

**Wholesome and unwholesome whores: Historical representations of
Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle**

By

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Table of Contents

List of figures	iv
Abstract	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Nell Gwynn	
2.1 Biography	3
2.2 Representations and their significance	5
Chapter 3: Louise de K�roualle	
3.1 Biography	14
3.2 Representations and their significance	16
Chapter 4: The binary	
4.1. Gwynn vs. K�roualle	24
4.2 A variation	28
4.3 Production and existence of the ‘wholesome (Protestant) whore’ ...	32
Chapter 5: Conclusion	33
Bibliography.....	36

List of Figures

Fig. 1.1. Simon Verelst, *Nell Gwyn as Diana*, circa 16750. Oil on canvas, 1235 x 1010 mm.

Whereabouts known.

Fig. 1.2. Simon Verelst. *Eleanor ('Nell') Gwyn*, circa 1680. Oil on canvas, 737 x 632 mm.

National Portrait Gallery, London.

Abstract

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Charles II reigned from 1660 to 1685, and his reign followed the topsy-turvy nature of 17th century England. Taking the throne directly after the 11-year Interregnum, Charles II faced religious conflict, parliamentary struggles, and national and political strife, yet managed to navigate his rule without civil war and to die safely in bed, leaving the Crown for his brother, James.

This thesis examines the contemporary representations of Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle, and how they are placed in a binary of mistresses that labels Nell as the 'wholesome whore' and Louise as the 'unwholesome whore'. It will argue that the traditional binary, that of a 'good queen' and a 'bad mistress' was shifted as the queen was not a suitable candidate for that role, primarily due to her open Catholicism, which was intensely feared. Thus, our binary was born and Nell was placed into the role of being a 'wholesome whore'; the category was created for her, and her representation was molded to fit it.

Generally speaking, mistresses are looked upon as illicit holders of power, and are seen as swaying the King's decisions through their sexuality - they are resented. However, Nell is represented in an overwhelmingly positive fashion, due to her English-ness and Protestantism; in contrast, Louise is hated for her French-ness and Catholicism. They are historical rivals, and an examination of their dichotomy will reveal their creations to be more complex than 'good' vs 'bad', and will emphasize primarily the fear of Popery, but also of anti-Frenchness as they intertwined with sexuality to produce an image. Ultimately it will show representation to be a product of the historical context, and how depending on the need of the time, certain parts of people are brought to the forefront, whilst other parts are ignored.

Introduction

In a satirical poem titled "An Essay on Scandal," written in 1681, the author blamed the King's financial troubles on the fact that he spent so much on his mistresses. The author advised to "remove that costly dunghill [Portsmouth] from thy doors; / If thou must have 'em, use cheap, wholesome whores."¹ Such advice was common: Charles II's sexual exploits and their supposed influence on the state were widely discussed and written about. The court of Charles II, the 'Merry Monarch' was infamously scandalous; Pepys wrote that it was a place of "gaming, swearing, women and drinking, and the most abominable vices that ever were in the world."² Charles II had several long-term, prominent mistresses, whom he showered with gifts, money and titles; they bore him several illegitimate children, whom he subsequently showered with gifts, money and titles. These mistresses were widely discussed figures and, like the court in general, were publicly criticized and celebrated.

His mistresses came from different social backgrounds: some, such as Barbara Villiers and Louise de K roualle, came from families of high status, while others, such as Lucy Walters and Moll Davis, came from obscure middle-class backgrounds. Charles II slept with Catholics and Protestants alike, with women who were faithful to him and with those who were not. Despite the diversity of mistresses, representations of the women were similar. Mistresses in general were seen as inappropriate holders of power, women who used their sexuality to sway the most powerful man in the kingdom. This was true for all - save one, and as such, the positive representation of Nell Gwynn will be examined, specifically in opposition to her rival, Louise de K roualle.

¹ "An Essay of Scandal," cited in *Court Satires of the Restoration*, ed. John Harold Wilson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 64.

² Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. John Warrington, vol. 3 (London: J.M. Pent & Sons Ltd, 1966), 20.

From the 1670s until Charles II's death, Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle came to represent oppositional values, reflecting the hierarchical assumptions at the time: this will be shown through my analysis. However, this invites curiosity due to the abnormality of a mistress being represented positively; normally, this role would be filled by a queen. Thus, in this paper I will pose the questions: how were Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle represented by contemporaries, and how do their contrasting portrayals shed light on the unique issues of the period, namely the extreme sentiments of anti-popery and anti-Frenchness? What can we learn from their stereotypical opposition; why are they pitted against each other? Why is there a 'good' mistress at all; why the existence of the 'wholesome whore'?

I will answer these questions through examining both primary and secondary sources, to gain well-rounded views of their representations. For contemporary representations, I will focus principally on satirical writings that circulated in coffee houses and at court, diary entries of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, and letters written by their contemporaries concerning their opinions on Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle. I will also look at general, well-known stories of the women, taking into account their questionable reliability but rather focusing primarily on anti-Catholic and anti-French attitudes expressed. For later representations, I will look at English eighteenth and nineteenth century books concerning the court, to see how the legacy of their personas endured.

I will first separately discuss Nell Gwynn's and Louise de K roualle's respective lives and relationships with Charles II, and how they were each represented by contemporaries. I will discuss what these representations reveal about specific anxieties of the time, focusing the overlapping of religion and politics with sexuality. Finally, I will discuss the nature of their representational binary, looking at *why* it existed and what purpose it filled, and how it was a

variation of the queen vs. mistress binary. Throughout the paper, I will aim to prove that while Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle's representations fit them nicely into a 'good' vs 'bad' binary, it is more complex: this binary was a variation of the traditional 'good queen' vs 'bad mistress' dichotomy, and, as such, Nell Gwynn's heroic representation was created to fill the role of the good queen, as the current queen was unsuitable due to her religion. Gwynn's status as a 'wholesome whore' made her a vehicle through which attacks on Catholicism and French-ness could be made, all with reference to Charles II's actions. Gwynn was able to step into the role; her stereotypically immoral position as mistress was set aside due to the needs of oppositional rhetoric. In addition, this argument will emphasize the critical role that religion played in images of sexuality in the Restoration rule, and how sexuality itself was revolutionized through Charles II's reign.

Nell Gwynn: biography

Eleanor Gwynn was born in February, 1650 or 1651, but there is some debate as to her birthplace: Hereford, Oxford, and London have all claimed the distinction, yet there is no solid evidence to tip the scales in any one direction.³ Her parentage is uncertain as well; her father was said to be Welsh, possibly a captain in the navy, and her mother's name was supposedly Helena. She lived with Gwynn in Pall Mall for some time, until she drowned in 1679. Gwynn had a sister, Rose Gwynn, who received a pension from the Crown, lasting until Mary and William's accession in 1688.⁴

Similarly, not much of Gwynn's early life is known - except that presumably she grew up in poverty. Living in London, likely in the Cole Yard, she sometimes served drinks at a brothel;

³ S. M. Wynne, "Gwyn, Eleanor (1651?-1687)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/11816> (accessed 30 Jan 2016).

⁴ H. Noel Williams, *Rival Sultanas* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1915), 40 - 42.

this was stated in a conversation overheard by Samuel Pepys, in which she defended herself against accusations of whoring by maintaining that she was only with one man, "though I was brought up in a bawdy-house to fill strong waters to the guests"⁵. Thus, we can conclude that although she spent time in a brothel, it is unlikely she was a prostitute in her younger years.

From the brothel, Gwynn made the transition to selling oranges in the theatre pit, and from there she went on to become an actress. Lord Rochester speaks of this transition in one of his poems, stating that "this first step raised, to the wondering pit she sold, / The lovely fruit smiling with streaks of gold. / Fate now for her did its whole force engage, / And from the pit she's mounted to the stage."⁶ She had affairs with actor Charles Hart, who helped her with her career, and then later with Charles Buckhurst, which was short-lived. She gained popularity as an actress and moved up in the world; it is in the context of the theatre that Samuel Pepys befriended her, giving us an introduction to "pretty witty Nell."⁷

Nell Gwynn met the King through the stage, and they became lovers in the late 1660s, although it was not publicly known at that time. In early 1668, Pepys wrote that "the King did send several times for Nelly, and she was with him, but what he did she knows not."⁸ However, Gwynn gave birth to a son, Charles, on May 8th of 1670, and thus the nature of their relationship became clear. During the summer of 1670, Gwynn moved into a house on the north side of Pall Mall, and shortly after into a more expensive house on the west side of Pall Mall, where she would remain for the rest of her life.⁹ She gave birth to another son, James, on December 25th, 1671, and lived out the rest of her life comfortably as the King's mistress.

