

dire yell, / As when, by night and negligence, the fire / Is spied in populous cities," the coarse voice of Iago, *Othello's* "most profane and liberal counselor."<sup>11</sup> But Iago had learned that voice—and so had Shakespeare's Thersites, and Webster's Bosola, and (Tourneur's) Vindice. And these malcontents and their brethren, who in a few short years would so profoundly delineate the tone of what came to be known as the "Jacobean" in drama, would all have learned that voice from a writer who turned up not only in the middle of the 1599 ban but at the center of almost every literary controversy of the era—John Marston, whose career might serve as an abstract of the times.

As a new and aggressively sexualized form of distinctly English literature began emerging into definition in the 1590s, of all the writers working within the paradoxes inherent in the demands of that form the one who best understood them was not Thomas Nashe, whose *Choice of Valentines* is too jocular and invests too much self-mocking humor in exposing the comedies of male impotence ever to reach the dark depths and psychic defenses that underlie the pornographic. The writer who best understood those depths was John Marston. And it was Marston who understood the pornographic in the full range of its investments and negotiations with the reader. In *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion's Image*, one of his two works on the bishop's list, he deliberately experiments with masturbatory strategies of inhibited desire designed to stimulate the reader's arousal by creating a friction with it. As the poem leads its (male) reader toward the given object of desire, the centripetal figure of the waiting female body, it alternately arouses him with prurient questions much like those which Iago directs at Othello and then prohibits him access by refusing to show what the reader has been titillated to imagine, a denial technique that—like Iago's pursed up thoughts, his "stops" and "close dilations" (*Oth.* 3.3.133, 136)—only guarantees that the aroused reader will, like Othello, increasingly demand voyeuristic satisfaction: "Make me to see't" (3.3.380). At the end of *Pigmalion* are appended some verses titled "The Authour in prayse of his precedent Poem," where the poet radically switches his stance and, in the voice of the moralist, scathingly attacks his readers as "lewd Priapians" whose prurience has been "tickled vp" by the poem, which the author now disclaims as a piece of "chaos indigest" which he just "slubbered up" to "fish for fools." The poem and its annexed verses together constitute the paradox of this emerging genre's split mentality, the seeming contradiction of Iago's dual stance which lies at the heart of English pornography. By appropriating the voice of the moralist disgusted by what he graphically describes, the strategy neutralizes the guilt of the sexualist and allows the two psychic figures to coexist in the reader. Only because of such a split can the moralist revel in what he

simultaneously decries and the voluptuary be whipped for the pleasures that arouse him.

Perhaps because of the dual investments it must serve, English pornography came into the world with a voice all its own. What characterizes that voice is a language not of lascivious delight but of sexual scatology—of slime, poison, garbage, vomit, clyster pipes, dung, and animality—that emerges connected to images of sexuality in the vocabulary of Iago and his brethren. It is a language that flaunts a new coarseness in both its sound and its semantics. And, fittingly enough, this newly emergent English pornography adapts an important part of its native idiom from the moralists who had been writing against it. It was Marston who first contributed this language to English satire in his 1598 *Scourge of Villanie*, perhaps the most obscene piece of literature listed in the Bishops' Ban, yet one that purports to be an outraged attack on sexual writing spoken in the voice of the offended moralist. Throughout Marston's early satires an identifiable new fusion of sound and diction reshapes the possibilities for the stage and frames the extremities of the Jacobean discourse on the sins of sensuality.<sup>12</sup> In Marston's *Scourge* persona's new language of sexual bluntness the playwrights discovered a rich new muck pit for the drama to mine, and this voice seems to have provided what we might call the father tongue for figures such as Thersites, Vindice, Bosola, and other Jacobean malcontents who—along with Malevole/Altofronto and other of Marston's own dramatic scourgers of sexual vice—soon emerged on the English stage. But probably the *Scourge* speaker's closest descendant is Shakespeare's most famous villain. Like Iago, whom Othello describes as a man who "hates the slime / That sticks on filthy deeds" (5.2.154-55). Marston's speaker is a bluntly "honest" man who hates "the slime of filthy sensualitie" (xi l.207), which he endlessly describes in snarling ejaculations at

*Aretines* filth, or of his wandring whore . . .  
of *Ruscus* nastie lothsome brothell rime,  
That stincks like Aiax froth, or muck-pit slime.  
(xi ll. 144, 146-47)

Out on this salt humour, letchers dropsie,  
Fie, it doth soyle my chaster poesie. . . .  
(xi ll.155-56)

