

CONNECTED GENRES AND COMPETING NATIONS: FROM LAHONTAN'S *NEW*
VOYAGES TO JOHN DENNIS'S *LIBERTY ASSERTED*

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In 1704, between February 24th and March 16th, John Dennis's *Liberty Asserted*ⁱ appeared a notable ten times in Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. Known primarily as a critic, then and now, this heroic drama was Dennis's only real success on the stage. The play focuses on the abduction of a Huron mother and son. Their familial reorientation to the Iroquoian confederacy allows Dennis to critique French colonial practice and re-imagine indigenous relations under guidance of English liberty. Despite the play's foregrounding of imperial competition, critical work has paid limited attention to its North American or even transatlantic context.ⁱⁱ Richard Braverman sees it as an allegorical narrative generative of a country English ethos and a corrective parliamentary model,ⁱⁱⁱ and Julie Ellison views the setting as a generic colonial terrain for the re-staging of the Roman drama's tensions between homo-social relations and reproductive desires.^{iv}

Extending Bridget Orr's reading of Dennis's drama as an advertisement for local Whig politics and imperial rivalry^v, I argue that the writing and successful production of this drama exemplifies England's shifting cosmopolitan perspective toward America in the early 18th century. Locating *Liberty Asserted* within a tradition of dramatic performance preoccupied with colonial encounters, I show how Dennis's definition of English empire in North America is shaped by the representations of Anglo-French and Native relations in Baron de Lahontan's *New Voyages* (1703).^{vi} Well before England established an upper hand in North America, even before it wielded control over the seas, Dennis's unacknowledged investment in this explorer-ethnography sheds new light on the use of Native American representations across connected genres and between competing nations. His "new world" drama and Lahontan's narrative function with and against each

other as sentimentalism and pseudo-empiricism converge, contesting the effect of existing colonial practices while offering new possibilities for colonial unity.

In 1759 *London Chronicle* asserted, “We are well enough informed too of the customs of the American Indians to want no interpreter, when we read of their taking up or burying the hatchet of war; of their tomahawking or scalping their enemies; and of planting the tree or smoking the pipe of peace.”^{vii} Less than a century earlier, the English certainly knew far less about Native American cultures, but their obliviousness to the use of cultural difference has been overstated in recent criticism.^{viii} Gathering information about indigenous allies and foes in King Williams’ and Queen Anne’s War required interpreters. English clergymen, politicians, merchants and family members of colonists looked curiously to North America throughout the 17th century, attentive to the moral and economic relevance of Native American relations. The interpretations they received, in addition to their correspondences, from traveler, explorer and missionary writers may eventually have become old news. In their early stages, however, publication and strategic representation of Native customs had an enlivening impact on an inchoate English literary culture.

Writing, as it manifested itself in 17th century ethnography, confirmed the supposed linguistic and literate divides structuring an Enlightenment duality between the civil and the savage.^{ix} During the Restoration, an exponential increase in London printing presses and a dramatic rise in literacy allowed England to separate itself into a more “civilized” nation at least in part through the dissemination and consumption of travel and explorer narratives.^x Multiple volume accounts remained expensive and therefore harder to come by, but pamphlets and short tracts were purchased at little cost.

Proliferating print culture also coincided with the beginnings of a more elaborate transnational literary exchange. Increased numbers of French and Spanish translations reached England, and for the first time, English language travel writings cropped up elsewhere in Europe.^{xi} No longer simply the subject of an appeal to monarchy, parliament or the church, readers and writers became aware of the cultural and cartographic “data” provided by other explorers and more cognizant of a beginning transnational and transatlantic literary marketplace.