⁵ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 3, 95.

⁶ Lord Rochester, *A Panegyrick on Nelly*, (1681).

⁷ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 1, 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 146.

⁹ Wynne, "Gwynn, Eleanor (1651?-1687)."

She always remained in his good graces; upon his deathbed, Charles II asked his brother, the Duke of York, to “let not poor Nelly starve.”¹⁰ Gwynn died two years after Charles II, on November 14th, 1687, and was buried in St Martin-in-the-Fields, in London.¹¹

Nell Gwynn: representations and their significance

Nell Gwynn has characteristically been held in “a tolerant and kindly regard”¹²; she is the good mistress, the only one to have been loved by the people. This unusually positive representation of a mistress is well-remarked upon by historians, and the reasons behind it are usually prominent questions in their discussions. Anna Jameson, a nineteenth-century British writer, summed up the secret to Gwynn’s popularity: it “seems to have consisted in what is usually called *heart*.”¹³ More specifically, however, we can credit her popularity to several elements which made her more favourable in the minds of the public: her English-ness, her religion, her social background, her public persona and the nature of her relationship with Charles II.

Gwynn’s English-ness was frequently remarked upon; as she was English, she did not pose any national threat and thus was seen as a less harmful mistress. Given the constantly shifting nature of alliances, relations with other countries were often fraught with tension and conflicts, and France especially was extremely unpopular with the English population, despite the secret monarchical connections throughout the latter part of Charles II’s reign. In May 1670, Charles II began their relationship upon signing the Secret Treaty of Dover with Louis XIV. Charles II promised to convert to Catholicism and to support the French in their war against the

¹⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1734), 460.

¹¹ Wynne, “Gwyn, Eleanor (1651?–1687).”

¹² Peter Cunningham, *The story of Nell Gwyn: and the sayings of Charles II* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1852), 2.

¹³ Anna Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II with Their Portraits*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), 174.

Dutch, and in return France would pay England £230,000 per year, and an additional sum both upon Charles II's conversion to Catholicism and a victory over the Dutch.¹⁴ Charles II's motives have "remained a mystery"¹⁵ and it is difficult to ascertain his intentions, but regardless of any level of trust between the two monarchs, anti-Frenchness was rife among the English public, who regarded them as mortal enemies. Anti-Frenchness automatically translated into a patriotic stance, and as a result, Gwynn's English background increased her appeal.

Most satires concerning Nell Gwynn emphasize her Englishness. In a 1682 satire, Gwynn is made to remark that "In my clear Veins best *Brittish* Bloud does flow."¹⁶ Similarly, in a dialogue published in 1681, Gwynn's English nationality is mentioned throughout: "The English lap-dog here does first begin / The vindication [*sic; recte*, vindication] of his lady, Gwynn." The dog states that "so long as I have an English tooth in my head" he will protect Gwynn, that "my lady [Gwynn] is a good Common-wealths woman." Even K eroualle's dog refers to Gwynn as an "English madam."¹⁷ In a 1678 poem addressed to K eroualle, the author presents an English mistress as a lesser evil, stating a preference to be "govern'd by an English ~~cast~~."¹⁸

Gwynn's English-ness was also linked to her Protestantism, the 'true' religion. Anti-Catholicism was ubiquitous in seventeenth-century England, and the Popish plot and the Exclusion Crisis in the late 1670s and early 1680s demonstrate the extent of the fears of Catholicism. Charles II's Catholic associations and sympathies were a source of suspicion, and there were attempts to bar his brother James, the Duke of York, from the line of succession for

¹⁴ Ronald Hutton, "The Making of the Secret Treaty of Dover, 1668 - 1670," *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 2 (June 1986): 297 - 318.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁶ Anonymous, "A Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at parting" (London: Printed for J.S., 1682).

¹⁷ Anonymous, "A Pleasant battle between two lap dogs of the Utopian court" (London: Printed for R.B., 1681).

¹⁸ Anonymous, "The Whore of Babylon" (1678), as cited in Alison Conway, *The Protestant Whore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 32.

similar reasons.¹⁹ Gwynn's Protestantism was commented on extensively, and she was hailed by the public for it in a way that seemed to compensate for the fact that she was a mistress. The clearest example of this tendency was in 1681, when Gwynn was travelling through Oxford in one of Louise de K roualle's carriages. Upon being surrounded by an angry crowd - thinking her to be the Catholic mistress - Gwynn called out to them "pray, good people, be civil: I am the Protestant whore."²⁰ The earliest known citation of this story is in 1775, cited as a "known fact";²¹ its reliability is difficult to state, but the story appears in all subsequent biographies of Gwynn, and reveals the unique position her Protestantism gave her. She had the love of the people despite her adultery, which also demonstrates the intense anxiety surrounding religion, and the fact that it was seen as a greater threat than sexual immorality. I will expand on the idea of the 'Protestant whore' later, and how I believe Gwynn came to embody this role.

Apart from being the 'Protestant whore', simply being 'Protestant' was one of Nell Gwynn's principal identifiers, and like her Englishness, it is repeatedly mentioned in even critical contemporary satires as a positive quality. In *The Ladies March*, Gwynn is "A saint to be admired the more / Because a Church of England's Whore."²² Her lap-dog (in the previously mentioned satire) states that "if [there is] anything [to] raise my Ladyes Fortune, Let me tell you, 'tis, her being a Protestant, who shall be protected."²³ Like her English-ness, her religion compensates for her adultery: "The kingdom can't by whoring suffer want / If prince swives [*sic*] concubines that's Protestant."²⁴ Gwynn was portrayed by many chroniclers as being sincerely religious; "Nell piqued herself upon her orthodox principles and her reverence for the clergy,

¹⁹ Paul Seaward, "Charles II," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/5144>, accessed 1 Feb 2016 (accessed February 1st, 2016).

²⁰ James Granger, *A Biographical History of England*, 2nd ed, vol. 4 (1775), 189.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "The Ladies March," cited in *Court Satires of the Restoration*, 58.

²³ Anonymous, "A Pleasant battle between two lap dogs of the Utopian court".

²⁴ Anonymous, "The Whore of Babylon".

partly from a sincere religious feeling which had been early and unaccountably impressed on her mind, and never left her"²⁵; "Nelly was firm to the Protestant religion - so firm indeed that her adherence to the faith of our fathers is one of the marked characteristics of her life."²⁶ How the historians arrive at their conclusions is uncertain; however the image of Nell Gwynn as staunchly Protestant is a persistent one.

Gwynn's social background was humble, and as she became wealthy she gave much away to charity; she was often admired for her generosity. During the last decade of Charles II's reign, economic troubles plagued the kingdom, and many saw mistresses as responsible due to the vast amount of money that Charles II paid them. As such, Gwynn's reputation for generosity and (relative) modesty in her spending was an extremely important factor in her popularity. Her journey from selling oranges to the King's bed was widely known, and as such Gwynn ended up as a kind of "cinder-woman,"²⁷ the heroine of a true rags-to-riches tale. As one satire aptly states, she went straight "from cole-yard, and celler, to the Throne."²⁸ Another satire emphasizes both her honesty and generosity as reasons for her popularity: "I do them [the public] Justice with less Sums a Year. / I neither run in Court nor Citys score, / I pay my Debes [*sic; recte, debts*], Distribute to the Poor."²⁹ A 1681 newspaper documenting Gwynn's trip to Oxford states that "Madam Gwyn was very liberal to the Ringers and Poor all the Road, and especially at *Beconsfiel* [*sic; recte, Beaconsfield*] and *Wickam*, where she distributed much money," and that "Madam Gwyn has been very liberal here upon all occasions, and out of her charitable

²⁵ Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II*, 169.

²⁶ Cunningham, *The story of Nell Gwyn*, 164.