In 1599, when the bishops ordered censorship and attempted to cut off the hostile, malcontented potential aggressions of the violently sexualized discourse they heard in these new hybrid literary constructions,

the targeted authors reacted not, as Gascoigne had done, by becoming resentful castrati but by shifting venues. Now, as opposed to 1576, the writers had somewhere else to go, for 1599 almost pinpoints the shift in England from a poetry culture to a theater culture; it marks the beginning of the competition between a culture of print and one of performance. It also marks the theatrical shift to a style we generically associate with the core tragedies of Jacobean drama—a shift to the lurid, Italianate plots that were first contrived and put onstage by, once again, John Marston, who essentially transformed the narrative character of contemporary English drama with the very first play he wrote, *Antonio and Mellida*, probably composed in late 1599.<sup>13</sup>

But while English pornography developed in its own distinctive direction, the story of its origins and its relationship to the 1599 ban does have an outside agitator. What seems to have energized England's newly sexualized literature and in turn stimulated the peculiarly phallic aggressions of the Jacobean drama was the textual immigration of an Italian literary subversive—Pietro Aretino—whose arrival marks the entrance of vernacular pornography into England. *Pornography* means a written story of whores. And, indeed, this was the form in which pornography first arrived in England in 1584 under the title of Aretino's *Ragionimenti*. In his *Dialogues* the male fantasy of limitless sexual capacity is doubly displaced onto women's voices and a fantasy of women's limitless sexual insatiability. *The Dialogues* are spoken by an older and a younger woman debating the merits of becoming a nun, a wife, or a courtesan; the conversation is, of course, merely an excuse to describe and revel in the graphic "porntopia" fictionalized here as the older woman's experiences. The conclusion to the debate is that since all three choices are, quite literally, merely male "occupations," a woman ought best become a courtesan, in which "occupation" she at least gets paid for what the male author behind the female narrator invariably imagines as a repetition of endless pleasures.

Prior to 1584 Aretino had been known in England primarily as a political satirist and scourger of princes, a poet who had been compared even to Tasso and Petrarch by none other than Gabriel Harvey. Then word began to come from continental sources about Aretino's other productions, in particular his obscene sonnets. This soon-to-be infamous group of sonnets—which Aretino himself mockingly refers to as "I positzioni"—had originally been written to accompany a series of prints that Marcantonio Raimundi had made from Giulio Romano's erotic drawings, referred to in Italian treatises as "I modi," but coded in all English references as either "the postures" or "the pictures."<sup>14</sup> Not long after word of Aretino's association with "the postures" began to

filter through to England, in 1584, *I ragionimenti* was published by John Wolfe, Gabriel Harvey's own publisher.<sup>15</sup>

The impact exerted by Aretino's *Dialogues* across Europe can perhaps be measured by the fact that the form which European pornography took for the next 150 years was that of Aretino's dialogue between two women—an emulation that has led modern biographers to call Pietro Aretino, appropriately enough, the father of modern pornography. And though we have no direct evidence that the pictures or Aretino's sonnets ever actually circulated in England, word about them most certainly did. Within ten years Aretino's name had come to be a layered metaphor occupying multiple grammatical positions (an "aretinized" discourse; an "aretine/aretin" idea; the "English Aretine"; the great "aretiner"; an "aretinizing" influence) and signifying both a certain type of salacious text and its aroused reader's response. Not surprisingly, the collocation also provoked a volley of self-legitimizing political responses from various state and social institutions reacting against this newly available form of moral transgression.

No doubt because late Elizabethan culture recognized its own image in what it denounced as an invasion of literary filth from Italy, Aretino was not only well known by the 1590s—he was infamous. So much so that David McPherson has argued that the deluge of works in the 1590s depicting Italian diabolism owes its impetus more to England's contact with Aretino than with Machiavelli.<sup>16</sup> Within a decade of Aretino's arrival, writers such as Thomas Nashe and John Marston suddenly began experimenting with a type of literature that cannot be defined generically as either the Elizabethan bawdy or the Ovidian sensual. Marston's use of the epyllion form in *Metamorphosis of Pigmaliion* marks a significant difference from that which Marlowe and Shakespeare had already established. This new type of literature, *Metamorphosis* included, bears the graphic stamp of Aretino.

