman that is forc'd to quit her House, her Family, and Country, by domestick Discontents[?]" No, he answers: "Madam *Mazarin* left *France* to set up a Basset Table in *London*, to make her House a publick Ordinary for Gaming, and all the loose practices which Gaming draws after it." Judging such scandalous conduct, Hérard declares that Mazarin "made her House a publick Rendezvous for Gaming, Pleasure, and Gallantry: a new *Babylon*, where People of all Nations, Sects, and Tongues march'd confusedly together under the Standard of Luxury, and Fortune."⁴⁰ The repeated adjective "publick" identifies a focal point of his argument for late Stuart readers: that a life of voluptuous display does not square with Mazarin's stated position as the victim of domestic tyranny. His evocation of "the Standard of Luxury" identifies her English house with vice rather than refinement.

Astell, who read Mazarin's *Memoirs* as well as Hérard's brief, introduces her *Reflections* with the observation that "The Name of *Mazarine* is considerable enough to draw the Eyes of the Curious." When she makes the Duchess an example of the perils of marriage, she does so with reservations, stating that "one can't help wishing that so much Wit and Beauty, so much Politeness and Address, has been accompany'd and supported by more lasting Qualities." Accepting Hérard's criticism of Mazarin's life, but not his premises about marriage, Astell declares that readers "must blame her Conduct." However, she continues, the Duke's actions cannot "be justified," because of the "great Misfortunes" they caused Mazarin, "yok'd for Life to a disagreeable Person and Temper; to have Folly and Ignorance tyrannize over Wit and Sense." Astell regrets that Mazarin sought "Relief by such imprudent, not to say scandalous Methods...from the Gaieties of a Court, from Gaming and Courtship, from Rambling and odd Adventures, and the Amusements mixt Company affords."⁴¹ For Astell, the pleasures she criticizes were all of a piece, too excessive and too public to be moral, even if they fit an Epicurean model. The word "Adventures" has none of the positive connotations it possessed for Manley's Rivella. Unlike Manley or Behn,

⁴⁰ *The Arguments of Monsieur Herard, for Monsieur the Duke of Mazarin, against Madam the Dutchess of Mazarin, His Spouse* (London, 1699), 34, 41.

⁴¹ *The First English Feminist: Reflections Upon Marriage and Other Writings*, ed. Bridget Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 89, 90, 91.

Astell could not embrace such an independent woman, a rover who sought the freedom to satisfy her desires. Yet the fact that she began her essay with Mazarin's story conveys sympathy for a person whose wit and politeness, she believed, were tragically wasted.

To conclude, I return to Lucas's *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the Most Famous Gamesters*, which includes a brief characterization of Mazarin that recapitulates many aspects of late Stuart discourse about her. Already framed by the title's words with strongly negative connotations for women in the decade of *The Spectator*—intrigues, adventures, gamesters—this sketch immediately follows an account of her defender Saint-Évremond, whom it implicitly rebuts through this juxtaposition. Lucas describes Mazarin's flight to England, where being "mightily in favour with King Charles II. she lived to the height of voluptuousness in all degrees; and for gaming, her lodgings were more frequented than the Groom-Porters, in which she was as great a proficient as any at that time." The comparison of Mazarin's private house with a public gambling venue brings his representation in line with Hérard's brief, where her house resembles an ordinary, and separates his portrait from Saint-Évremond's apology for her life, where her residence demonstrates that she is a true disciple of Epicurus. Lucas also situates Mazarin in the company of the other royal mistresses in Rochester's poem: "witness her winning at Basset of Nell Gwin 1400 guineas in one night, and of the Dutchess of Portsmouth above 8000 £. in doing of which she exerted her utmost cunning, and had the greatest satisfaction, because they were her rivals." However, he has to acknowledge her artistry, skill, and fairness: "She would play as fair as any person, when she found her gamester play only upon the square, for she play'd so well that scarce any one could match her."⁴² For Lucas such praise cannot outweigh too numerous transgressions. His book seems designed to serve a cultural function similar to Manley's *The New Atalantis*, but with the opposite ideological spin, discrediting the recent past associated with voluptuous excess. To prepare England to embark on a Hanoverian era, his chronicling of twenty-six figures from the final Stuart monarchies linked their "adventures" to an outgoing royal line that the nation should not regret leaving behind.

Like Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire a century later, Mazarin became a powerful cultural symbol because she was one of the most visible transgressive women of her time. While the later Duchess was recently the

⁴² *Lives of the Gamesters*, 250.

subject of a complex biography by Amanda Foreman, Mazarin has been commemorated only briefly as a “siren-adventurer” in Betsy Prioleau’s *Seductress: Women Who Ravished the World and Their Lost Art of Love*.⁴³ However, in late Stuart England Mazarin’s status as a rover and voluptuary, by choice subject to chance and her own will, made her a figure to be denounced or mocked by most male writers who described her English life—Lucas, Evelyn, Rochester, Dorset, and the French lawyer Hérard. For them her voluptuousness was dangerous, both personally and politically. Even Astell, who deplored her husband’s tyranny and regretted her wasted talents, judged Mazarin’s conduct to be immoral. For a few writers—Saint-Évremond, Waller, Behn, and Manley—her voluptuousness approximated Epicurean understanding of pleasure rather than decadent excess, tranquility rather than luxury. These authors represent Mazarin, as the *Memoirs* had done, shaping her roving life in accordance with her desires. When Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger declare luxury to “the defining issue of the early modern period,” they call its discussion central to “debates over the nature and progress of society.”⁴⁴ Voluptuousness was an important aspect of this discourse, and the Duchess of Mazarin, a touchstone for early debates within it.

⁴³ *Seductress: Women Who Ravished the World and Their Lost Art of Love* (New York: Viking, 2003), 250–54. For Foreman, see *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (New York: Random House, 1999).

⁴⁴ “The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates,” in Berg and Eger, *Luxury*, 7.