

# Updating the Restoration Libertine in Tanika Gupta's Contemporary Adaptation of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*

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## Abstract

This paper analyses Tanika Gupta's contemporary version of William Wycherley's Restoration comedy, *The Country Wife*, particularly in terms of its treatment of the libertine character central to the genre described as 'sex' or 'marriage' comedy, popular during the 1660s and 1670s (Rosenthal 7-8). By resituating the play in contemporary multicultural London, Gupta enables a critique of contemporary gender and marital mores amongst young, ethnically-hybrid communities to emerge, problematising patriarchal, misogynist or aggressive versions of masculine identity, and asserting the right of individual men and women to choose their own marriage partners. However, she also gives place to the libertine ethos as it was valorised in early modern sex comedies. Critical debate concerning the social and moral implications of the libertine have remained active since the seventeenth century, with the libertine character generally interpreted as either a refreshing freedom-seeker or an anxious misogynist. While Wycherley's play celebrates but finally limits and condemns the efforts of the libertine to disrupt patriarchal social structures, returning the rebellious upper-class ladies to patriarchal authority, and condemning Horner to future (teputedly impotent) oblivion, Gupta's female libertines, Dolly and Daisy, remain fun-loving outsiders ready to embark on new adventures, while Hardeep/Horner succeeds in assisting the "country wife" to escape an unhappy marriage. Gupta's version of the play draws parallels between Restoration social debate – particularly concerning morality, marriage, patriarchy and class – and the ethnically charged debates concerning cultural identity, marriage and gender rights which dominate twenty-first century urban Britain.

**Keywords:** Restoration sex comedy, libertine, ethnicity, anomie, miscenation, marriage.

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## Özet

Bu çalışma Tanika Gupta'nın, William Wycherley'nin Restorasyon Komedi türü olan *The Country Wife* adlı oyununun, özellikle 1600 ve 1670'lerde popüler olan "cinsellik" veya "evlilik" komedisinin temelini oluşturan çapkın karakterini esas aldığı çağdaş versiyonunu inceler (Rosenthal 7-8). Bu oyunu, çok-kültürlü Londra'da yeniden canlandırarak, Gupta çağdaş genç melez topluluklardaki cinsiyet ve evlilik normlarını eleştirir, saldırgan ataerkil kadın düşmanına örnek erkek kimliklerini problematize eder ve kadın ve erkeklerin birey olarak eşlerini seçme hakkını vurgular. Aynı zamanda, erken dönem modern cinsellik komedilerindeki çapkınlık etosu üzerinde de durulmuştur. Çapkın karakterine, onyedinci yüzyıldan günümüze kadarki ahlaki ve sosyal yaklaşımlar, onu genellikle ya hoş bir özgürlük arayışçısı ya da tedirgin bir kadın düşmanı olarak değerlendirmiştir. Wycherley'nin oyunu çapkın karakterini onaylamakla beraber, onu sonunda ataerkil sosyal düzeni bozmaya kalkıştığı için suçlar ve isyankar üst-sınıf kadınlarını ataerkil otoriteye geri döndürüp, Homer'i de iktidarsızlıkla cezalandırırken, Gupta'nın Hardeep/Homer karakteri "köylü gelinin" mutsuz bir evlilikten kurtulmasını sağlar ve kadın çapkınları, Dolly ve Daisy, yeni serüvenlere açık zevk düşkünü yabancılar olarak kalırlar. Gupta'nın oyunu, Restorasyon döneminin - özellikle ahlak, evlilik, ataerkillik ve sınıf kavramları üzerine yoğunlaşan- sosyal tartışmaları ile, kendi oyununda ele aldığı yirmibirinci yüzyıl Londrası şehir hayatındaki etnik içerikli kültürel kimlik, evlilik ve cinsiyet hakları ile ilgili tartışmaları arasında paralellik kurar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Restoration dönemi cinsellik komedileri, çapkın, etnisite, ümitsizlik, maserasyon, evlilik.