²⁷ James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 256.

²⁸ George Etherege, "The Lady of Pleasure, a Satyr" (London, 1687).

²⁹ Anonymous, "A Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at parting."

inclinations, has released three Prisoners for Debt out of the Castle, and Two out of *Bocardo*.”³⁰ Gwynn donated money in her will - she gave some of her savings to her parish, to poor individuals in the community, to Roman Catholic individuals in need, and to specific individuals who had cared for her.³¹ This was seen as “an illustration of Gwynn’s kindness of heart ... [and a] real *sympathy* with the poor, that is to say, a capacity for feeling *with* them, and not merely *for* them.”³² The vast majority of her money, however, was left to her son; yet, it is the charity that is overemphasized by biographers, with Jameson stating that “that little [i.e. her savings] was by her will distributed in charity.”³³

Her nineteenth-century biographers celebrate her generosity; it is a trait that has become a crucial part of Gwynn’s representation. Cunningham states that “when raised from poverty, she reserved her wealth for others rather than herself,”³⁴ Jameson stresses that “many stories are told of Nell Gwynn’s charity,”³⁵ and Williams argues that “she was generous and free-hearted too, almost to excess, and no one in genuine distress who appealed to her for assistance ever went empty-handed away.”³⁶ Stories are indeed told of her charity throughout all biographies; in one tale, a clergyman is being taken to prison for debt, and upon Gwynn witnessing the event, she immediately pays his debts and thus bought his freedom.³⁷ It is stated that Gwynn helped her old theatre comrades financially - she had not forgotten her social origins, and wanted to return the favour to those who had helped her in her early days.³⁸ Gwynn is also credited with the creation of the Chelsea Hospital, first mentioned in Cunningham’s biography. He acknowledges it as a

³⁰ *Smith’s Protestant Intelligence, Domestick and Foreign* (March-April, 1681), as cited in Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 34.

³¹ Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwynn*, 168.

³² Williams, *Rival Sultanas*, 346.

³³ Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II*, 172.

³⁴ Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwynn*, 2.

³⁵ Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II*, 180.

³⁶ Williams, *Rival Sultanas*, 172.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II*, 168.

³⁸ Williams, *Rival Sultanas*, 172.

tradition, but accepts its accuracy due to “the known benevolence of her character, her sympathy with the suffering, and the fact that sixty years ago at least Nelly’s share in its foundation was recorded beneath her portrait serving as the sign of a public-house adjoining the Hospital.”³⁹

There is no credible evidence that links Gwynn to the Chelsea Hospital, but the myth has persisted.⁴⁰

It is important to note that Nell Gwynn was not as thrifty as her contemporaries would have believed. She was given an annual pension of £4,000 a year, increased to £5,000 over time⁴¹; in today’s currency, this equals £570,000 or \$1,150,000.⁴² In fairness, this was less than half of what the Duchess of Portsmouth received, but it was still an extremely large income for a single woman. In 1674, Gwynn ordered a bed to be made and delivered to her house, the cost of which was £1,135 3s 1d as seen from a receipt,⁴³ which equals approximately £129,300 or \$270,000 today.⁴⁴ Burnet was more accurate in stating that Gwynn “was maintained at a vast expense”⁴⁵; interestingly, her representation of being humble and charitable has survived.

Gwynn’s public persona ensured her popularity, particularly her image of as charming and vivacious. She was seen universally as *fun*; Madam de Sévigné described her as “young, indiscreet, confident, wild, and of an agreeable humour. She sings, she dances, acts her part with a good grace,”⁴⁶ and Burnet stated similarly that she was “the indiscreetest and wildest creature

³⁹ Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwynn*, 146.

⁴⁰ “The Royal Hospital: History of the foundation,” in *Survey of London: Volume 11, Chelsea, Part IV: the Royal Hospital*, ed. Walter H Godfrey (London: London County Council, 1927), 7-11, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol11/pt4/pp7-11> (accessed February 6, 2016).

⁴¹ Wynne, “Gwynn, Eleanor (1651?–1687).”

⁴² Used the Currency Converter of the National Archives of Britain, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>.

⁴³ Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwynn*, 143-144.

⁴⁴ Used the Currency Converter of the National Archives of Britain, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>.

⁴⁵ Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 1, 369.

⁴⁶ Sévigné, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de. *Letters from the Marchioness de Sevigne*, vol. 3 (London: Spurr & Swift, 1927), 69.

that ever was in a Court.”⁴⁷ Aphra Behn, in a dedication to Gwynn for her play *The Feigned Courtesan* in 1679, wrote that Gwynn was “was infinitely fair, witty, and deserving, but to what Vast degrees in all, they can only Judge who liv'd to Gaze and Listen; for besides Madam, all the Charms and attractions and powers of your Sex, you have Beauties peculiar to your self, an eternal sweetness, youth and ayre, which never dwelt in any face but yours.”⁴⁸ She had a unique energy which endeared her to people, as Pepys comments on: she “hath the motions and carriage of a spark, the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her.”⁴⁹

By the 1670s, Nell Gwynn was very open about her status as a mistress, feeding into her image as the ‘honest’ whore. The ‘Protestant Whore’ story reveals much about the importance of religion, but it also emphasizes a personality trait of Gwynn’s - that she was not afraid to label herself for what she was. In another apocryphal story, her coachman and another coachman were both refusing to give way to the other. The other coachman called Gwynn a whore, and in response her coachman had begun a fight in her defence. Upon inquiring and being told what had happened, Gwynn supposedly said to her coachman “Go, you blockhead! Never fight again in such a cause, nor risk your carcass but in defence of truth.”⁵⁰ She did not put on airs or attempt to deceive as to her status at court. Madam de Sévigné described Gwynn’s opinion about her occupation as a mistress: “it is my profession. I do not pretend to be anything better.”⁵¹ Her openness surrounding her role as a mistress emphasized that she was present in Charles II’s bed for sex only, and was thus an unthreatening mistress. She had no ulterior motives beyond her sexual desires, and this reinforced the honesty in the ‘honest’ whore trope.

⁴⁷ Burnet, *History of Our Time*, vol. 1, 369.

⁴⁸ Aphra Behn, “Dedication to Mrs. Ellen Guin” in *The Feigned Courtesan*, London: 1679.

⁴⁹ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 2, 418.

⁵⁰ Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II*, 183.

⁵¹ Sévigné, *Letters from the Marchioness de Sevigne*, vol. 3, 69.

Finally, Nell Gwynn's perceived relationship with Charles II was a factor in her popularity, for two reasons specifically: she was seen as being faithful to him and for loving him without political motives. These two qualities combined to make Gwynn an honest mistress, a 'wholesome whore'; she was represented as being in the relationship because she loved Charles II as a man, not as a king. It is impossible to know her true motivation for the relationship, but her faithfulness and lack of political ambition were commented upon heavily. Gwynn's fidelity is seen as a sign of virtue: in *A Dialogue between ...* she states that "yet have I been to him, since the first hour, / As constant as the needle to the flower."⁵² She was always present when Charles II needed her, and this was valued in a mistress. She was, in an oxymoronic way, a sexually pure mistress: in a satire, Gwynn states that "I, a poor, kind, harmless creature, / A plain true passion show and trust good nature."⁵³ She is represented as faithful in paintings, as well; in a painting by Simon Verelst around 1680, Gwynn is painted as Diana, goddess of chastity and virtue (figure 1.1). In another painting by the same painter around 1675, Diana is wearing pearls, a classic symbol of feminine virtue (figure 1.2). Her breasts are revealed in both, clarifying her status as a mistress, but it is noteworthy that she is represented as chaste in other ways.⁵⁴

More so than her faithfulness, her represented stance as apolitical was of the utmost importance in ensuring her popularity. There was a general fear of



Figure 1.1

⁵² Anonymous, "A Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at parting."

⁵³ Anonymous, "Untitled song," *Court Satires of the Restoration*, 248.