In spite of overseas print culture, *Liberty Asserted* ran at a time when it was still natural for European writers to connect success abroad with their poetic and dramatic national heritages- an invocation of the *translatio imperii studii*. Traveler and explorer texts, however, confirmed the imperial history of arts and arms in ways which became increasingly hard to ignore. England’s established settlements contrasted with France’s itinerant trade and missionary practices, making the latter the authority on those indigenous populations living in more remote regions.^{xii} A scattering of anti-Indian tracts and captivity narratives written by New England settlers during King Phillip’s War differed markedly from the many, detailed and largely sympathetic accounts provided by Jesuits and explorers prior to and through King Williams War. The pan-Indian-French alliance, known as The Great Peace of Montreal, and the intensification of French-Native raids on northern New England at the start of the 18th century were all visible signs of a parallel between colonial stability and ethnographic publication. Readers in England and France gradually realized what colonists had come to hard terms with over the 17th century: success in America depended upon knowledge of or more appropriately the appearance of knowledge of indigenous lands and cultures.

Arriving with inevitable projections, fettered and unfettered by colonial conditions, explorers employed strategies for appearing qualified in their representation of Native American lands and customs. They shaped the form and content of their accounts in accordance with their own expectations and the demands of a broadening readership. ^{xiii} Gordon Sayre in his *Les Sauvages Americains*^{xiv} shows how French and English explorer-ethnographers often authorized their narratives through the artificial separation of ethnography from travel. This allowed writers to make customs and manners appear comprehensive and malleable, while enticing readers toward spuriously vacated or easily obtainable terrains. ^{xv} As this strategy suggests, these texts were often directly complicit in the construction of future colonial policy. At the micro level, explorers and missionaries used Western phonetics to transliterate Native language. Indigenous words appeared on maps and in lexicons, often misrepresenting and simplifying complex tribal affiliations and territorial arrangements. At the macro level, writers attempted to fit Native Americans into or expel them from a Judeo-Christian tradition as descendents of biblical or classical history. The integrationist or “substitutive” side of this approach presented Native peoples as transferable under a monogenetic worldview with the Lost Tribes of Israel or with early Middle Eastern civilizations, such as the Carthaginians, Scythians and Phoenicians (Sayre 81).

As a result of these strategies, England received consistently inconsistent accounts from English, French, Spanish and Dutch interpreters, all of whom proclaimed to have especially accurate knowledge of specific Nations and lands and/or descriptions of Native Americans in general (Even in single texts contradictions were often glaring.). As explorers passed on their versions of unconfirmed places and languages, they did so in

ways that belied their proclamations, by making data less about accuracy and more about use in the bolstering of epistemological and ontological positions. They made local culture incessantly subject to substitution, re-signification or exclusion in the name of a larger worldview, a conjunctive or disjunctive effort to figure out how distant people might be a part of or distinct from Western tradition. While criticism has made note of the formal and stylistic influences that travel and explorer accounts had on the early novel, these texts also altered late Restoration drama in accordance with contesting views of empire.

Travel and the English Stage

Despite the success of *Liberty Asserted*, little remains to tell us precisely if the production appeared on stage in accordance with any visual information gathered from French or English travel accounts. No record exists of its costumes or its stage design. In the dedication, Dennis acknowledges that the inspiration for the setting came from Anthony Henley, who patronized it, and fellow new world playwright and correspondent, Thomas Southerne, both of whom he attributes with providing him the “hint” upon this subject. Southerne’s redaction of Behn’s *Oronooko* attaches the drama to colonial performances of the Americas, while the reference to Henley creates a muse out of a figure who held influential sway in parliamentary and literary circles in London.^{xvi} Much of what we make of this combination can be colored in by late 17th century technical and generic changes in English drama.

