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Porn, Pantomime and Protest: the politics of bawdiness as feminine style.

This article explores the significance of the recent 'Face-Sitting' protest that took place outside of Westminster in 2014. A carefully staged response to changes to pornography legislation that criminalized particular sexual practices pertinent to women's pleasure, this porn-panto protest put the spectacle of the 'kinky' woman and her desires centre stage. The activists' unique use of fetish dress, class and humour is explored in relation to the protest by brothel keeper and campaigner Cynthia Payne in the 1970s/80s. Payne deployed bawdy humour and a particular high camp use of 'kinky' dress and English etiquette to undermine contemporary sexual norms. The 2014 protest also clearly reclaimed two traditional roles within English pantomime: the Dame and the Principal Boy. These examples will be used to examine the political function of humour in relation to cross-dressing and the 'woman-on-top'. Ultimately, this study argues that 'bawdiness' is a politics that offers us potential promise but not without critical limitations established through media representations.

Keywords: bawdiness; resistance; legislation; unruliness; face-sitting protest; Cynthia Payne; sexual pleasure; camp.

Introduction

On December 12 2014, a theatrically camp and bawdy 'Face-Sitting' protest took place outside Westminster in London. Sex workers, activists and performers gathered together to protest against recent legislation. This legislation made it a criminal offence to represent sexual activity in video-on-demand (VoD) online pornography, where there was a risk of suffocation or consensual erotic violence that leaves marks. The Audiovisual Media Services Regulations 2014 (an amendment of the 2003

Communications Act) requires that UK based video-on-demand online porn follows the same British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) guidelines that were set out for sex shop DVD porn. This legislation in effect ruled out pornography that focused on female orientated 'kinky' pleasure such as 'face-sitting' and female ejaculation. Face-sitting in fact sits amongst the major activities listed as 'life-endangering' by the BBFC. It also outlawed the depiction of alternative sexual preferences such as S&M bondage/fetish where consensual erotic pain/violence - whipping, spanking, fisting, caning or being restricted - leaves welts on the skin. The law also prohibited what were seen as sexually humiliating acts such as urolagnia (golden showers or watersports).

The activists involved in this protest came dressed up in character for their respective sex roles, whether as a Femdom S&M dominatrix – cut glass accent and school 'marm' dress - or dressed in a manner which lampooned the 'life-endangering' suffocating elements of the activity - wearing a snorkel. This was activism where protest was relayed through bawdy performance and provocative dress up and role play. Throughout the performance the activists 'sat' on male protesters whilst 'caning' and 'spanking' the participants. One participant, in the process of being sat on contributed by chanting, 'What do we want. Face-Sitting. When do we want it? Now'. They also held up placards with the slogans, 'I reserve my right to the English vice' and 'Shame on You: We Come Too', written above and below a pink painting of a vulva and vaginal opening. Unsurprisingly the event sparked much publicity and the media employed a similar strategy of humour. One report claimed, for instance, that some media photographers on arrival were disappointed that the activists performed whilst fully clothed. Other reports played with the mixture of 'panto' and 'porn' – for instance an article entitled 'sex and snorkels'. This bawdy interplay between the performance

and the media underscores an important democratic questioning and airing of perversion and the preposterous.

The way in which bawdiness was received and played out in the public domain highlights a dialogue which makes a theatre of sexualized humour and dress. I would like to argue that this public dialogue – between the 'face-sitting' protest and the media circus - enacts a politics of bawdiness. The performative use of theatrical play is used to question social and legal value systems as regards female pleasure and its counter offensive of shame. The legislation on kinkiness and 'appropriate' pornography is indeed shown to be gendered. It is this tension and tussle as regards 'pleasure', 'obscenity' and 'perversity', in relation to ideal sexual and gendered behaviour, that will occupy my discussion. The use of bawdiness by the protestors humorously made transparent the way that class, gender and Englishness produces and performs 'pleasure' via shame.

This mode of social protest is not, however, new. In order to understand the way this established approach functions it is important, therefore, to discuss its links with earlier political practices. The bawdy 1970s/80s public persona of English brothel keeper Cynthia Payne is the precursor that will inform my discussion. Payne's high-profile case merits recovery because of the media circus that responded to her high camp sexual politics, behaviour and persona. The article will explore the manner in which Payne's work challenged legislation as regards 'kinkiness'. It will also explore the way that she has been preserved in popular culture, in films such as *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and books, such as Cynthia Payne's own manual, *Entertaining at Home* (1987). She is remembered for her bold shame-free heterosexual femininity that challenged sexual and gender norms.