⁵⁴ Julia Marciari Alexander and Catharine MacLeod, eds., *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2009), 170.

mistress' involvement in political matters, and Gwynn quelled this fear and simultaneously gained approval because of it. She was represented as having no ulterior political motives; in a popular ballad, it was stated that "she [Gwynn] hath got a trick to handle his prick, / But never lays hands on his sceptre."⁵⁵ Another poem applauds her for making a complete distinction between personal and political, writing that that "all matter of state from her soul does she hate, and leave to the politic bitches."⁵⁶ A similar sentiment is repeated in yet another poem, and her focus on Charles II's sexual needs over any political involvement is emphasized: "In her [Duchess of Portsmouth's] hand let thy gold sceptre shine, / And what I must not name be put in mine, / Crowned and in purple robes to her I'll fling thee, / But naked every night let Gwynn unking thee."⁵⁷ She is "laborious Nelly,"⁵⁸ focused only on pleasing the King sexually, and nothing else. For this reason her power was not threatening = although illicit, it came from simplistic desire, and could not be used for political purposes. As Aphra Behn states in her dedication to Gwynn: "And who can doubt the Power of that Illustrious Beauty, the Charms of that tongue, and the greatness of that minde, who has subdu'd the most powerfull and Glorious Monarch of the world."⁵⁹ She had power over the King but not power through the King, and this distinction was important; it not only made her 'harmless' as a mistress, but it



Figure 1.2

⁵⁵ Cited in Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 38.

⁵⁶ George de Forest Lord, ed., *Anthology of Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1600 - 1714*, vol. 1 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), 420.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, "Untitled song."

⁵⁸ Lord Rochester, "A Satyr on Charles II" (London: 1672), as cited in David M. Veith, "Rochester's Scepter Lampon on Charles II", *Philological Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (January, 1958): 424 - 432.

⁵⁹ Behn, "Dedication to Mrs. Ellen Guin."

invited the possibility of her wielding a good, 'wholesome' influence over the King.

As I have shown, Nell Gwynn was seen by her contemporaries as likeable and 'wholesome,' due to her English-ness, her Protestantism, her proportionately modest claims on Charles II's purse, her generosity, and the fact that she did not meddle in politics. These elements reveal the anxieties present in London (and to a larger extent, England) during the Restoration, particularly in response to the threat of Catholicism, of French policies, of corruption and of public spending. Gwynn's positive qualities were seen as outweighing the normal disapproval reserved for royal mistresses, and she became the 'wholesome whore', the good mistress. Although she can be seen as a stand-alone, Protestant Whore, her representation is better understood in direct contrast to the representation of her rival, Louise de K eroualle. Thus, I shall move on to describe K eroualle's representation and its significance, particularly as part of the binary that produced the 'wholesome whore'.

Louise de K eroualle: biography

Louise de K eroualle was born in Brittany, France, in September, 1649. Unlike Nell Gwynn, her parentage and lineage is documented and known; the K eroualle family were one of French nobles, although not powerful or exceedingly wealthy. She was educated near her birthplace, and in 1668 became a lady-in-waiting to Henrietta Anne, known as Madame, the duchess of Orleans and sister to Charles II.⁶⁰ She accompanied Madame to Dover, where the secret negotiations of the Treaty of Dover were taking place between Charles II and Louis XIV - via the proxy of Madame - in late May and early June of 1670. When Madame and K eroualle left Dover, K eroualle reputedly offered to Charles II as a parting present on behalf of Madame, and

⁶⁰ S.M. Wynne, "K eroualle, Louise Ren e de Penanco t de, suo jure duchess of Portsmouth and suo jure duchess of Aubigny in the French nobility (1649-1734)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/15460> (accessed 8 Feb 2016).

Charles II supposedly stated that K eroualle was the only jewel he wished to take home - however Madame did not allow it, and K eroualle accompanied her back to France.⁶¹ However, upon Madame's death mere weeks after the treaty was signed, Charles II was so distraught that it was suggested by the Duke of Buckingham that Louise be sent over to England to ensure the friendly alliance between England and France was upheld.⁶² In September or October of 1670, K eroualle sailed to England to become a lady-in-waiting to Queen Catherine of Braganza.

K eroualle and Charles II reportedly did not sleep together until a year after her arrival: in October 1671, on a trip to Euston. It is recorded by Evelyn, who states that "it was universally reported that the fair lady was bedded one of those nights, and the stocking flung after the manner of a married bride."⁶³ She became pregnant, and during her pregnancy was given apartments at Whitehall, which were infamous for their grandness and splendour; Evelyn stated they were "luxuriously furnished, and with ten times the richness and glory of the Queen's."⁶⁴ On July 29th, 1672, K eroualle gave birth to a son, Charles Lennox. A year later, she became the Duchess of Portsmouth, and was thus officially established as a mistress of the King, which she remained until her death.

At court, K eroualle was in the center of politics, and entertained politicians at her apartments in Whitehall regularly. From the mid-1670s onward she became involved in English-French affairs and often pushed forward French interests, although Weil argues that "it cannot be claimed that any of the mistresses convinced Charles to do something he did not wish to do."⁶⁵ However, there is no denial that she was exceedingly powerful as a mistress, at times acting

⁶¹ Williams, *Rival Sultanas*, 109.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John Evelyn, *Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E.S. de Beer, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 589 - 590.

⁶⁴ Ibid., vol. 4, 74.

⁶⁵ Rachel Weil, "The female politician in the late Stuart age," in *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, eds. Catharine MacLeod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London and New Haven: Yale Center for British Art and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007), 180.

negotiating outside of Charles II's knowledge, although ultimately her power was dependant on Charles II's favour, and after his death her influence was instantly gone. She returned to France that year, and visited England a couple of times before the turn of the century, when she lost her English pension and thus permanently remained on her estate in Aubigny. She died on November 14th, 1734, and was buried in Paris.⁶⁶

Louise de K roualle: representations and their significance

Louise de K roualle is characteristically represented as a villain, as a cunning mistress who was "sent to enslave the English King and the English nation."⁶⁷ She was disliked almost universally by contemporaries, who wrote vicious satires attacking her, and was subsequently disliked by historians, who see her as solely a political spy. Like Gwynn, we can isolate certain traits that contributed to her exceedingly negative representation: her French-ness, her Catholicism, her political involvement, her expenses, and her socially pretentious personality.

In the concise words of Crawford, Louise de K roualle "was born, lived, and died a Frenchwoman."⁶⁸ She was hated for her French-ness: coming from a nation that was constantly at war with England, she was seen as promoting enemy interests and an enemy culture, regardless of England's complicated secret alliance with France at the time. K roualle is constantly referred to as 'French' in satires, always in derogatory sense. In a poem addressed to her, it begins with "You treach'rous Whore of France,"⁶⁹ and goes on to outline the damage she is causing England; namely misfortune, disease, and shame. In the satire with the dogs, K roualle's dog is described as a "French scoundrel ... a French pocky rascal" and K roualle is

⁶⁶ Wynne, "K roualle, Louise Ren e de Penanco t de."

⁶⁷ Cunningham, *Story of Nell Gwynn*, 120.

⁶⁸ C.M. Crawford, preface to *Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth, 1649 - 1734: Society in the Court of Charles II*, by Henri Forneron 3rd ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888), xiv.

⁶⁹ Anonymous, "The Whore of Babylon."

“a French Romish bitch,” a “French whore,” and a “French bitch.”⁷⁰ France is associated with the Devil and hell; in *A Dialogue between ...* Gwynn states she would rather retreat from court, “than be again blasted by thy French fire.”⁷¹

Most satires blamed K eroualle for any state problems, for example lack of funds, citing her foreignness: “And also [problems stem] from that Foreign WENCH, / Who leaves behind her such a Stench.”⁷² In January of 1680, a list of K eroualle’s ‘offences’ against the crown was widely circulated, in a document titled *Articles of high treason and other crimes and misdemeanors against the Duchess of Portsmouth*. The fourth crime was that Louise had “advised and still does nourish, ferment and maintain that fatal and destructive Correspondency and Alliance between England and France, being sent over and pensioned by the French king to the same end and purpose,”⁷³ which simultaneously - and intentionally - attacked Charles II. K eroualle’s nationality was constantly invoked, and in an era of a tense, fraught relationship with France, naturally it became her principal identifier - along with her religion.