Thus while information remains spotty regarding staging, we do know that Dennis took a particular interest in the use and invention of increasingly popular stage devices.^{xvii}

These machines, notably props, sets and stage arrangements, exploited the spectacular possibilities of late Restoration theatre, displaying exotic spaces and resources in enticing ways so as to highlight the stakes of distant colonial competition. Their innovations brought new world terrains to life, implicitly demonstrating potential knowledge of and control over conquered and conquerable peoples. As Bridget Orr notes, “The scenic command over the world of the theatre offered to the dramatist by the newly sophisticated engines can be seen as analogous to the power that technological assets such as guns, shipping and cannon provided Europeans in colonial adventuring.... The machinery was not simply aesthetically effective: it functioned as an index of political, technological and cultural command in the world beyond Europe so often represented on the stage.”^{xviii} Whether those events on stage conformed to or revised popularly held beliefs about Spanish, French, Dutch and Native peoples of the colonies, they did so within the refined parameters of transplanted and/or invented visual and aural effects. Difference was choreographed, scripted and dressed, so that knowledge of the appropriate staging of drama signaled knowledge of foreign cultures.

Just as dramatic devices aligned production with military prowess, they also responded to the aesthetic demands of audience, promising a convincing transport to exotic locales well before mass tourism was possible. Playwrights imported lavish costumes and included scenic features in their dramas designed to attract their audience. In Davenant and Dryden’s adaptation of *The Tempest* (1667) and in Tom Brown’s advertisement for the London stage (1700), Joseph Roach locates the beginnings of what he calls “vicarious tourism,” a commodified staging that stands-in for direct foreign experience.^{xix} In Brown’s account, the actors actually become ethnographic subjects and

the trip to the theater becomes a travel narrative, underscoring the late 17th century transformation of theater into an entertainment industry^{xx} and spectators into consumers entitled and provoked to “know about the ‘real’ behind-the-scenes truths belonging to local culture.” Even without magical elements in productions like *The Tempest*, English theater going lost little of its escapist attraction. Plays with explicitly real yet little known settings, such as *Liberty Asserted*, not only included costumes and scenic details designed to appeal to the eye, they borrowed information from largely unverifiable travel sources.^{xxi} Readily available parallels between theater and travel and probable allusions to travel narratives even in this magical adaptation suggests that 17th century travel accounts, in spite of their supposed empiricism, contained comparable currents of the implausible.^{xxii} As a result, the plots and characters of “real” world dramas blended fact and fiction making them just as unrealistic as those productions which had lesser claims to empirical truth. This does not mean that dramatists considered cultural difference irrelevant. For many playwrights, actual places, regardless of how remote, demanded accurate representations, including speech, character, costume and setting. Approval or disapproval of heroic drama depended heavily on verisimilitude in so far as it applied to poetic justice *and* cultural distinctiveness.^{xxiii} Criticism of the former sprung from a disparity between rewards and punishments on stage and a divine moral order.^{xxiv} Criticism of the latter, at least in those plays set in distant locales, stemmed from first hand accounts.

Dennis wrote much about poetic justice, but his reflections on cultural distinctiveness, in so far as they apply to theater, refer largely to the maintenance of an unadulterated English temperament and culture in response to an increasingly

cosmopolitan London. They exemplify his divided role as dramatist and critic: a figure controlling his audience and a figure wary of exotic spectacle. In *The Usefulness of the Stage* (1698), Dennis claims that England's drama has saved its citizens from the dangers of imperial expansion. It is owing to plays, Dennis argues, that England recognizes it is "ill designed for Conquest" (*MT*, 311). He separates arts from arms, intending to celebrate a national drama which improves rather than weakens the unique, albeit "splenetick" English disposition. Dennis saw English military advances and colonial commerce as antithetical drives. The former, he upholds in his naval tract for The War of Spanish Succession (the broader European name for Queen Anne's War), the title of which bears noting in full: *A Proposal for Putting a Speedy End to the War, by Ruining the Commerce of French and Spaniards, and Securing our Own without Any additional Expence to the Nation* (1703). The latter he denounces as destructive of England's distinctiveness. In *Comments on Publick Spirit* (1711), Dennis's concern legitimates a benevolent definition of empire:

-it is manifest, that we can have very little Publick Spirit among us: for we have no Manners of our own to love; our manners are those of all the neighboring Nations. And whereas it was formerly a part of the Roman wisdom, whenever they gave to other People the Right of Roman Citizens, to oblige them to throw off their old Customs, and become comfortable to theirs; we at a time of general Naturalization are throwing off the very Remains of our old Customs, and embracing those of all the Nations whom we design to receive.^{xxv}