This paper will examine Tanika Gupta's contemporary version of William Wycherley's bawdy Restoration classic, *The Country Wife*, a popular hit when it was first performed in 1675. Contemporary adaptations of canonical classics, especially when the original play is transposed to a different ethnic environment, often represent post-colonial responses to imperialist discourse: a form of "counter-discourse [which] seeks to deconstruct significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text, to release its stranglehold on representation, and, by implication, to intervene in social conditioning" (Gilbert and Tompkins 16). However, as Schaffeld has noted, canonical counter-discourse is only one possible post-colonial response to the canon: the original text may offer itself to "an oppositional reading that receives its political update indirectly, i.e. from the contextual frame of external political communication" (2).

Gupta's version, written and performed in 2004, appropriates Wycherley's play and casts it into colloquial urban English. However, by resituating the play in a contemporary urban location Gupta challenges the sense of distance a modern audience would normally perceive between itself and the world of a Restoration comedy, forcing it to interpret the play through contemporary, rather than early modern mores. Rather than representing an oppositional, 'ethnic' reading of Wycherley's play, Gupta transposes Restoration debate concerning patriarchal authority, gender and marriage to a modern environment in which men and women frequently try the social and cultural boundaries that have been erected between them.

This paper will focus on Gupta's treatment of the libertine ethos central to Restoration comedy. The 'libertine' or 'rake' was associated with a particular lifestyle and attitude associated with the recent disruptions of the civil wars and the dying days of absolute monarchy. The court of Charles II during the 1660s and 1670s was famous for its lax morals and the wild behaviour of the king and his close companions, the "merry gang" (Dobree 13). As Duncan has noted, the values of the libertine in Restoration drama were deliberately intended to mirror those of the "genial", fun-loving king, whose commitment to pleasure was regarded as a justifiable response to the hypocritical moral repression which royalists associated with the puritan regime during the Interregnum (299-312).<sup>1</sup> Dramatists, designing their work to appeal to the court, often depicted libertines as loyalist but outlaw figures, whose wit and breeding have survived the loss of their family's fortunes during the wars, and subsequently allowed them to out-manoeuvre the emergent bourgeois 'cits' (citizens). In Wycherley's play, Horner is a libertine who has recently returned from the Continent and decides to trick the powerful men of the town by pretending to be impotent after receiving a mercury cure for venereal disease:

Shy Husbands and Keepers,  
like old Rooks are not to be cheated, but by a new unpractis'd  
trick; false friendship will pass now no more than  
false dice upon 'em, no, not in the City. (Wycherley, Act 1, scene 1, p. 2)

Horner's new reputation as a kind of eunuch enables him to seduce the naïve Margery Pinchwife (the "country wife"), as well as the upper class wife and sister of the pompous courtier, Sir Jasper Fidget.

According to Thompson, critics of *The Country Wife* have traditionally been divided between those who see its hero as a generous, liberating "helper of nature...striving to release himself and others from corrupt social restraints on their pleasure and freedom,"<sup>2</sup> and those who regard him as a selfish, cynical and (self) destructive individualist, a "Machiavel in love", who is hostile, aggressive and fearful of women (Thompson 100).<sup>3</sup> Thompson has read the play in terms of seventeenth-century misogynist discourse: in choosing a wife whom he regards as "plain, open, silly, and fit for slave[ry]" (Act 4, scene 2), Pinchwife "interpret[s] intellectual and physical bondage as virtue and fidelity" (Thompson 105). Thompson also stresses the homosocial values promoted throughout the play, which revive classical, medieval and Renaissance conceptions of gender difference

<sup>1</sup> See also Novak 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> For the celebratory view of the libertine Thompson cites Birdsall 134-36, 156; Freedman 424 and Weber ("The Rake-Hero"): 147 (Thompson, n.1, 100); also see Weber, "Horner and His Women of Honour", discussed below.