Quite probably what had popularized Aretino as the exemplar of the obscene was the use that had been made of him in the scurrilous Harvey-Nashe pamphlet wars early in the decade, in which Harvey had attacked the immorality of Nashe's writing by calling its author "the English Aretine," an appellation Nashe apparently relished.<sup>17</sup> In *Machiavelli and the English Drama* (1897), Edward Meyer claimed to have found over five hundred references to Aretino in English texts printed before 1642 and even mentioned his belief that references to Aretino outnumbered those to Machiavelli.<sup>18</sup> Of all the contemporary responses, two by Ben Jonson and one by John Donne best demonstrate the range of uses. Jonson's two allusions illuminate the polarized responses of pleasure and outrage that characterize the English psy-

chic reaction to Aretino. In *The Alchemist*, Sir Epicure Mammon devises a pleasure palace to excite his moribund sexual fantasies, and imagines the palace as a room

Filled with such pleasures as Tiberius took  
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine  
But coldly imitated.

(2.2.43-45)

In *Volpone*, however, Corvino lashes out at

... some young Frenchman, or hot Tuscan blood  
That had read Aretine, conned all his prints,  
Knew every quirk within lust's labyrinth,  
And were professed critic in lechery.

(3.7.59-62)<sup>19</sup>

It is John Donne who situates Aretino politically. When Donne invokes Aretino, he places the Aretino associated with the pornographic pictures in antithesis to the Aretino earlier praised as the scourge of Princes. And from this intersection of the pornographic images and the "pictures" of supposed virtue that a prince's court should model, Donne reroutes the public lust to see "Aretine's pictures" into a complex site of political hostility directed against authority.

Now; Aretines pictures have made few chaste;  
No more can Princes courts, though there be few  
Better pictures of vice, teach me vertue.<sup>20</sup>

The Bishops' Ban marks an important line in literary representation and speaks of the state's effort, in the final year of the sixteenth century, to plug the dike against a new kind of literature that the authorities saw inundating England.<sup>21</sup> The two forms of literature put in focus by the ban are sexualized literature and the satiric invective, the two newly emergent forms that had, by June 1, 1599, been so busily cross-breeding as to become frequently indistinguishable from each other. To constitute the two forms as binary and argue the intent of the ban within that either-or context thus is not only unnecessary but misses something vital. A new kind of subgenre—later identified as England's only contribution to the genre of pornography—was, during the late 1590s, being born. And as the Muse labored, it brought forth a monstrously hybrid creature which combined the salaciously erotic with the violent, misogynistic excoriations of the Juvenalian satiric

speaker, a literary genre which, thus parented, carried within it a newly destabilized discourse, an English pornography that brought together prurient lust and revulsionary loathing. With this admixture of scatology, misogyny, and revulsion, the pornographic pleasures of Aretino had at last become "Englished."

The ban did not therefore halt sexual representation so much as it politicized it by defining it as the contestatory site. By challenging the writer's autonomy, the ban effectively constituted sex and sexuality as the overt, primary, and reinvoked scene of primal struggle for the competitive assertion of authority. Like the confessional ecclesiastical authorities before them, the ecclesiastical censors of the Tudor state asserted their power over sexuality by situating it discursively.<sup>22</sup> But during the cyclonic heyday of the Jacobean stage, from 1600 to about the 1620s, the playwrights made a new claim on it: they claimed it representationally.

The theater that was created was a theater of the ego—a peculiarly narcissistic, sensationalized medium increasingly dependent on the ability of its self-dramatizing playwrights to dominate ever larger territories of sexual representation, the space over which they flaunted their dominion through their theatricalized and violent spectacles. The Jacobean theater is about power: sexuality becomes the vehicle for its expression. And the almost unavoidable cultural effect of framing the issue of authorial control as a male writer's battle for dominance and potency versus his acquiescence to gelded restraint is to produce—and by necessity reproduce—a medium, a metaphor, and, ultimately, a sensationalized message about male power welded to male violence. Translated from the well-known personal competitions among the brother playwrights into dramatic narratives to be played out on the stage, the contest is set up as an Oedipal struggle and a masculine battle for power. But within such an Oedipalized drama, the space for the female progressively becomes the site of a disturbingly new kind of male competition that resolves itself over, through, and in the annihilation of the female body through which the narrative has sexualized itself.

In 1599, when razors of restraint were effectively turned against the print medium, the writers had somewhere else to go. And Marston and Middleton set a pattern that, in a way, bespeaks the times: they ceased writing for print and turned their prodigious energies toward the medium where the most gratifying form of "publication" was instant, ephemeral, and constituted within performance. This move to the drama provided the Jacobean writers with a sanctuary that was itself strangely constituted by the spatial, the literary, and the cultural liminality of the theaters they wrote for. Inside that margin they could postpone any effective censorship of their texts by submerging them-