Both the 2014 and earlier protests made a spectacle out of an unruly femininity in their use of high camp fetish BDSM costume (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadomasochism). This was used to undermine gender, sex and class norms. Role play was used to ham up and switch gender, sex and class roles, to '"camp up" ideology in order to undo it' (Tyler 2003,102) or more succinctly, to *overdo* it (40). By 'occupying' (Halberstam 2013, xiv) heterosexual femininity in such a theatrical, political and bawdy manner, the ideological underpinning of sexual citizenship becomes transparent. Irigaray's notion of 'feminine style' is therefore a useful linchpin for this argument. For Irigaray (1985, 76), 'feminine style' is to 'assume the feminine role deliberately […] in particular […] ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic […] so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to stay invisible'. The protestors performed heterosexual femininity as 'disruptive excess' (1985, 78) to bring to the fore the censorious way class, sex and nationhood configures femininity.

My argument is that bawdiness performs female heterosexuality as a claim for female 'kinkiness'. Bawdy humour is used to critique laws which straitjacket heterosexual female sexual freedoms. However, the media reaction to both the 2014 protest and the protests by Payne in the 1970/80s also reveal the limits to these modes of protest. By reiterating bawdy politics as entertaining panto-porn, the media circus could dissipate its threat.

Bawdiness, Shame and Unruly Femininities

Cynthia Payne's case merits recovery because of its challenges to the absurdity of sexual norms, both in terms of her clashes with the law, and her dress and behaviour. Gender – specifically heteronormative femininity - is policed by rituals of shame.

Exploring Payne's corporeal resistance and resilience to shame gives us a strong precedent and theoretical context for the current activist demonstrations. I will begin my analysis with a scene from the film *Wish You Were Here* (1987). The film is about the early life of Cynthia Payne – played here by Emily Lloyd - who was convicted in 1980 of keeping a 'disorderly house' after police raided her home in South London in 1978.

Emily Lloyd's performance of Payne is brazen and upfront. One scene shows Lloyd as the young Payne, flouting rules of female decorum and feminine appropriateness. She is seen pulling up her dress, doing a 'moonie' and sticking her two fingers up, whilst singing an 'Up Your Bum' rap. The behaviour is loud and unruly and shocking to an onlooking older woman, who is offended by the lewd use of language, laughter and the body.

She performs indecency to expose the community's intolerance and double standards. For instance, after having become pregnant out of wedlock, she is visited by her stepmother who offers her money for an abortion. She tells her that she is a pretty girl and she could get herself a man who would look after her. However, she would never get a man if she had the baby, as from that point on, she would be sullied goods. She would bring shame on her community. The end of the film sees her, however, getting off a bus back in her home town resplendently dressed and confidently pushing her baby in a pram. This confidence plays out throughout the film where she is seen sticking her fingers up and showing her knickers, or bum, as a riposte to confining etiquette and 'appropriate' behaviour. Her brash behaviour is without shame, and thus exhilarating.

We could contextualize this behaviour and situate it within a lineage of 'revolting' or unruly women (Russo 1997; Arthurs 1999). Jane Arthurs argues that 'revolting women' can be understood in relation to the 'cultural violations' that they

represent. The ‘intensity of pleasure or revulsion’ that they provoke comes directly from their refusal to conform to the feminine expectations for ‘bodily decorum’. In Wish You Were Here the pleasure and revulsion arising from the protagonist’s behaviour and language is evident. The phrase, ‘up your bum’ is repeated almost like a mantra throughout the film as the character’s response to ‘correct’ oppressive rules and etiquette. In one scene, at a very staid tea party laid on to celebrate the return of their father, the two daughters sit in their Sunday best frocks rigidly listening to the conversation. We see Lynda (Cynthia Payne) whispering to her sister who smiles and then cuts into the discussion by saying: ‘Lynda’s just said ‘up your bum’ and ‘pig’s willy’. The shock is immediately apparent with Lynda being sent to her room by her father. Along with bodily posture, the control of language used to refer to the body and its comportment is of paramount importance (Arthurs 1999, 137).

This defiance of bodily decorum is contingent on aspects of class, sexuality and gender – for instance not being grateful for a career in hairdressing or loveless sex. In one episode when Lynda is made to leave her hairdresser job for insulting a client - ‘silly fat cow’ her father shouts at her for her ‘disgusting’ mouth and behaviour.