<sup>3</sup> Critics supporting this view include David M. Vieth, "Wycherley's *The Country Wife*: An Anatomy of Masculinity." *PLL* 2 (1966): 346, and Anthony Kaufman, "Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and the Don Juan Character." *FC* 9 (1975-76): 220-225 (Thompson, 100 n. 2).

by celebrating men as rational and sociable, as against women, who are depicted as irrational, dishonest and threatening, and therefore needing to be controlled (Thompson 106-108, 110). In Wycherley's play *Pinchwife* insists that women are naturally more corrupt than men:

Why should women have more invention in love than men? It can only be because they have more desires, more soliciting passions, more lust, and more of the Devil. (Act 4, scene 1, p. 60)

Turner also suggests that the libertine figure can be associated with an increasingly hostile and violent attitude towards women emerging as a response to women's increasing conspicuousness in the public sphere (1-46).

Other critics have stressed the libertine's socio-economic ambitions and potentially oppositional status within a class-bound, monarchist society (Matalene, for example, identifies Horner as a shameless social-climber, 400-411). In 1981, Brown identified the libertine as a rebel "whose partial exclusion from traditional routes to wealth, power and prerogative provides him with a critical perspective upon that society" (48). More recently, Rosenthal has suggested that Restoration sex comedies challenge traditional, patriarchal authority by "explor[ing] the boundaries of acceptable sexual relations," and specifically what happens when people rebel against the rules that hold society together, and how that society can subsequently survive (7, 16). Rosenthal suggests that as confidence in the mystique of absolute royal authority declined, "drama began to explore the possibility of a contractual, rather than patriarchal marriage, granting women new capacities to choose a husband" (7). Rosenthal identifies Horner as a potential social "leveller" who believes that by seducing upper-class women he can "expose the elite class's lack of inherent superiority" (Rosenthal 20).

In another recent study, however, Mackie identifies the libertine with aristocratic but also transgressive, delinquent masculine identities resulting from a shift in social values away from the valorisation of heroic, courtly prestige and absolutism towards ideals of "civil respectability" and liberalism (129-130). By 1675, she suggests, the libertine was already becoming a defiant anachronism, gradually superseded by "emerging reconfigurations of the polite gentleman" (129, 132).<sup>4</sup> In Mackie's view, therefore, rather than embodying opposition to traditional authority, "the libertine represents an outdated world, updated in privileges authorised more immediately by gender than by status" (129). Mackie draws attention in particular to the frequently criminal behaviour of the libertine, which she suggests has been overlooked by critics because of his social status:

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<sup>4</sup> In the early eighteenth century Joseph Addison and Richard Steele would use their new periodicals, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, to condemn the immorality of libertine values and promote the new gentlemanly ideal; for example, Steele, *The Spectator* 65 (1711), cited in Rosenthal 13-14.

in her analysis, the libertine represents the survival of a “nostalgic and outmoded fantasy of fully licensed masculine will,” which necessarily “becomes more socio-culturally mobile as it becomes first and foremost a function of gender (which everyone has) rather than of elite status” (145).

Gupta’s play brings many of these debates into the contemporary arena, especially by bringing them to bear on ethnic-gendered, rather than class-gendered debates. Gupta’s characters are caught in an historical and cultural moment in which gender identities and cultural values are under review. However, while Wycherley’s play, despite engaging with growing female cultural agency, validates contemporary convictions of masculine superiority, Gupta’s play presents a world in which men are no longer certain of their gendered privilege.

Tanika Gupta emerged as a playwright in the 1980s as part of the Asian Women Writers’ Workshop in London, one of the projects supported by the left-wing General London Council (King 131). Gupta began her theatrical career by translating Indian stories into western contexts; later, she focused on tensions and mixed values within and between different ethnic communities (King 320-321).

While Wycherley’s play, like many Restoration comedies, pits the rebellious young against the easily-duped old (Pinchwife is in late middle age), Gupta depicts a youthful community: the aggressively jealous and misogynist Alok (the Pinchwife character), is only two years older than his rival libertines, who are just twenty. The pompous courtier, Sir Jasper Fidget, becomes Jazzy, an ex-gangster who is the eldest character at thirty. As I will discuss below, the youthfulness of these characters sharply alters the shape and comic tenor of the play.