The Restoration era was an especially turbulent reign with respect to religion; neither Protestant dissenters nor high Anglicans were happy with Charles II’s restoration settlements, yet Protestants of all strains feared popery; it “had been regarded by most English people for a hundred years as the bitterest enemy of their own church.”⁷⁴ Catholicism was a bogeyman; it was an “abstraction,”⁷⁵ a way to mark boundaries between the ‘true’ English and everyone else. However, its pervasiveness caused much anxiety: as Dolan argues, “the threat they offered was

⁷⁰ Anonymous, “A Pleasant battle between two lap dogs of the Utopian court.”

⁷¹ Anonymous, “A Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at parting.”

⁷² Anonymous, “A Letany for St. Omers” (1682), as cited in Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 36.

⁷³ Anonymous, “Articles of high treason and other high crimes and misdemeanors against the Duchess of Portsmouth” (London: 1680).

⁷⁴ Hutton, “The Making of the Secret Treaty of Dover, 1668 - 1670,” 297.

⁷⁵ Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 6.

precisely that they could not be readily separated out.”⁷⁶ It was “persistently linked to women,”⁷⁷ giving rise to the term ‘the Whore of Babylon,’ which was “larger than life, monstrous, foreign, grotesquely feminine yet not human.”⁷⁸ This phrase equated sexual immorality with religious immorality, and saw England’s goal of ridding itself of Roman Catholic influence as synonymous with ridding itself of sexual deviance. This term is featured heavily in K  roualle’s representations; in most of the satires mentioned, she is referred to as some version of a ‘Catholic whore,’ and there is even a poem addressed to her titled *The Whore of Babylon*.

Like her French-ness, Louise de K  roualle’s Catholicism was an identifier: she was “the Popish mistress.”⁷⁹ If Gwynn’s religion to some extent excused her immoral sexuality, in contrast K  roualle’s exemplified it, again exacerbating associations of religion with sexuality. Gwynn’s dog, in the satire already discussed, states that K  roualle could not become a Protestant, as she would make “a Whore of Religion, as she has of her Body.”⁸⁰ The satire states clearly equates Catholicism with whoredom, and as K  roualle was seen as trying to convert England to Catholicism, she was simultaneously trying to make England immoral. In *Articles of high treason* ... her second crime was that “she hath laboured to ... introduce Popery and Tyranny in the three Kingdoms,” and her third that “she hath by her persuasion ... reconciled Several of her servants and others, natural born subjects, to the Communion of the see of Rome.”⁸¹ It was a continual fear that K  roualle would convince Charles II to convert, and indeed on his deathbed, Charles II converted. Some have claimed that it was K  roualle who informed

⁷⁶ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁹ Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwyn*, 120.

⁸⁰ Anonymous, “A Pleasant battle between two lap dogs of the Utopian court.”

⁸¹ Anonymous, “Articles of high treason.”

the French Ambassador that it was Charles II's wish - "The King of England is at the bottom of his heart a Catholic"⁸² - in order to get him a Catholic priest.

Kéroualle was also criticized for her involvement in political affairs, and her Catholicism and French-ness exacerbated fears of her promoting interests that were not English or Protestant. She is described as politically dangerous: "under all circumstances, and in every case, she was a lethal and intelligent agent of Louis the Fourteenth in London; and she won every wage he paid her, by consciously trying to bring England into subjection to France."⁸³ Kéroualle was an intermediary between France and England, and understandably this was worrisome to contemporaries. Her unique role as mistress allowed the English-French relationship to be at times private and at other times public: she, like other mistresses, occupied "an ambiguous space between the public and private."⁸⁴ Kéroualle was given money and gifts by Louis XIV and Charles II, and these gifts could be interpreted as either official or personal⁸⁵: because of this ambiguity, her involvement caused more anxiety and was understandably represented negatively. Her friendship with both kings was a metaphor for the secret alliance between the two countries; as Weil argues, "mistresses were part of the *semantics* of politics"⁸⁶. However because the alliance was secret, contemporaries feared her involvement, worrying that she solely put forward Louis XIV's interests.

Satires represented Kéroualle as a traitor, inherently extending the insult Charles II: "I'll teach the best French cur of you all to come as a SPY [*sic*] into our Quarters at this unreasonable hour,"⁸⁷ Nell Gwynn's dog spoke. In *A Dialogue ...* Gwynn openly calls Kéroualle a political

⁸² Letter from Barillon to Louis XIV, as cited in Williams, *Rival Sultanas*, 337.

⁸³ Crawford, preface to *Louise de Kéroualle*, xiv.

⁸⁴ Weil, "The female politician in the late Stuart age," 183.

⁸⁵ Wynne, "Kéroualle, Louise Renée de Penancoët de."

⁸⁶ Weil, "The female politician in the late Stuart age," 181.

⁸⁷ Anonymous, "A Pleasant battle between two lap dogs of the Utopian court."

spy, and accuses her of benefiting from it: “whilst you to your Eternal Praise and Fame / To Forreign Scents betray’d the Royal-Game.”⁸⁸ In the *Articles of high treason ...* Kéroualle’s political involvement is cited multiple times as a crime of treason: “she hath laboured to alter and subvert the Government in Church and State now established by Law... she has from time to time intermeddled and advised in matters of the highest moment and importance in Government... she has the opportunity to draw from him [Charles II] the secrets of his Government.”⁸⁹ Charles II was partially at blame for her political involvement, as he was seen as a slave to lust; Rochester wrote that “his Scepter and his Prick are of a length. / And she that plays with one may play with t’other.”⁹⁰ The attacks on Kéroualle’s political involvement are arguably attacks on Charles II’s allowing of such political involvement, as ultimately, Kéroualle’s power was “illusory.”⁹¹ As Harris points out, “there is no firm evidence to suggest that Charles’ mistresses did exercise an undue influence on royal policy.”⁹² Furthermore, this statement is supported by the fact that Kéroualle’s influence vanished after Charles II died; her power and political influence was nothing outside of Charles II. Despite the logic that her power always had limits, Kéroualle’s representation as a manipulative, political spy with excessive influence has remained; she is still “credited with controlling access to Charles II”⁹³ by many historians today.

Louise de Kéroualle was the most expensive of all Charles II’s mistresses, and was widely resented for it. By 1676 she was receiving £8,600 a year, which was eventually increased to £11,000 a year, and by the time of Charles II’s death was receiving upwards of £20,000 a year with all her additional payments outside of her annual pension.⁹⁴ In modern currency, this equals

⁸⁸ Anonymous, “A Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at parting.”

⁸⁹ Anonymous, “Articles of high treason.”

⁹⁰ Lord Rochester, “A Satyr on Charles II.”

⁹¹ Weil, “The female politician of the late Stuart age,” 181.

⁹² Tim Harris, “The reality behind the Merry Monarchy,” *History Today* 55, no. 6 (June 2005), 42.

⁹³ Weil, “The female politician of the late Stuart age,” 179.

⁹⁴ Wynne, “Kéroualle, Louise Renée de Penancoët de.”

£2,278,000 or \$4,572,960⁹⁵: clearly, she was expensive. Evelyn visited her apartments and was shocked by the “rich and splendid furniture of this woman’s apartment, now twice or thrice pulled down and rebuilt to satisfy her prodigal and expensive pleasure, whilst her Majesty’s does not exceed some gentlemen’s ladies’ in furniture and accommodation.”⁹⁶ Kéroualle outshone the Queen in her material splendour, and it emphasized the illicit nature of her position; she was rewarded extensively for her sexual relationship with the King.

Throughout the 1670s, Charles II alienated himself from Parliament through his disagreements on foreign policies and religious toleration, and received little money from it; after Charles dissolved Parliament in 1681, he never reconvened it.⁹⁷ The Crown was thus facing financial troubles, and the public was understandably upset at the vast amount of money being spent by the Crown to support Charles II’s mistresses; one satire asked the question very clearly – “Why art thou poor, O King? Embezzling c--t, / That wide-mouthed, greedy monster, that has done’t.”⁹⁸ Kéroualle, in particular, was blamed for the economic decline of the nation. That satire continues, advising the King to “go visit Ports[mouth] fasting if thou dar’st, / (Which well thou may’st, at the poor rate thou far’st) / She’ll with her noisome breath blast ev’n thy face, / Till thou thyself grow uglier than her face. / Remove that costly dunghill from thy doors.”⁹⁹ It cannot be denied that Charles II’s finances would have improved if he had fewer mistresses to support, and thus there is legitimacy to such criticisms. Many of her crimes in *Articles of high treason ...* focus on acceptance of and inappropriate use of English money; “that she hath been an unspeakable charge and burden, for many years past prodigious Sums of money in other peoples names, (the better to disguise the matter) as well out of the Publick Treasury, as the

⁹⁵ Used the Currency Converter of the National Archives of Britain, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>.