‘People just don’t want to hear a load of filthy talk when they’re having a perm. It’s unprofessional and disgusting.’

‘Ever since you were a child, you and your disgusting mouth.’

‘There’s something wrong with you my girl.

To which she replies: ‘I’m bloody bored’.

And Margaret her sister responds with, ‘Language!’

Payne's unruliness is unaccepting of the way things are - her 'lot'. It is this element that needs more analysis for it is this which demolishes etiquette and becomes an act of refusal. Bawdiness is a performance of obscenity by way of language, gestures, 'moonies'. It is sticking two fingers up to the rules of the community by way of a liberating display of legs and knickers. This brash disregard is a refusal of shame.

The counterpoint to disgust is shame (expected, imposed or felt) and in *Wish You Were Here* this sense of shame is generated in the interstices between Englishness, gender and sexuality. It is shame in relation to the body of women's public sexuality that this section will now focus on as this will open up the new ground that will inform my discussions of urban activist 'face-sitting' protests.

The unruliness performed by Emily Lloyd is a rebellion against the 'stiff upper lip' of Englishness. Englishness is expressed in the film by way of village greens, cricket, garden sheds and cups/pots of tea that epitomise the restraint of that culture. Lloyd's performance undermines these rituals by 'shagging' in sheds, cycling with dress raised over her head across village bowling greens and joyously laughing and shouting 'Up your bum!' to protestations of - 'Hey no cycling'. This is a corporeal release from the regulation of the female body and its pleasures. The performance of a bawdy humour as feminine style is used to renegotiate the boundaries of pleasure and desire. This is a renegotiation of sexual citizenship with the corporeal and verbal 'low' acting as an orgasmic insubordinate release and refusal.

The idea of belonging and freedom as regards the gendered cultural body is represented at various levels: within a community, the family unit, the couple and within an Anglo-American colonial context. Betty Grable is referenced throughout the film – Payne is constantly showing off her 'Betty Grable legs' epitomizing American freedoms. Freedoms are represented through the figure of the female movie star and her

sexuality. The star's nylons – back seamed stockings where the pencil line runs sensuously down the centre of long slim female legs - becomes a metaphor for national pride, honour and hope. The star is a metaphor for the nation, to be fought hard for (for instance, women on the wing of the gunner planes during WW2). However, when this image is re-appropriated by the young Payne her self-possession is chided as shameful with her father, as a returning soldier, raining abuse on his daughter for bringing shame to the family. There are jibes about selling off the daughter to his sleazy friend – for a small amount of money - a self-proclaimed cowboy and 'bare back rider' – referring to his boast that he doesn't need to wear a condom. He himself is buying into an American heroic masculinity inscribed in film and advertising that Payne uses to mock and ridicule him when she gets pregnant – 'Mr. Bare Back Rider Long John Silver' – reducing him to the level of the pathetic.

McClintock (1995) has explored challenges to English norms of sexuality in relation to racial identity and empire, where femininity is constructed through the colonial white male bourgeois gaze. Similarly, my argument focuses on the way that social parameters of femininity are constructed through a middle-class dissociation with 'dangerous classes'. Conversely, I argue that what was stigmatized by shame specifically in relation to English female working-class sexuality was also ironically being channelled into the image of the American female pin-up as an aspirational symbol of national freedom and pride. When the symbolic freedoms of female American sexuality are claimed by the young Payne, she is treated with disdain. Her reaction to shame is to appropriate English etiquette and up-end it. In a heated rant in a tea house, Payne stands on a table and shouts out a stream of abuse, using a play on language when she asks 'long john silver' whether he wants a 'Pot of tea rather than a piss pot'.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue that for many working class women physical work and the ability to defend oneself are important, and less value is placed on physical delicacy. They discuss the different expectations between middle class girls and girls from working class or black backgrounds. Being 'ladylike' is therefore anchored to specific cultural expectations. One of the ways that this control is institutionalized is through the language of Englishness. Refusing these tenets of 'ladylike' femininity incurs a mark of shame. This is clearly portrayed in one scene from *Wish You Were Here*, where Payne is taken to see a psychiatrist by her father.

> 'Your father says you have sworn constantly since a child'
>
> 'My first word was bum.'
>
> 'He's very worried about your swearing and your behaviour.'

The psychiatrist asks her to recite the A-Z of bad language. At F she quips that she cannot think of anything. He pushes the point:

> 'You are a filthy old man.'
>
> 'Are you feeling ashamed?'
>
> 'No.'