Gupta frequently writes about third generation immigrants and their place in a hybrid urban culture. In her original plays the characters’ ethnic origins are specifically identified.<sup>5</sup> However, in *The Country Wife* the ethnicities of some characters are deliberately left unclear, partly to demonstrate the ways in which cultural identities have become increasingly mixed in urban Britain. Gupta describes her aims in adapting the play in her forward to the printed edition:

My first priority was to adapt the play to entertain a modern audience. Making sure I kept the comedy intact...I transposed the setting to Southall, not so much because it is a predominantly Asian area in London but because it has a mix of different cultures. I didn’t want to write a purely Asian version but wished to reflect the multicultural world in which today’s London youth live. (8)

<sup>5</sup> For example, *Fragile Land*, London: Oberon, 2003, and *White Boy*, London: Oberon, 2008.

The table below compares Wycherley's characters with Gupta's updated versions:

Horner (a mischievous libertine just returned from France) / **Hardeep** (an Asian youth, about 20; a famous rap singer who has been living abroad).

**Mr Pinchwife** (a middle-aged ex-libertine, once friendly with Hardeep and the other libertines) / **Alok** (a young Indian man of about 20 who has formerly belonged to the group but has returned home to marry an Indian wife).

**Margery Pinchwife** (Pinchwife's innocent but curious country wife) / **Preethi** (Alok's naïve Indian wife, newly arrived in England and eager to explore London).

**Alithea** (Pinchwife's sister, who has agreed to an arranged marriage with Sparkish) / **Alesha** (Indian, Alok's clean-living but liberated sister, living in London; Alok has arranged her marriage to the foolish Sparks).

**Sparkish** (a foolish fop, or man of fashion, who is marrying Alithea for material, social reasons) / **Sparks** (a foolish Asian guy, about 20, who is marrying Alesha to fulfil his family's demands and inherit the family business).

**Harcourt** (a rake, Horner's friend, whose cynical attitude towards women changes when he falls in love with Alithea) / **Baz** (a black guy, about 20, Hardeep's friend, who falls in love with Alesha).

**Sir Jasper Fidget** (an ambitious courtier and politician, described as a 'formal fool' and a 'grave man of business') / **Jazzy** (an ex-gangster and pimp, turned aspiring Conservative politician, about 30; his ethnicity is not identified).

**Lady Fidget and Dainty Fidget** (Jasper Fidget's wife and sister; upper class ladies who rely on their reputations as "virtuous ladies of Honour," but are essentially hypocritical) / **Dolly and Daisy** (Jazzy's girls, ethnicity not identified).

**Dorilant** (a libertine, friend of Horner, Sparkish and Harcourt) / **Dorliant** (Hardeep's friend, about 20, ethnicity not identified).

**Quack** (a fake doctor, Horner's friend, rather stupid) / **Quack** (a white medical student, Hardeep's friend, usually stoned on drugs).

**Characters omitted from Tanika Gupta's version:** the Squeamish women (old Lady Squeamish and her granddaughter); Lucy (Alithea's straight-talking maid).

In Wycherley's play, the country functions as an idealised contrast to the city: a place where Pinchwife imagines his "country wife", Margery, will be shielded from sexual advances by other men and remain ignorant and innocent. In Gupta's play, the "country" is Alok's homeland (India): therefore, the country wife becomes the "desi" (native) wife, a woman whom Alok believes he can control and define in terms of traditional

patriarchal values. Novak has located Wycherley's play within the seventeenth-century debate concerning the relative merits of town and country:

[I]n the Restoration comedy during the 1670s there was what seems like a deliberate effort to praise the city and court as the centre of civilisation and to see the country as stupid, barbaric and dull; praise of the city was bound up with the advocacy of libertine ideals, associated with a particular historical debate between the relative merits of tradition and innovation or progress. (1)

Novak insists that within this context libertinism was a valid philosophical outlook in the seventeenth century, representing resistance to tradition and cultural stagnation (16-18). Wycherley depicts Restoration London as a site in which social mobility is becoming increasingly achievable due to social arenas like the New Exchange, where characters parade, shop, flirt, show off and exchange news, and the theatre, a sexually dangerous site of male/female social encounters.