The parallel to Rome, a direct reference to the *translatio*, forwards a civilizing discourse. Rome does not conquer or even coercively assimilate its chosen inductees; it does not even annex territory. It simply gives, "obliges," and makes its citizens "comfortable" in their new customs. Clothing connotes civility and eloquence; its use as a metaphor with the English "throwing" off their customs signals England's potential return to savagery

and their national failure to fulfill the *translatio*.^{xxvi} Within the context of interstate rivalry, Dennis's argument for unadulterated Englishness justifies the generous clothing of "the Nations whom we design to receive."

The English degradation Dennis feared could be remedied through late 17th century generic changes on the stage. While heroic dramas were popular well into the 18th century, Laura Brown observes a shift toward affective tragedies in the 1660s. These plays amplified pathos, leading to a greater "emphasis on situation at the expense of assessment correspond[ing] to a diminished interest in characterization and a diminished ability to create and sustain consistent characters."^{xxvii} Hybrid heroic-affective tragedies provided marginal moral exemplars within narrative frames increasingly distorted by separate situations designed to create sympathy. This shift toward sentiment, identified most recently in Lyn Festa's work on 18th century novels, had particular advantages for plays set in the colonies.^{xxviii} Unlike Tory plays, such as *Oroonoko*, where commercialism morally degrades all the European colonists, albeit to varying degrees, Whig drama could celebrate avatars of virtue. In the idealized version of Whig empire fashioned by Dennis, a malleable, comprehensible locale requires civilizing assistance. A moderated, valiant ethos survives in the characterization of its colonizing hero, a martial figure unaffected by the material excesses of imperial exchange, and thus presented as capable of reforming rather than replicating invasive, exploitative and basely motivated encounters. Colonial travelers and explorers function comparably to these self-effacing heroes. By separating travel from culture, they maintained the illusion of an unchanged traveler-narrator. At the same time, their writings simplified complex cultural practices; and, in so doing, they assuaged the anxiety of figures like Dennis. They assured readers that the customs of

distant peoples could be circulated within the metropolis under visible, compartmentalized control.

Angiès in *Liberty Asserted* and *New Voyages*

Dennis's knowledge of Native American tribes and their centrality in Queen Anne's War is evident in the plot of *Liberty Asserted*, which accurately pits Huron and French against English and Iroquois. The setting and dramatis personae, however, reveal a more extensive investment in the use of Native culture than critics have noted. In drawing attention to these seemingly minor dramatic attributes, Lyn Festa's observation is helpful: "Spartan descriptions or sweeping statistics make faint impressions; seemingly 'trifling' details lend power and verisimilitude to an otherwise affectively unconvincing narrative. The dilation upon 'little circumstances' that seeps the reader in another world helps confer imaginary being upon distant peoples."^{xxix} By setting the play in the lesser known Canadian region of Angie, an area populated by Angian Indians, Dennis links distant people to local place using verisimilitude to authorize his foreign drama. Angie is not simply a tribal fabrication as some critics have implied. It is in fact the French name and home of the Mohawk Nation. While the English and Dutch travelers typically referred to this tribe and area as Mohawk, Dennis uses Agniè.^{xxx} Whether this was an intentional re-spelling or a misspelling, in effect, he re-transliterates a French transliteration. Before the heralded and much discussed 1711 arrival of the "Mohawk Kings" in London, it seems that the tribe had already been on prominent display on the English stage.^{xxxi}