To draw this section to a close I would like to analyze Payne's use of inappropriate sexualized language and gesture in relation to Luce Irigaray's theories of 'feminine style' and 'parler femme'. Irigaray argues for a linguistic feminine style of embodied lived language, gesture and expression which will 'jam' the 'machine' of phallocentric discourse (Irigaray 1985, 107).

The desire to generate a space for women's speech is premised on the understanding that the root of all women's oppression is sexual difference. Irigaray's theories have been taken to task for excluding the lived specificities of class, ethnicity, race and other cultural/national identities. However, Marjorie Hass argues that Irigaray was not trying to create a theory of 'woman' but encouraging 'new styles that also amplify the disruptive elements of women's speech. For Irigaray, new political possibilities for women can arise only when women's specificity is expressed' (Hass 2000, 85). For Davidson and Smith, Irigaray's ideas can be better understood in light of Wittgenstein's point that 'one can only gauge the meaning of a word when it is embedded within a particular "given" environment. Language only works when it is in place… placed in a visceral context and felt bodily' (1999, 79).

I would like to argue that the feminine style of utterance, gesture and dress featured in Wish You Were Here exposes the way that language dovetails with multi- variants such as class, gender and nationhood. Payne's use of language and gesture disrupts by politicizing the way in which language is tightly bound up with gendered and classed material oppression. She is given a place where her sexuality is restricted to specific gendered roles, taste and bodily decorum. However, she is granted no space to operate within those boundaries as an 'I'. She can only express herself through a masculine language predicated on the reiteration of oppressive forms that exclude and shame her speaking body as 'senseless, inappropriate, indecent' (Irigaray 1985, 148-9).

This is a language which controls Payne as an object of discourse but refuses her agency and a space to freely operate; she must know her place as spoken about but is never granted a space to speak. By reiterating these symbolic forms of expression, she disrupts the status quo by highlighting the way that

language and indeed society marks her body as sexual, 'low' and feminine. Turning these forms back on themselves makes material inequalities speak from the point of oppression and moves towards liberating that body from their mastery. Payne's unruliness - her bawdy use of language and gesture - is therefore contingent on her embodied and embedded refusal to know her place.

It has been important to flesh out this case study to understand the way in which protest via heterosexual femininity links into questions of shame and gender. The next section will allow us to reflect further on how the recent protest functions as a counter to the hypocrisies of 'decency', appropriateness and respectability in relation to the law.

Bawdiness, legislation and Respectability

The 2014 'face-sitting' protest was organized by Charlotte Rose, a sex worker and activist, to raise awareness around sexual freedom and the arbitrary nature of censorship. The state asserts power over what it legislates as deviant behaviour with shame as a ritual punishment. The 2014 protest has a clear precedent in Cynthia Payne and her wrangles with the law.

Payne expressed an interest in becoming a Member of Parliament in order to change Britain's sex laws, which she followed through by standing for Parliament as a candidate for the Payne and Pleasure Party in the Kensington by-election in July 1988. The name of her Party is a play on words that reference Cynthia Payne's own BDSM practice (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission and Sadomasochism). The by-election was followed by her standing in her own area of Streatham for the Rainbow Dream Ticket in the 1992 UK General Election. She did not gain a parliamentary seat.

In her book *Entertaining at Home* (which she sent to the judge as a present), she lists various 'Points of Etiquette' alongside an anecdote showing bad etiquette. She

states: ‘One couple were performing on the bed and all around them sipping tea were other gentlemen guests. It was a lovely scene, very English...Then suddenly someone started making a noise with his cup and saucer…*’* (Payne 1987, 36). The deviance in this anecdote focuses on the outrage of rattling a cup on a saucer rather than from the fact that the gentlemen are sitting sipping tea whilst watching a live sex act being performed.

Another example that challenges etiquette relates to Cynthia Payne’s name. Payne was not Cynthia’s real name, she added the ‘y’ because it sounded classier. She adopted ‘Mrs’ but was not in fact ‘Mrs’ as she was not married. The author of her biography, Paul Bailey stated that Payne would not have used ‘Ms’- ‘Ms Payne is a title she wouldn’t even begin to countenance. ”Ms” is definitely not respectable’ (Bailey 1987, 8). She also left a cane and high heels by her front door – which again gave a fetish yet light hearted twist to the idea of being a lady or a Mrs.