In Gupta's play these locations become the clubs and pubs frequented by fun-loving Londoners as well as the globalised London markets (in Wycherley's play the libertine, Horner, gives Margery a gift of oranges- then an exotic import- as a prelude to seduction: in Gupta's play, Hardeep gives Preethi "oranges, mangoes, guava, bananas, melons" (Act 3, scene 1, p. 59). In Gupta's play the seventeenth-century defence of city life is updated to the contemporary debates surrounding multicultural policies and attitudes, and the rejection of the potentially stultifying limitations of tradition. The idea of cultural blending is emphasised in the characters' speech: a mixture of Asian, Caribbean and English speech styles. As Peacock has noted in a discussion of black British drama, "[h]ybridization – the mixing of cultural identities to create not black-British (multicultural) but an altogether more complex identity – has been most apparent in third-generation, teenage Afro-Caribbeans" (49). Gupta's predominantly Asian but also Afro-Caribbean and white characters are also in the process of constructing new, hybrid British identities. Gupta's play also emphasises the ways in which modern technology (the characters are easily able to communicate through mobile phone messages, displayed on a screen above the stage), and ease of international travel makes cultural and social divisions ever easier to bridge.

Gupta's Horner, Hardeep, is a successful rap singer who has secured a recording contract in Germany. Unlike Horner, Hardeep has a personal motive for his mission, having lost his ex-girlfriend to Alok, who beat her and subsequently left her to Jazzy, who in turn put her to work as a prostitute (this girlfriend has escaped in order to work the West End clubs by herself). By providing Hardeep with a revenge motive Gupta creates a more obviously sympathetic character than Horner. Also unlike Horner, Hardeep does not initiate his plan by pretending to be impotent: instead, he claims to have been converted to religion. The reasons for this change are not immediately apparent; however, Hardeep's

claim to have embraced religion may signal the growing instability of cultural allegiances within multi-ethnic urban communities, and young people's readiness to move between extremes. Nonetheless, the other male characters interpret Hardeep's rejection of women in terms of sexual failure:

Jazzy: The lights are on, darling, but there's no one at home. (*He holds up a little finger and then turns it down*).

...

Truth is – poor sod's got a tower block but the lift doesn't work any more.  
(15)

As in Wycherley's play, the cuckolds (Jazzy and Alok) can be associated with social ills which the libertine (arguably) aims to address. Gupta's characterisation of Jazzy demonstrates the pervasive influence on masculine identity of glamorised notions of violence, criminality and macho codes of behaviour that devalue women and interpret success in terms of economic and physical power over others. Jazzy's material success is demonstrated by outward signs (a Mercedes and expensive jewellery, as well as the desirable Dolly and Daisy). His decision to stand for the local branch of the Conservative party (normally identified with white, middle-class, right-wing interests) demonstrates his hypocrisy:

Hardeep: You've gone straight.

Jazzy: You are now lookin' at the new local parliamentary candidate for the Conservative party.

Hardeep: So you're as crooked as ever.

The move from criminal boss to right-wing politician represents no essential shift in personal values. As Sir Jasper uses his court contacts to pursue his political interests, Jazzy pursues support from the local business community, using his sexual charisma to woo important businesswomen. However, while Sir Jasper is a bumbling, gullible figure, Jazzy is potentially more threatening. Unlike the affable libertines, Hardeep, Baz and Dorilant, Jazzy recalls the fantasy of "fully-licensed masculine will" Mackie associates with the early modern libertine ethos, demonstrating the ascendancy of the gangland values that have come to dominate sections of the urban community. Jazzy may be black or white: Gupta does not make this clear; as Peacock has remarked, many contemporary black playwrights have explored "the emergence of a nihilistic black-British subculture of violence, which has also been adopted by young urban whites" (53). The character of Jazzy may be interpreted as a sign of the social anomie prevailing amongst urban youth: the idea of social responsibility has been replaced by the attractions of sex, money and crime. Peacock cites Gabriel's recent study of these phenomena, in which she quotes a