⁹⁶ Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 4, 343.

⁹⁷ Paul Seaward, “Charles II (1630–1685).”

⁹⁸ “An Essay of Scandal,” 63.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 63 - 64.

Private Purse.”¹⁰⁰ Due to her Catholicism and French-ness, this extravagant amount of money was seen as being given into the wrong hands and used for the wrong purpose; “those vast, prodigious sums she hath for the most part, was to be transported to a Nation by Religion, Interest and Practice, an Enemy to our Religion and Government.”¹⁰¹ Her nationality and religion attached to *why* she received the money = her sexual endeavours = ensured that her expenses contributed to her negative representation.

Finally, Louise de K roualle’s personality and relationship with Charles II were represented negatively: she was seen as an arrogant individual who was unfaithful to the King. K roualle was said to be melodramatic, and was nicknamed the “weeping willow”¹⁰² by Gwynn, for her supposed tendency to cry when she desired anything. There is a widely circulated story that describes K roualle appearing at court entirely dressed in black, mourning for the Chevalier de Rohan, leading people to believe they were close relatives - although they were not. The next day, Gwynn arrived at court dressed entirely in black, and upon questions as to who she was mourning, she replied it was for the Cham of Tartary. When asked her relation, Gwynn replied that it was “exactly the same relation that the Chevalier de Rohan was to the Duchess of Portsmouth.”¹⁰³ Madame de S vign  wrote of Gwynn’s reaction to the Duchess’s grandiose airs: “This is how she [Gwynn] argues: ‘That hoity-toity French duchess sets up to be of grand quality. Every one of rank in France is her cousin. The moment some grand lord or lady over there dies, she orders a suit of deep mourning. Well, if she’s of such high station, why is she such

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, “Articles of high treason.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Forneron, *Louise de K roualle*, 178.

¹⁰³ Williams, *Rival Sultanas*, 174.

a jade? She ought to be ashamed of herself!”¹⁰⁴ K roualle was seen as a fraud; a mistress who still tried to play the part of a noblewoman.

This hypocrisy extended to her relationship with Charles II, as she was seen as unfaithful. There is no doubt of Charles II’s feelings towards K roualle; Burnet recorded Charles II sayings on his deathbed, writing that “he recommended lady Portsmouth over and over again to him. He said, he had always loved her, and he loved her now to the last.”¹⁰⁵ Charles II also wrote in a letter that “‘tis impossible to express the true passion and kindness I have for my dearest, dearest, fubs.”¹⁰⁶ It is more difficult to know the true feelings of Louise; one can never know whether her motivation was personal or political, but her representations certainly lean towards the political. A song about the competition between Gwynn and K roualle claims that “perhaps her [K roualle’s] interest may improve / By all the studied arts of fraud and love,”¹⁰⁷ suggesting that K roualle’s affection was learned, rather than natural. A crime in the *Articles of high treason ...* is that “the day before His Majesty fell sick at Windsor, she persuaded His Majesty (being then in her lodgings) to eat a meal of broath,”¹⁰⁸ implying that she had poisoned him, and thus meant him harm. It is highly unlikely that this was the case, but nevertheless, her relationship with Charles II was not presented in a positive way, but was seen as a detriment, both to him and the nation.

I have detailed the ways in which Louise de K roualle’s representation was filtered through specific factors - namely her nationality, her religion, her political involvement, her expenses, and her personality and relationship with Charles II. In the Restoration period especially, these factors were perceived exceptionally negatively, emphasizing the fears

¹⁰⁴ S vign , *Letters from the Marchioness de Sevigne*, vol. 3, 69.

¹⁰⁵ Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 2, 460.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Charles II to Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth's MSS, Goodwood MS 3, unfol.

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous, “Untitled song.”

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous, “Articles of high treason.”

surrounding French-ness and Catholicism, and the decline in the stability of the government and the economy. K roualle embodied these fears: she was a lightning rod, a figure for the public to focus on as a personification of their anxieties. Moreover, as has been stated before, she was often contrasted to Nell Gwynn, in a binary that portrayed Gwynn as the ‘wholesome’ mistress and K roualle as the ‘unwholesome’ mistress.

The binary: Gwynn vs. K roualle

As James Turner has noted, Nell Gwynn and Louise de K roualle “formed an indispensable pair, defining the two kinds of contaminating Other.”¹⁰⁹ As mistresses they were naturally seen as rivals, competing for the King. Madame de S vign  described their competition and K roualle’s annoyance with it, saying that “she [K roualle] did not foresee that a low actress was to cross her path, and to bewitch the king. She is powerless to detach him from this comedian. He divides his money, his time, and his health between the pair.”¹¹⁰ Courtin, the French ambassador, wrote in November, 1676 that “I have ascertained beyond doubt that he passes nights much less often with her [K roualle] than with Nell Gwynn.”¹¹¹ Charles II did care a great deal for both of them, and I believe that the strong differences between the two allowed for such a steady opposition to one another for a decade and a half. In *A Dialogue ...* K roualle acknowledges their rivalry, stating that “two such great Lights cannot together shine: / To give your Orb more Lustre I decline.”¹¹² The author is thus acknowledging the influence of both at court, and hopes K roualle will return to France, eclipsed by Gwynn. A satire has Gwynn saying that “each minute I find myself without thee [Charles II], / Methinks I find my rival’s arms

¹⁰⁹ Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London*, 256.

¹¹⁰ S vign , *Letters from the Marchioness de S vign *, vol. 3, 69.

¹¹¹ Courtin, letter to Louis XIV, as cited in in Forneron, *Louise de K roualle*, 162.

¹¹² Anonymous, “A Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at parting.”

around thee.”¹¹³ Whether or not they were as preoccupied with each other is impossible to judge; however, they were clearly placed in a binary by others - the Protestant vs. the Catholic, the English vs. the French, the common-girl vs. the noblewoman - and this dichotomy was continued by later historians.

In books concerning one or both of the mistresses, they are repeatedly compared, although the sympathies of authors sometimes vary. In a biography of Nell Gwynn, Cunningham writes aptly that “it is this contrast of position [with K roualle] which has given Gwyn much of the odd and particular favour connected with her name. Nelly was an English girl of humble origin, a favourite actress, a beauty, and a wit. The Duchess was a foreigner of noble origin with beauty certainly, but without wit.”¹¹⁴ Contrastingly, in a biography of K roualle, Forneron writes about Charles II’s meeting K roualle that “he [Charles II] was tired of ... the vulgarity of Nell Gwynn. The conversation of the Breton blonde, who appeared sad and gentle, interested him.”¹¹⁵ In yet another nineteenth-century book the situation is reversed again, as Gwynn has “genuine wit, unfailing animal spirits, and careless humour, [which] were a relief from the vapours, caprices, and politics cabals which most often annoyed him [Charles II] in the Duchess’ boudoir.”¹¹⁶

The seventeenth century was a time ripe with conflict, and I argue that Gwynn and K roualle were binarized to emphasize and maintain the divisions within the population, and to show clearly which traits were valued. Charles II’s reign was turbulent, as he had inherited kingdoms fraught with animosity between sects, both religious and political. He was unable to please everyone, and near the end of his reign, we see the emergence of party politics and the

¹¹³ Anonymous, “Untitled song.”

¹¹⁴ Cunningham, *The Story of Nell Gwynn*, 120.

¹¹⁵ Forneron, *Louise de K roualle*, 56.

¹¹⁶ Jameson, *Memoirs of the Beauties of Charles II*, 153.

apex of the anti-popery sentiment, further splintering populations. The Popish Plot and successive Exclusion Crisis in the late 1670s and early 1680s demonstrated the increasingly intense fear of Catholicism and dissent.¹¹⁷ Gwynn and K  roualle were placed in ‘wholesome’ and ‘unwholesome’ roles so that it was clear which values represented goodness in these fragmented times, and which did not.