Categories of deviance are confused in unexpected and humorous ways, with etiquette, decency and playing straight becoming theatricalized, and categories of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ taking on new meanings. This confusion of categories became even more absurd when the undercover police operation was relayed in court which I will quote at length from *The Observer* article (1987*)* ‘A Feydeau Farce in Ambleside Avenue’)

> As everyone is now well aware, PC Stewart Taylor and PC Jack Jones sneaked into the brothel in heavy disguise. Taylor was commanded to play the country squire and donned a hacking jacket and tweeds. He dyed his beard white and carried a walking stick. It was Jones however, who was assigned the more demanding part. He was ordered, from above, to appear as a bisexual. What does a bisexual look like? PC Jones, a happily married man with teenage children, had to seek advice. A make-up

> artist was contacted and provided Jones with the requisite bisexual resemblance. Bisexuals, it seems, are given to applying green eye-shadow. They favour a cravat instead of a tie, and they wear spectacles on a fetching gold chain.

The police officers are made to look silly by the preposterousness of stereotypes such as the bisexual and the sexual pervert. Like John Sampson's film *Dressing for Pleasure* (1977) where middle-class middle-age respectable men and women dress up in s/m and fetish gear whilst sipping tea (banned by London Weekend Television), fetish becomes assimilated into 'normal' life, to challenge the concept of straight.

In Cynthia Payne's obituary in 2015 the journalist Duncan Campbell stated that 'Throughout the case, the press treated "Madam Cyn" gently (C Y N obviously punning with the word sin S I N), portraying her as part of a bawdy tradition that stretched from Chaucer to the Carry On series'. Indeed, when one reads through articles about Payne there is a tongue-in-cheek tone to all press accounts of the 1987 court case. The articles from 1980 however are more serious in their tone. At that point Cynthia Payne was imprisoned for 18 months for the offence of brothel keeping whilst a whole string of men from Fleet Street journalists, peers, barristers, MPs, vicars and academics were not prosecuted.

In 1987 there was a clear change in the way that this case was dealt with by the media with the 'high' of jurisdiction being brought down to the 'low' of popular culture. An example of this is when Cynthia Payne's counsel Mr David Spens argued 'that the police version of events implied: "A sexual marathon not even a Mars Bar a day could possibly sustain". Or when he argued that 'the way the evidence was presented was "rather like watching the edited highlights of Arsenal verses Tottenham on Match of the Day" (*The Guardian* 1987). This situates itself within a carnivalesque tradition where rebellious bawdy humour is used to turn shame and folly back on the legislators.

From the time of her exit from Holloway prison sticking her fingers up in a 'V' to photographers with the quote – '"V" for Victory and "V" for Voucher' (referring to the vouchers that clients to her house received in exchange for £15 with a £3 discount for pensioners), accounts and imagery of Madam Cyn were more and more slapstick. Her bawdy image captured a change in public attitudes, spearheaded by Payne's impertinent and irreverent attitude to the law. An example of this is a newspaper account of Payne posing 'for photographers holding a policeman doll, which laughed when she pulled a string hidden in its bottom.' Indeed, the very same 'obscenity' that was used to imprison Payne was used to undermine the operation launched by the Obscenity Squad, thereby questioning the culture that produced these laws.

It is useful to explore the etymological roots of bawdiness further. The word bawdiness comes from 'bawd' or 'bawdy' which means brothel keeper and brothel. The term 'bawd' is rich in meaning. It equates with our term 'prostitute' - a label for a woman who exchanges sex for money. However, there is an historical slippage between the terms 'prostitute' or bawd and the term 'whore'.

In Medieval England, 'Whoredom' was a word to describe all unruly and disorderly women – which as well as prostitutes included gossips, scolds, alewives, quarrelling women and nags (Noah's wife in English Mystery plays being a clear archetype). The term 'whore' encompassed all women who were sexually active outside of marriage as well as those who were unruly in other ways. Punishment was the same for offenses of the tongue and the body – all was whoredom. On occasion this also applied to a woman who showed a sexual interest beyond procreation inside marriage too. Laws therefore about whoredom were powerful tools for controlling appropriate feminine behaviour – labels were made more legitimate by being backed up by the legal system which makes it clearer what society deemed as immoral and indecent. 'Whether

it was her tongue or her body that was out of control, the independent woman had to be regulated' (Mazo Karras 1996, 140).