black criminologist: “a bad man in the community can develop a massive reputation on the basis of his criminal activities, increasing the motivation to commit crime” (Glynn, Gabriel, qtd. Peacock 54). Similarly, regardless of his moral status, the man teenagers look up to in British urban communities “has the car and the girls...” (Keno Ogbo, in Gabriel, qtd. Peacock 54). Jazzy’s cynical ambitions to ally himself with the ruling class distance him from Hardeep’s more anarchic libertine project.

Alok also represents a negative version of masculine identity. While Wycherley’s *Pinchwife* is an ex-libertine who has retreated to the country and is determined to keep his wife confined so that she cannot be unfaithful to him, Alok has been a wild-living westerner in the past, but has returned to India to bring back a native, “desi” wife. In Wycherley’s play, despite his pathological jealousy and threatening behaviour towards Margery (at one point he commands her: “Write as I bid you, or I will write Whore with this penknife in your face,” Act 4, scene 1, p. 61) *Pinchwife* remains a stock comic character: the old husband with a desirable young wife who repeatedly appears in classical and medieval comic literature. In Gupta’s version, as I have said, Alok is of the same generation as his rivals. Where *Pinchwife* fears the declining power that accompanies old age, Alok fears the decline of his culture’s and gender’s power. Alok’s readiness to engage in violence (he draws a gun several times, as well as verbally abusing and intimidating Preethi) means that he is feared rather than laughed at. The threatened domestic violence in Wycherley’s play is given a more sinister colouring when it is transposed to a contemporary context, due to the altered sexual-political environment.

Gupta’s play also adapts the Restoration debate between contractual and patriarchal forms of political and familial government to explore contemporary mores surrounding marital choice. Rosenthal has emphasised that while modern critics have interpreted the libertine in terms of individual aspirations, Restoration audiences would have perceived the characters as members of family groups, even where parents and relatives do not actually appear on the stage (9). *Pinchwife*, as Alithea’s brother, is determined to force her to settle down to her feminine destiny, and has arranged to marry her off to Sparkish. Alithea enjoys the “innocent liberty of the town” (Act 2, scene 1, p. 16), so much that she will accept marriage to the imbecilic Sparkish in order to retain it. She believes that Sparkish’s lack of interest in her means he will allow her to continue her life in London without becoming jealous, and she will therefore avoid the fate of Margery, whom *Pinchwife* is determined to incarcerate in the countryside. The example of Alithea, who despite identifying herself with the city is honest enough to refuse Harcourt’s advances, even when she falls in love with him, demonstrates the folly of *Pinchwife*’s attitude to his wife.

Like *Pinchwife*, Alok wants to control his sister because she represents his family’s reputation. Alok is dedicated to a group ethic which Gupta associates with Asian culture,

in which marriage may be organised to support family interests rather than personal romantic choice. Insisting that Alesha may not “marry out”, Alok has arranged her marriage as an expression of his authority: “Your days of gallivanting are over sis. From now on you’ll settle down like a proper woman and look after your husband’s needs” (Gupta 27). He has chosen Sparks because he is ethnically and economically suitable - a young Asian male who must marry an Asian girl from a good family in order to fulfil his family’s expectations and inherit the family business. Alesha has agreed to the marriage because, despite being aware of the availability of different choices, she believes “my family honour is at stake here. And I can’t let them down” (Gupta 32).

As Gupta demonstrates, the new multi-ethnic societies, with their unprecedented opportunities for transcultural exchange, problematise the agenda of ethnically pure marriage. Like Pinchwife, Alok is a hypocrite: Pinchwife has been unable to keep a woman to himself in the city so has turned to the country to find an ignorant and innocent wife; Alok has had numerous westernised girlfriends but has turned to India to find a woman he believes he can control. Alesha refuses to live by this hypocrisy; therefore, when Baz first tries to woo her she vehemently refuses his advances.