Dennis's appropriation of Angiè suggests that he, or his dramatic contributors,

Henley and Southerne, read one French explorer account in particular, locating unacknowledged traction for the drama's message in its transliterated language. The term most likely came from Baron de Lahontan's *New Voyages to North America*. This well circulated epistolary narrative and satirical dialogue, written by a military deserter and French exile, was printed in Holland and translated with great success into English a year before *Liberty Asserted* appeared on stage.^{xxxii} In spite of its numerous fabrications, English cartographers and military strategists continued to use *New Voyages* as a collection of empirical truths well into the 19th century.^{xxxiii} While there is no evidence to prove that Dennis knew Lahontan, because of the text's popularity outside of France, the playwright and the explorer may have met when the latter came to London to serve as an intelligence officer during Queen Anne's War.^{xxxiv}

Lahontan's frustration with French social hierarchies, a disposition resulting from experience with bureaucracy and Jesuit theocracy in North America and his thwarted efforts to obtain his inheritance in France, would have appealed to Dennis's ardent anti-French and anti-Jacobite sentiments. In much of *New Voyages* this bias predominates, such that one feels as if one is reading a guidebook to English success against the French. In one of Lahontan's early letters, which English readers may have read with particular attention, the Agniès figure as follows: "There has been an Alliance of longstanding between these Nations and the English, and by trading in Furs to New-York, they are supply'd by the English with Arms, Ammunition, and all other Necessaries, at a cheaper rate than the French can afford 'em at" (*LA*, 58). And later in that same letter Lahontan notes in his frustration with the French governor-generals that they "made Head against the Agniès upon the Champlain Lake, in Winter as well as in Summer; but they could not

boast any great success.” If the playwright did in fact read this letter, then the setting must be seen as an implicit reference to appropriate and effective colonial strategy. The Mohawk challenged the early 18th century trend toward increasing French-Native American alliances and their subsequent military superiority over English settlers. Located between New France and New England, Mohawk territory was likewise a conduit promising mutually beneficial trade, where the English armed the Indians against the French, indirectly facilitating expansion into new regions of North America.

The Pathos and Power of Captivity

Other transliterated words and stylistic features from Lahontan’s ethnography appear in the dramatis personae of *Liberty Asserted*, revealing Dennis’s complex awareness of North America’s fluid significations. While the character Frontenac, a very prominent French general in King Williams’ War may well have been known outside of *New Voyages*, Lahontan popularized him for English readers. Frontenac appears often in *New Voyages*, rarely in a sympathetic light, as a leader fecklessly constrained by the Jesuits and as a bureaucratic obstacle blocking Lahontan’s return to France to obtain his inheritance.^{xxxv} Even more interesting, however, are the names Sakia and Okima, which come directly from Lahontan’s Algonquin-English lexicon. They mean “to love” and “captain or leader” respectively. Because the drama’s first act focuses primarily on the relationship between these two characters, their overlooked Algonquin definitions bear further consideration.

In the preface to *Liberty Asserted*, Dennis locates the tragedy’s sentimentalism in the contrast between England and an unnamed site of colonial violence. Dennis tells his

audience, “Ye Britons, from your Thames’s Silver Flood/Turn, turn your Eyes to Streams distained with Blood..../No fancy’d Tragedies are acting there,/There the distracted Native rends his Hair,/And shrieks and wrings his Hand in true Despair” (*LA*, 104). In keeping with affective tragedy, the instructions here rely on connection and differentiation. The spectator-citizen shifts his eyes outward to a distant pathetic subject, whose fortunes like his own are reflected in the natural world. This “turn,” though, is predicated on a privileged distinction between sufferer and suffering. Dennis concludes the preface: “With silent care to the first act attend,/then you with Pleasure may perhaps unbend.” These instructions turn spectators into captives, comparable participants in the Native process of prisoner exchange which is the focus of the play’s first act. Dutiful identification is followed by a permitted “unbending,” suggesting that the play socializes as captivity does with an original experience of discomfiting reorientation followed by relaxed submission. Unlike the play’s captive subjects, however, the advertised “pleasure” forewarns them of their own entitlement.