What was also interesting about the Medieval regulation of women's bodies was that legislation and shaming rituals were enforced through dress via the Sumptuary Laws**.** In 1382, it was pronounced that: 'All common whores, and all women commonly reputed' had to wear a cape with a rayon (striped) hood and were prohibited from having fur lining which was only permitted to be worn by gentile women. This law therefore discriminated against any common woman whose behaviour scandalized the authorities in some way (Mazo Karras 1996, 27). Sumptuary Laws forced women to dress according to their station in order to control challenges to the status quo as regards class, sexuality and femininity. These laws acted as a categorization and punishment through public differentiation of dress or undress.

In the case of Cynthia Payne, her unruly challenge to 'respectability' and the 'perverse' was conducted through dress and a self-conscious tongue-in-cheek humour. High camp farce was used to reflect back on society and the legal system its own absurd rules. By performing behaviour, etiquette and dress otherwise, clear demarcations and categories of perversion, innocence, deviance, 'normal' and 'respectable' become confused. And it is this aspect that I would now like to consider further in the final section where I return to the 2014 Westminster protest.

Sex and Snorkels

The 'Face-Sitting' protest that took place outside Westminster in London was described by the media as 'porn pantomime' and 'porn protest' respectively. The deliberately raucous and pleasurable combination of fetish and femdom, dress and snorkels, musical comedy, sing-a-long, double-entendres, gags, slapstick, placards and

audience participation, situates this performance within a popular English tradition of Pantomime. And it is the way that the face-sitting demonstration used the English genre of Pantomime in combination with 'porn' and 'protest' that this section will explore, as it is this DIY fusion of camp entertainment, obscenity and activism that marks out this event.

The low popular family entertainment of pantomime – camp with no pretensions to grandeur - is rooted in English traditions – specifically the 18th century masquerade; carnival which sent up authority. Terri Castle argues that England had its own peculiar trajectory of anarchic insubordinate revelry and ancient traditions of misrule which went into decline with the more urbanized society of the eighteenth century. However, these outlets for symbolic expression still lingered in popular consciousness. Castle refers to Keith Thomas's discussion in his book *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1991 [1971]) where he argues that in a society that was becoming less and less rural, 'the spirit of theatricality' of 'verbal and gestural freedom' (Castle 1986, 19) lived on in public masquerades. In these masquerades gender, class and indeed the restrictions of Englishness were upturned through carnival dress and misrule and the 'pleasure' of the phallocentric pecking order flouted, with both 'Punks' and 'Duchesses' enjoying equal access to the pleasures of participation.

The theatrical use of dress and misrule in public masquerade found its place in the annual Christmas pantomime. Pantomime's humour resides in its childlike 'knickers and bottoms' vulgarity (Holland 1997, 204); it is a quintessentially English comedy form which Holland argues is directed at a middle-class culture which is 'uneasy about admitting to the reality of sex or of believing in sex as a mature activity.' Holland references George Orwell's essay 'The Art of Donald McGill' in which Orwell links the bawdy humour of the seaside postcard with that of music hall as a, 'proletarian rejection

of establishment values' (Orwell 1970 in Holland 2014, 194) In pantomime the adult is permitted a child's curiosity and fascination about sex; it is 'a sort of saturnalia, a harmless rebellion against virtue'.

The dominatrix figure sitting astride a male protestor wearing a snorkel was using pantomime's bawdy humour to undermine the 'virtue' and hypocrisies of the state and its laws. This 'FemDom' in fetish equestrian costume –jodhpurs, knee length boots, riding crop and tailored jacket – played her role as an upper-class English 'lady', with cut-glass accent, drinking a cup of tea and talking to the media. Garber argues that in the early modern period transvestism was at the juncture of 'class' and 'gender' '[...] to transgress against one set of boundaries was to call into question the inviolability of both, and of the set of social codes by which such categories were policed and maintained (1998, 177). Laws were in place to prohibit the pleasures of 'passing' as the privileged 'Other' and transgressing and obfuscating the social order.

The porn protesters made an unruly spectacle out of female pleasure and its multi-variant 'kinky' guises by performing an alternative femininity which played with the sexual, gendered, classed and English privileges of being 'on top'. Mary Russo refers to Natalie Davis's seminal text *Woman on Top* (1975) in order to develop and historically contextualize the image and trajectory of this spectacle of an unruly woman. The carnivalesque use of inversion spearheaded by a disorderly woman proclaiming her right to be 'on top' was threatening for it was feared that this would 'incite and embody popular uprisings' (Russo 1997, 321). Russo was referring to the riots against the Enclosure and Forest Laws which were led by a man dressing as Lady Skimmington, a cross-dressed figure from the English charivari rituals, who was paraded to humiliate and punish a hen-pecked husband.