While Pinchwife dreads the consequences of his wife’s encounter with city culture, Alok fears his wife’s contamination by Western culture: control of women is vital to enable him to establish his family as authentically Asian. The fear of being cuckolded is therefore transformed in Gupta’s play to a fear of miscenation - of being ethnically or culturally erased through the process of sexual or marital mixing. In the original play, when Margery convinces her husband that it is Alithea, and not herself, who has written love letters to Horner, Pinchwife is readily able to substitute him for Sparkish and marry him to his sister. Similarly, Alok will accept the idea of Hardeep as a prospective groom for Alesha, but Alesha knows he will never accept the man she really loves: as she tells Baz, “[it]’s ‘cos you’re *not* Asian” (Gupta 32).

Alok’s dedication to traditional patriarchal and ethnic values mirrors Pinchwife’s repressive and self-seeking conservatism. When Alesha finally asserts her right to marry Baz, Hardeep advises Alok that his project is anachronistic, and therefore doomed:

Alok: I’m her brother- I give the consent around here. He’s not suitable. Firstly, he has no proper job and secondly – he’s black!

Hardeep: We’re not living in the last century here, Alok. You gotta let people be with who they want to be with. (Act 5, 98)

According to Rosenthal “Restoration sex comedies suggest that young people might come to deny the advantages of virtue or religion, and follow their own desires” (15). Libertinism therefore tests the strength of social values against the force of individual

sexual choice. Gupta's version of the play also presents a world in which traditional values are tested against a complex and changing cultural climate, suggesting that the achievement of gender equality in mainstream society continues to compete with ethnic cultural traditions that place women under the control of men.

Through the female characters in the play, Gupta also explores the misogynist values which, as I have said, many critics have attributed to Restoration comedy. Wycherley's upper-class ladies seem to embody the hypocrisy which Horner ostensibly wishes to deflate, continually referring to themselves as "ladies of honour," a title which they interpret in terms of public reputation alone. As Horner tells Quack at the beginning of the play:

...she that shows an aversion to me loves the sport...Your women of honour, as you call them, are only chary of their reputations, not their persons, and 'tis scandal they would avoid, not men. (Act 1, scene 1, p. 8)

However, the women put their own point of view to Horner when they arrive at his lodgings to drink with him:

Why should you not  
think that we women make use of our  
reputation as you men of yours, only to  
deceive the world with less suspicion... (Act 5, scene 1, 92)

Harold Weber has challenged the view that the upper-class women function solely to demonstrate women's intrinsic dishonesty, suggesting that the women's open statements of their intentions mean that they "achieve a harmony between social masks and natural desires denied to most of the other characters" ("Horner and his Women of Honour," 108). Like the Fidget ladies in Wycherley's play, Dolly and Daisy are sexually driven. Lady Fidget's drinking song, in which she complains of the gulf between male and female socially-acceptable behaviour ("Why should our damn'd Tyrants oblige us to live/ On the pittance of pleasure which they only give?" (Act 5 scene 1, 90) is echoed in Dolly and Daisy's angry rap song: "Let us women have a drink/ Break the shackles of the kitchen sink" (Gupta 94). Dolly and Daisy are essentially game-players, dedicating themselves to the world of computer games, pub games, sex games and party games (they arrive at Hardeep's flat with a game of 'Twister'). Where the Fidget ladies protest against sexual double standards would be read as an affirmation of feminine folly and unreliability in the seventeenth century, however, Dolly and Daisy's rebellion against Jazzy's imposition of the double standard affirms cultural values which are broadly valorised and familiar in contemporary British society. Moreover, while they rely on the social acceptance that comes with Jazzy's money and protection, their liaison with him is implicitly transient:

untrammelled by marriage or the need for respectability, they finally accept what Hardeep can give them - a means of competing with and outwitting Jazzy. Rather than focusing on Jazzy as a foolish cuckold, Gupta focuses on Dolly and Daisy as sexual levellers: they know Jazzy is seeing other women (as Hardeep asks them, "What did you expect from a man like Jazzy?"), and therefore enjoy taking their revenge.