In the opening scenes, Sakia’s agony over her and her son Ulamar’s Iroquoian capture continues the preface’s sentimentalism. Her grief stems from Ulamar’s unwitting participation in a battle against his Huron people and more specifically against his French father, Frontenac. Ulamar’s potential marriage to Irene, an Angian princess plague Sakia as well, given her promise to Frontenac that his son never marry an “Indian Maid.” In her anguish, Sakia becomes the Native who “rends his Hair/And shrieks and wrings his Hand in true Despair.” Excessive feelings for her lost husband turn into anger at her Angian captives instilling both pity and apprehension. Her Algonquin name (meaning to love), signals “unnatural” affections and untamed passions. Dennis’s view on colonial

commerce and gender relations explains the confluence of pathos and power behind Sakia's anger. In his essay on England's flagging public spirit, he argues, "Thus has our Luxury chang'd our Natures despite of our Climate, and our Girls are ripe as soon as those of the Indies. Nor has it only chang'd our Natures, but transform'd our Sexes: We have Men that are more soft, more languid, and more passive than Women...On the other side, we have Women, who, as it were in revenge, are Masculine in their Desires, and Masculine in their Practices"(LA 424). For Dennis, luxury troubles sexuality, trumping all cultural differences determined by climate within a monogenetic worldview. Its degrading power in *Liberty Asserted* stems from a critique of French materialism, suggesting that in Sakia's exchange she functions as a commodity. In her removal from the Huron and the French, she threatens to destroy all barriers between an us and a them.

Whether Sakia's influence also corresponds to gathered travel narrative information regarding the matrilineal arrangements of most Native American tribes is unclear. The character inconsistency typical of affective tragedies highlights her anguish and power in ways that are meant to signal identification with and difference from an English audience. As Sakia and Okima's conferences demonstrate, that difference gives rise to alternative strategies of colonial control:

Sakia: Hurons we once were call'd and once were thought to be descended from no vulgar stock, but now, alas! are sunk to wretched Slaves....

Okima: Forget your Hurons and become an Angian.

Sakia: O may the whole accursed Race [Angie] by Fate

Be rooted ev'n from Human Memory!

Perish their very Names too with their Persons,

Excepting thine, for thou art wondrous good.

Okima: Sakia, you forget;

To curse your Benefactors thus is impious.

Sakia: To curse our mortal Enemies is just.

Okima: The Angians are your Friends and your Defender(LA, 106)

In this exchange Okima is the exception that proves the rule, absolving her from complicity in Sakia's captivity. Her Algonquin name meaning "captain or leader" shows us who she really is, a figure capable of controlling this Huron woman and aiding her peaceably into the Angie-Iroquois-British confederacy. By including this "leader," *Liberty Asserted* confirms Abdul JanMohamed's noteworthy claim of the earliest period of colonialism, which he calls the dominant or hegemonic phase: "Although we shouldn't overlook the various forms of native 'cooperation'-for example, in the traffic of slaves- the point remains that such cooperation testifies less to a successful interpellation of the native than to the colonizer's ability to exploit preexisting power relations of hierarchy, subordination, and subjugation within native societies."^{xxxvi} Dennis inscribes Okima within her language,^{xxxvii} literally using her hierarchy to calm an unruly subject.

The complex negotiations here are borne out more fully in the relationship between Sakia, Okima and Beaufort, the ideal Englishman. In the first conference Sakia's appeal to Huron identity remains unresolved; its notable cogence and later disappearance, subsumed by family tensions exemplifies a familiarizing erasure, which both Okima and Beaufort facilitate. Rather than mobilize affect, claims to justice arising from Sakia's captivity and removal- the very claims meant to inspire compassion in the audience- dilute and eventually disappear . Before this dissolution, Sakia protests to Okima,

Know that I am not deluded by a Word,
 And even this Shadow of the Angians Favour
 Is due to the Request of generous Beaufort;
 For he the fatal Expedition led,
 To which I owe this long Captivity,
 To which I owe a twelve Years mortal Woe.
 Confined by barbarous Iroquois to Angie;
 Which may just Heav'n by sharpest Plagues revenge!(*LA*, 108)