The cross-dressed image of the formidable matriarch has therefore figured in uprisings as a potent symbol of defiance. This challenging figure was co-opted as a symbol of popular male dissent against the establishment. The carnivalesque figure of the woman-on-top as a site of anxiety also found its place in pantomime. David Mayer in 'The Sexuality of Pantomime' argued that the twentieth century pantomime dame signalled, 'men's deep ambivalence toward women' and the threat they represent as sexual and phallic mothers (1974, 13-14). Lipton argues that the character of the dame signifies a cultural anxiety about manly women and feminine men - 's/he is a site of anxiety that is dispelled through humour (2008, 473). Humour is used to dissipate the threat this figure represents to patriarchal heteronormative sexual and gender power relations with its ability to upset the status quo. Humour is used to reassert control.

The carnivalesque figure of the woman-on-top has recently been reclaimed by women as a counter to misogyny and sexism, re-appropriated as a symbol of women's resistance to patriarchal power. The porn protesters have reclaimed this figure as a strategy of resistance to challenge sexist and kink-phobic legislation which adversely effects the representation of women's pleasure, demonstrating against legislation which prohibits the 'kinky' acts performed in mainly female domination porn.

Campaigner and sex performer/worker Pandora Blake claims that her site 'Dreams of Spanking' was immediately closed down as soon as anti-porn legislation came into effect. Yet she argued that her website and business was wholly egalitarian in relation to gender - queer, feminist and diverse. It was one of the few – possibly the only – online porn sites which dealt with women's and outsider/alternative bodies and pleasure. It was, she argued, feminist porn which gave the viewer the right to see and the performers the right to visualize inclusive porn. "Why is face-sitting banned, but not

gagging on cock?" she writes. "Why can UK video producers not show female ejaculation, but male ejaculation is permissible?" (Blake 2016).

In the year running up to the protest - between May 2012 and July 2013 it had been reported that MPs, peers and staff at the Houses of Parliament had tried to access 'adult' websites from work computers 309, 316 times with the most popular site being 'Out of Town Affairs' a site for those wanting extra-marital affairs which received 52, 000 hits in 7 months (*The Independent*, 2013). The new legislation did not prohibit this kind of website.

The law instead restricted the specific types of activity which figure in female dominant pornography. These include activity seen to be 'life-threatening' or obscene such as 'face-sitting' and female ejaculation, activity which lacerates or marks the skin and consensual humiliation. Three quarters of the sites closed down were run by dominatrixes. The law also banned websites which showed fat, trans and queer bodies.

Pandora Blake's website (which was closed down in August 2015) featured various role play activities. She argued that she was not going to feel ashamed by the fact that she has always got sexual pleasure from spanking, caning and other S&M practices. Indeed, in order to raise funds for legal fees Blake's activities included caning and spanking for money.

The porn protest put the spectacle of the 'kinky' woman and her pleasure centre-stage. The reclamation of two traditional roles within English pantomime: the Dame and the Principal Boy added an intriguing twist to the political performance. The role play made transparent both the hypocrisy and silliness of the legislation and the underlying value system from which it drew its validity.

Firstly, the protestors harnessed the role of the Pantomime Dame. Benjamin Poore in his article 'Reclaiming the Dame' (2012) usefully differentiates the Panto

Dame from the Drag Queen in that the Dame is 'ineptly feminine'. In his argument, he refers to the BBC television sitcom *Miranda* (2009-) where Miranda Hart makes 'comic capital from her physical clumsiness and social faux pas' (2012, 187). Her stocky 6ft+ stature and her inappropriate 'silliness' expose not only her own inability and failure to be appropriately 'ladylike' but also the unnaturalness of the social role that she was born into. As such it presents the artificiality of the social order as 'silly' and ridiculous.

The 'Face-Sitting' protest similarly reclaims the dame by performing the sex worker/performer as an upper-class lady. The carnivalesque inversion of the Lady 'on top' as dominatrix creates comedy by linking 'Ladies' with 'English vice'. Inserting the body of a sex worker into the body of a 'Lady' challenges the 'naturalness' of laws which are built upon the inviolability of this binary lady-whore system of cultural distinction.