Novak has suggested that Wycherley's city represents a potentially liberating space for women: at the end of the play, Margery has become "a natural, if unsophisticated, convert to the principles of female Libertinism" (19). Nevertheless, Margery is finally a comic figure who functions as a sign of male success or failure, and must finally be returned to the authority of her husband: "And I must be a country-wife still too I find / for I can't like a city one, be rid of my musty husband and do what I list" (Act 5 scene 1, 101). Gupta's Preethi attains far more agency through her contact with the city, and asserts her right to reject her husband:

Preethi: You thought that you could pluck me from my country and keep me a slave in your house? Mistreat me and abuse me and I would just accept it with a bowed head? You thought I would be eternally grateful for being brought to this great country of yours? I am not your property, Alok. I am nobody's property.  
(103)

Preethi's speech represents the only point in the play when post-colonial critique disrupts intra and inter-cultural debate. In addressing Alok, a second or third-generation Indian, as the colonising "you" who has thought to conquer her desires and keep her a slave, Preethi demonstrates the complex ethnic and sexual-political agenda of the play. Finally, it is the anxious and proprietorial ex-libertine who represents the aspiring coloniser, as the libidinous but empathetic modern libertine represents a force for liberation and self-expression.

Rosenthal suggests that the libertine in Restoration comedy was a dangerous figure because he threatened to undermine the powerful families on which national strength was thought to depend (14-15). In Wycherley's play Horner's influence is finally restrained when Sir Jasper chooses to believe in Horner's impotence, despite Pinchwife's informing him that Horner has seduced his wife. As Rosenthal has said, "forgetting" suits Sir Jasper's interests because he is primarily concerned with his public image and the outward legitimacy of his family rather than the truth of Horner's connection with his ladies (24). Similarly, when at the end of Gupta's play Quack insists that Hardeep, rather than having found religion, is suffering from "penile erectile disorder", Jazzy is ready to believe him, since his own reputation is secure. Having freed Alesha and Preethi from oppressively patriarchal marriages, Hardeep's role in the play is over, a moment Gupta signals by allowing the original text to surface into her colloquial contemporary narrative. Hardeep's final speech replicates Horner's, recalling and ironising the original

context of the character, as well as the finally festive and comic agenda of Wycherley's play:

Hardeep: Now, sir, I must pronounce your wife innocent, though I blush whilst I do it, and I am the only man by her now exposed to shame, which I will straight drown in wine, as you shall your suspicion, and the ladies' troubles we'll divert with a ballet. (103)

As in Wycherley's play, the "humiliating 'Dance of the Cuckolds'" (Gupta 104), here performed by Alok, Sparks and Jazzy, deflates masculine pretensions to authority. By the end of the dance, Hardeep and Preethi are together.

Wycherley's play provides Gupta with a vehicle through which to critique and satirise specific gendered and ethnic responses to contemporary phenomena. While the original play depicts a world in which personal morality and honour have been replaced by the pursuit of pleasure and privilege, Gupta's libertine operates in an environment in which competing ethnic, social and sexual identities have complicated and destabilised traditional roles and values. Wycherley's boozing, carousing rake is reflected in Gupta's fun-loving but driven urban male, seeking to make good in contemporary multicultural Southall, while his anxious cuckolds are reflected in the criminal or repressive masculine figures who insist on regarding women as property. Gupta subverts the confidently masculine ethos of Restoration comedy to highlight problems in contemporary British minority culture (especially violence against women; the masculine double standard, socially-orientated hypocrisy and material ambition; performance-orientated versus honest social behaviour). The misogynist agenda of libertine comedy is exposed and challenged while the libertine's status as challenger of repressive social conventions is retained and celebrated.

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