Notably, the representations of Gwynn and K  roualle emphasize primarily their religion and nationality, and although these identifiers are tied to their sexuality, either exemplifying or diminishing their immorality, their sexual practices themselves were not the forefront criticism of them. Sharpe argues that Charles II “revolutionized the representation of the royal sexual body,”¹¹⁸ and furthermore that he shifted the discourses surrounding gender and sex, leading to a sexual revolution in which women’s sexuality gave them agency. Through his openness surrounding his sexuality - the public nature of his affairs and relations with his illegitimate children - Charles “loosened traditional codes and transgressed conventional boundaries.”¹¹⁹ He allowed his mistresses power and influence and as a result was often called weak by his contemporaries, but through “celebrat[ing] and licens[ing] female sexuality,”¹²⁰ Charles II lessened its importance in representations. His mistresses were satirized for their ‘whoring,’ but Gwynn’s and K  roualle’s sexual activities often took a backseat in their representations. They were almost always called ‘whores’ with a descriptive word attached, usually referencing their nationality or religion, classifying them as either wholesome or unwholesome. Religion and sexuality were linked together regularly; being the ‘wrong’ religion - Catholic - was synonymous

¹¹⁷ Tim Harris, *Politics under the later Stuarts* (Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1993).

¹¹⁸ Kevin Sharpe, “Aesthetics, Sex, and Politics in the England of Charles II,” in *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, eds. Catharine MacLeod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London and New Haven: Yale Center for British Art and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007), 12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

with being sexually immoral,¹²¹ and thus being the 'correct' religion - Protestant, namely Anglican - could cancel out sexual sins, as it did with Gwynn.

Sexuality thus became a "leveler,"¹²² argues Sharpe, in response to the sharp divisions amongst the English in this time. Their sexuality was the element held in common by the mistresses, and with the "revolutionary sexuality"¹²³ of the time, it was of lesser importance and explains why the representations focus so heavily on other elements. From Gwynn's positive and K eroualle's negative representation, we can garner that the public was pro-English, anti-Catholic, worried about the lack of funds and nervous that the King was accepting political influence from outsiders. Gwynn and K eroualle provided a convenient 'good vs. bad' binary in political satires, and as public figures available to scrutinize, they were easy figures onto which anxieties could be mapped. However, the binary of 'good vs. bad' that they were placed into was not the original binary used to describe mistresses, but, I will argue, was a variation of the binary typically used to villainize mistresses in contrast to the queen.

The binary: a variation

Binaries are a classic way of dividing people, and thus of naming and strengthening loyalties within each group. Humans are binarized into good and evil, male and female, civilized and savage. The Madonna-whore binary is a popular way to classify female sexuality: a woman is either the virgin, chaste wife or the sexualized, lusty prostitute. The dichotomy was created and named by Freud, who saw the Madonna-whore complex as a reason for sexual impotency; it was a crisis for men, in which "sexual arousal is only possible with a sexual partner who has in some way been degraded (the whore) while the adequate and respected partner cannot be fully

¹²¹ Sharpe, "Aesthetics, Sex, and Politics in the England of Charles II," 16.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

desired (the Madonna).”¹²⁴ However, this view of women has existed for centuries, and the ‘good queen’ vs. ‘bad mistress’ is an extrapolation of the Madonna-whore binary. Traditionally, Queens are viewed as chaste mothers, who are virtuous and whose sexuality is present solely to provide heirs to the throne. Royal mistresses, on the other hand, have access to power and influence through sexual relations with the monarch, and are typically disliked due to this inappropriate exercising of power.¹²⁵

The ‘good queen’ vs. ‘bad mistress’ binary is a common theme in royal biography, and I shall briefly give three examples spanning several centuries. Edward III, who reigned for fifty years from 1327 to 1377, was married to Queen Philippa of Hainault and had a mistress named Alice Perrers. The queen was exceedingly popular; she “appears to have been widely admired ... she was ‘a most noble woman and most constant lover of the English.’”¹²⁶ She had twelve children, and was stated to have had an amicable relationship with her husband. Alice was accordingly disliked, as she used her relationship with the King to garner a large amount of real estate and political power. After the queen’s death, their relationship was publicized, and it was thought of in bad taste; she was criticized heavily for her “disregard for conventional morality.”¹²⁷ She was condemned by Parliament, banished from Court, and upon Edward’s death, put on trial.¹²⁸

Henry VIII had many, many mistresses, but the most infamous, Anne Boleyn, is the perfect example of the ‘bad mistress’ in opposition to the ‘good queen,’ Queen Catherine of

¹²⁴ Uwe Hartmann, “Sigmund Freud and His Impact on Our Understanding of Male Sexual Dysfunctionism,” *Journal of Sexual Medicine History*, 9 (2009), 2335.

¹²⁵ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550 - 1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹²⁶ Juliet Vale, “Philippa (1310x15?-1369),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/22110> (accessed 16 Feb 2016).

¹²⁷ C. Given-Wilson, “Perrers, Alice (d. 1400/01),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/21977> (accessed 16 Feb 2016).

¹²⁸ W. Mark Ormrod, “The Trials of Alice Perrers,” *Speculum* 83, no. 2 (April 2008): 366-396.

Aragon. Catherine was an exceedingly popular queen who has “enjoyed a good historical reputation ... as queen she performed her role with dignity.”¹²⁹ Despite being a foreigner she was loved by the English people; she produced an heir and was seen as a pious and loyal wife. In contrast, Anne Boleyn was villainized, represented as a power-hungry scheming Protestant, who convinced Henry to forsake his true religion and leave his faithful wife.¹³⁰ She was extremely unpopular with the people, who remained loyal to Catherine, and her execution was seen as justified by many.¹³¹ Despite becoming queen, Anne was never able to shake her ‘bad mistress’ role, and her traits that had served her well as a mistress did not serve her as queen - she was executed on charges of adultery.

Finally, the modern relationships of Prince Charles emphasize the power of this binary, even today. Although not queen, Princess Diana was overwhelmingly popular with the English people, called the “People’s Princess”; she was seen as an ‘ordinary’ girl, to be part of a real-life fairy-tale. She was described as charitable, empathetic, and caring, and had two sons, ensuring the stability of the monarchy.¹³² Upon their separation, it was revealed that Charles had been having an affair with Camilla Parker Bowles, who was subsequently villainized by the media, damaging her reputation and Charles’ as well. Despite it coming to light that Diana had also been unfaithful, her image as the chaste, virtuous - and wronged - wife remained intact, and after her death she was mourned in an unprecedented way by the people. Camilla’s image improved with

¹²⁹ C. S. L. Davies and John Edwards, “Katherine (1485–1536),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/4891> (accessed 16 Feb 2016).

¹³⁰ E. W. Ives, “Anne (c. 1500–1536),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/557> (accessed 16 Feb 2016).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² K. D. Reynolds, “Diana, princess of Wales (1961–1997),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/68348> (accessed 16 Feb 2016).

time, although - similar to Anne Boleyn - I doubt she will be able to shake the 'bad mistress' role that she was placed in years ago.

Thus, as we can see, the binary of 'good queen' and 'bad mistress' is centuries old and extremely persistent; thus, the binary between Gwynn and K  roualle - 'good mistress' vs 'bad mistress,' 'wholesome whore' vs unwholesome whore - invites inquisition, as a variation on the traditional binary. The queen was replaced by a 'good mistress' role: why? Mistresses should never be popular or placed in a positive role, and the legitimacy attached to the position of queen usually ensures that queens are respected. I will hence argue that this variation was caused by the unsuitability of Queen Catherine of Braganza to fulfill the role of 'good queen'. Her representations show her to be an unpopular queen, primarily due to her Catholicism and her inability to produce an heir - as such, the 'good queen' role was shifted onto the next possible candidate, a 'good mistress.'