The protestors also drew from the Panto role of Principal Boy. The gendered freedoms played out in this figure unleashed alternative erotic possibilities for the audience. In his article on pantomime cross-dressing and gender variance, Jim Davis (2014) refers to Caroline Radcliffe's essay on 'The Erotic Allure of the Principal Boy' in which she discusses the character's erotic appeal as expressed by the artist E.H. Shephard on first seeing her/him In his musing, the independent, active, assertive female body is fetishized through the styling of the body – silk tights emphasizing rounded thighs, masculine tailored outfit emphasizing ample breasts and small waist and the assertive use of riding crop: 'At every smack, a fresh dart was shot into the heart of at least one adorer' (Davis 2014, 218). Cross-dressing allowed the audience to imagine the female body otherwise by way of masculine garb. This role is traditionally played by a fully-grown woman role playing the potentialities open to an adolescent boy and that gender variance is fetishized through dress. The figure signals a gender variant

position for the panto audience eliciting, ‘multiple forms of pleasure’ (Shacker 2013, 62).

The Porn Protest demonstrators referenced this panto role and its multiple pleasures for female heterosexuality beyond heteronormativity - not by being a woman playing a boy but by playfully positioning non-normative bodies and desires as dominant, authoritative, powerful and without shame. The bawdy style of inversion acted as a form of ‘critical democratic citizenship’ in the way it married humour, performance and protest (Lane Bruner 2005). It playfully performed female sexuality and pleasure beyond binary categories befuddling categorization with the challenging proposition that ladies ‘come’ too. However, panto humour draws our attention to challenges that win while losing. The use of humour in pantomime quells and dispels the fearful/desire of the matriarchal figure and her power. This section therefore points to the limits of this model of protest in the way that bawdy spectacle can be co-opted to dissipate its transgressive possibilities.

Conclusion

This article set out to understand the way in which porn, panto and protest were combined to powerful effect outside Westminster in 2014. I have argued that the playful and anarchic protest can be contextualized within an historical trajectory of unruliness with the symbolic carnivalesque woman-on-top acting as a totem of a disorderly refusal of the social order and its laws.

I have developed the link between female bawdiness, feminine style and legislation by discussing Cynthia Payne’s work and the film adaptation of her life as a girl. Bawdy unruliness became a strategy and politics for undermining the seriousness of the etiquette and rules used to shame her ‘inept’ performance of femininity and her vulgar ‘sexuality. Particular values were forwarded as exemplary for a young woman

with the implication that being ‘ineptly feminine’ was shameful and disgusting for the family, community and nation. Indeed, Payne’s story (fiction and fact) allows us to understand the role that hypocrisy plays in determining and negotiating Englishness. Her playful transgression of the line between whore and lady exposed the rules which manage the limits of class, gender, class and sexuality.

I would like to forward bawdiness as a politics which undermines and challenges ‘virtue’ by self-consciously making transparent the co-dependence between a patriarchal value system and sexist legislation. The carnivalesque inversion used in the protest redirects the shame and disgust generated by social codes back onto the perpetrators of such law-making. The sex workers, activists and performers asserted and inserted their own ‘low’ ‘kinky’ bodies into the ‘high’ political arena as sexual citizens with a claim on democratic rights.

Performing kinkiness through a prism of class, gender, sexuality and Englishness highlighted the arbitrary way in which value systems categorize certain bodies and behaviour as indecent, immoral and even life-threatening. By reclaiming the panto figure as an erotic challenge to this sexist value system the protesters used their bodies as a potent site of cultural anxiety. An English popular bawdy theatrical form was used to expose the hypocrisy and double standards of Westminster which condemned and marginalized particular bodies and sexual behaviour as immoral whilst sitting down to a good dose of pornography itself.

This article set out to explore the politics of bawdiness as feminine style. Focusing attention on Payne’s sexual politics allows us to understand further the ideological power of heteronormativity. Irigaray argues that feminine style is a language that puts ‘the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms’ (1985, 79). By using bawdiness, the performers ‘knowingly’ anchor their protest in a body that

enjoys pleasure. This is a body that is defined in phallocentric discourse via class-laden words. Within this discourse female pleasure is repressed and censored. Heterosexual femininities are monitored by a regime of shame with words such as slut, whore, 'dirty', loud, whorish, good and bad girl, 'straight' and deviant; whore and virgin; lady and prostitute. Bawdy humour registers and resists these dichotomies – it makes them transparent whilst raucously performing these stereotypes as an act of disruption.

To conclude, whilst producing a political image of 'woman-on-top' is unsettling to the status quo, 'bawdiness' can also be used to draw this spectacle back into the heteronormative framework as fetishized porn-panto. The 2014 Protest therefore made female non-normative pleasures visible and shame-free but it also drew our attention to the difficulties of moving beyond the same system which censors and mediates such fun.

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