Queen Catherine was extremely pious and devoted to her religion; although the public was impressed by her piety, her religion made her unpopular.¹³³ There was a "connection between Catholicism and disorderly women,"¹³⁴ and having a Catholic woman legitimately in the bed of the King was extremely frightening in an anti-Papist society. She was a suspect in the Popish plot of 1678, when rumours circulated that Godfrey, the man who had received Titus Oates' testimony, was killed at the queen's house, and that many of those accused of the murder were the queen's staff.¹³⁵ Catherine was never tried, but she was accused of poisoning the King, and this suspicion reveals the discomfort the English had with their Catholic queen, which only

¹³³ Sonya Wynne, "'The Brightest Glories of the British Sphere': Women at the Court of Charles II," in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, 36 - 49.

¹³⁴ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

increased over the following years. She was publicly insulted when taking mass at Somerset House, and in 1680 decided to move to a more private chapel.¹³⁶

Catherine's infertility was another important part of her representation, disqualifying her as a suitable candidate for the 'good queen' role. An essential part of being queen was being a chaste mother, and securing the line of the throne. Whilst there is no doubt as to Catherine's chastity, she was unable to give birth to a surviving heir, and this rendered her a failure. There was enormous pressure put on Catherine, unaided by the proof of Charles II's fertility through his mistresses. There were many contemporary comments surrounding her infertility; in 1668, a visitor at court heard that "the extraordinary frequency and abundance of her menses"¹³⁷ made it unlikely she would ever bear children, and undoubtedly this rumour or fact circulated. Sir John Reresby also commented in a similar vein that she had "a constant flux upon her"¹³⁸; these representations invoke images of Catherine as dirty and unsound, in line with the common image of her religion.

Together, the representations of Catherine's religion and her infertility reveal, like the representations of Gwynn and K roualle, an intense anxiety surrounding religion and concerns over the security of the monarch. Understanding that Catherine was a target herself of criticism and scrutiny during Charles II's reign is essential to understanding how there was a role for Gwynn as a 'good mistress.' As stated earlier, these representations show that religion was impossible to separate from sexuality, and so Catherine's Catholicism overshadowed her virtuousness and chastity. Thus, with Catherine unable to fulfill the role of the 'good queen,' attention shifted to other possible candidates, landing on the popular Protestant mistress, Nell

¹³⁶ Wynne, "Catherine (1638-1705)."

¹³⁷ Lorenzo Magalotti, *Lorenzo Magalotti at the court of Charles II: his Relazione d'Inghilterra of 1668*, ed. and trans. W.E. Knowles Middleton (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980), 30.

¹³⁸ Andrew Browning, ed., *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby* (Glasgow: 1936), 40 - 41.

Gwynn. Having demonstrated the importance of religion, the 'wholesome whore' can now clearly be understood as a 'wholesome (Protestant) whore,' and Gwynn's declaration of herself as the 'Protestant whore' is significant.

The binary: the production and existence of the 'wholesome (Protestant) whore'

As seen in the last section, because Queen Catherine was an unsuitable woman to fill the role of 'good queen,' a space was left open; clearly, there cannot be an alternate queen in the scenario - although it is worthy to note that there were several suggestions made to Charles II to divorce his queen.¹³⁹ He refused, however, and thus in order for the binary to continue, a new role was created, that of the 'good mistress': hence its existence. To personify the anxieties of society, a heroine was needed in opposition to the villain; thus, a woman who was Protestant, English, loyal, and virtuous. Gwynn was clearly not sexually chaste, but she was faithful and loyal to the Crown, and her devotion to Protestantism and English background ensured that she fit the qualifications. The idea of a 'wholesome whore' emerged, with Gwynn first being called the 'Protestant whore' in an anonymous satire in 1678: "the Protestant Whore I cannot here leave out; / Fam'd for not wearing of the double Clout."¹⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter, she proclaimed herself the 'Protestant whore' in 1681, and Gwynn confirmed and reified the role and image set up for her, becoming even more popular.

Gwynn's representations were undoubtedly an exaggeration of her qualities, emphasized in order for her to be able to fulfill the part of 'good mistress'. Her signature identifiers were those of the ideal English woman, and became more pronounced as she was elevated to the role of the 'good mistress'. She was in a highly unique role, subverting sexual morality yet solidifying the important alliances: "the Protestant Whore acts outside the conventions of church

¹³⁹ Davies and Edwards, "Katherine (1485–1536)."

¹⁴⁰ Anonymous (1678), as cited in Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 38 - 39.

and state ... she sets a standard of her own."¹⁴¹ Gwynn's representation as the 'good mistress' is important for many reasons: historically, it reveals anxieties, but socially, it broke boundaries. The 'wholesome whore' is an oxymoron - yet it was Gwynn's reality. Due to her being on the right side of religion, and in addition her nationality and humble origins, she was forgiven for her sexual position as mistress. Rather than being condemned she was valorized, as she was deemed the most suitable candidate to oppose the devious and villainous other, Louise de K eroualle.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Nell Gwynn's and Louise de K eroualle's representations, primarily contemporary but steadily continued in later centuries, were based upon the intertwining of various anxieties and the need to emphasize the dangers of Catholicism and French-ness during the Restoration rule. Gwynn's portrayal also reveals the revolutionizing of sexuality, where her status as a 'whore' was less important than her positive attributes; she was not punished for her sexual behaviours. Gwynn is portrayed as a humble, common English Protestant, who is full of wit and originality, and loved Charles II for his personality, not his political power. In contrast, K eroualle is portrayed as an arrogant French Catholic whore, who was a political spy and seduced Charles II to further her personal, as well as French and Popish interests.

I argue that their representations were oppositional, and that they embodied a binary that served to highlight these divides in society and furthermore to strengthen those divides. The binary they personified, that of the 'good mistress' and the 'bad mistress', I argue, is a variation on the traditional 'good queen' and 'bad mistress' binary, which itself is an extrapolation of the Madonna-whore complex. This traditional binary is a classic way to categorize women into

¹⁴¹ Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 41.

virgins or prostitutes, but in the case of Charles II, the 'good queen' role could not be fulfilled due to Queen Catherine's Catholicism and inability to have a child, which inherently villainized her, especially given the political climate during the Exclusion Crisis. Thus, as she was unsuitable for this binary, its category shifted onto a woman who although not queen, could fulfill the other attributes, that being of the 'proper' religion, nationality and virtuousness. Gwynn fit these qualities, and she became the 'good mistress', the 'wholesome (Protestant) whore'. Her embodiment of this role resulted in her extraordinarily positive representation, which has stood the test of time.

The representations of these two mistresses, along with the circumstances of the creation of their representations, reveal sexuality as a discourse that changes with time. Attitudes towards sexuality shift depending on the contemporary issues, and during the Restoration era, the intense fear surrounding popery and foreign policies, as well as the reaction against the Puritanism of the Cromwellian era, allowed more open sexuality to flourish. In fact, it is argued that the "Restoration culture was the first in England to publicize, and in some cases to celebrate, female sexuality."¹⁴² Because of its publicized nature, sexuality was not most relevant factor in the representation of his mistresses, and was commented upon in connection to religion, nationality or politics. In their binary, Gwynn was seen as relatively sympathetic due to her Protestantism, English-ness, and lack of political involvement.

Representations do not occur in a historical vacuum; they are created entirely through their context, that being the contemporary anxieties and events. Ankersmit defines a representation as "a substitute or replacement of something that is absent,"¹⁴³ and to paraphrase his later argument, historical representations can never be completely precise - "there *will* and

¹⁴² Kevin Sharpe, "Restoration and Reconstitution: Politics, Society and Culture in the England of Charles II," in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, 19.

¹⁴³ F.R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 80.

always *must* be such differences”¹⁴⁴ - as there will always be a distance between the represented and its representation. Thus, rather than take such representations at face value, we should celebrate them for what they contribute to history; namely, exposing the values and ethics at the time of creation.¹⁴⁵ This is precisely what I have aimed to do throughout my paper - to take common, well-known representations of famous mistresses, and examine them to see the values and ethics they reveal about their time of conception - in this instance, I argue they emphasize the rampant anti-Catholicism and anti-French sentiments. I believe that this attitude should be taken with all representation, as the only danger of representation occurs when it is perceived as truth. As long as we continue to analyze representations, we can break down common misconceptions, through which we can gain insight to the circumstances of their creation - thus, we can unveil discourse and break barriers to move slightly closer to the truth.

¹⁴⁴ Ankersmit, *Historical Representation*, 81.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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