By deflecting all the blame onto the "barbarous Iroquois," Dennis magically distances

“generous Beaufort” from responsibility for the very captivity he has engineered. There is no irony here, so the slight of hand that renders Beaufort the benign leader of an Iroquoian expedition responsible for Sakia’s intolerable confinement bowdlerizes the English colonial initiative. By positioning Beaufort as both captor and appeaser and keeping him as far from potential captivity as possible, Sakia becomes little more than a series of token sentiments instigated and ameliorated by his hand. Like the ethnographer who calls custom into being only to use it for its own comparative ends, Dennis choreographs a scene in which the other’s agony exists solely for the appropriate fashioning of colonizing subjects.

Sakia’s complete reversal from justified intolerance to malleable convert, “deluded by [The] word” only a moment later comes as no surprise: “My Okima know things are alter’d much: For by long Conferences here with Beaufort, My son and I both strongly are inclin’d T’ embrace the Christian Faith” (*LA*, 124). Her conversion establishes a permissible contrast with and complicity between Beaufort’s English assimilation and an intimate conversation across tribes. That the play stages Okima’s conferences, her efforts to both inform and reform Sakia and not Beaufort’s, allows Dennis to retain the paradoxical impression of an exemplary, unaffected and scarce English colonial presence, while foregrounding the assistance Native Americans can provide in persuading other Native Americans to convert or assimilate to English ways. Collectively, this scene highlights both Beaufort and Okima’s exceptional tolerance. Both guide or lead troubled indigenous others into appropriate colonial systems, but unlike Beaufort, Okima disappears along with Sakia’s tribal identity. In this way, she functions, much like Gayatri Spivak’s native informant.^{xxxviii} She is integral to the reformulation of

colonial peace projected by the drama yet foreclosed by the civilizing terms of that unity. Tellingly, she exists no place outside of the two conferences which begin the drama.

Sakia's dual instructors oppose the French colonists who appear as Beaufort's and Okima's foils through the references to the conquering and corrupting monarch and his "haughty [Jesuit] priests" (123). Beaufort's hypocritical distinction establishes England's exceptionalism against not only France but the coerciveness of all continental colonialism: "Oh Europe, Europe! How has thou been dull to thy undoing? How thy heedless Magistrates have suffered poor unthinking sots to unlearn their native customs, and their native Tongues to speak your jargon and assume your ways" (*LA*, 151). Beaufort's voice echoes Baron de Lahontan's noble savage representation in *New Voyages*. Stimulated by his disgust with French administration, Lahontan offers the following representation of Native Americans: "I envy the state of a poor savage, who tramples upon Laws and plays Homage to no Scepter... They laugh at the Menaces of our Kings and Governors.... They look upon themselves as sovereigns, accountable to none but God alone, whom they call The Great Spirit" (*NV*, 14). If it is not evident by virtue of her absence in the drama, these comments suggest that the level of cultural development implied by Okima's name, leader, bear no relevance in broader debates. Lost in the expanse of inter-state rivalry, critiques of European civilization conjure a noble savage "unthinkng" opposite which erases the particularity of the other.

While both Lahontan and Dennis understood Native peoples through an anti-French lens, they had very different perceptions of captivity. Many explorer-ethnographers used Native American prisoner exchanges in war, contrasting these reformed communities with European conceptions of family and nation. Even in accounts

cataloging identical tribes, captivity representations ranged from seamless community integration to indelible alienation and torture. As Gordon Sayre notes, *New Voyages* touts the tabula rasa effect of captivity, favoring a clean break over the imprisoning, residual strictures of French hierarchy and bureaucracy. Lahontan advises, “You must take notice that the Savages of Canada never exchange their prisoners. As soon as they are put in Chains, their Relations and the whole Nation to which they retain, look upon ’em as dead.” Confinement interests Lahontan here and elsewhere far less than the radical autonomy resulting from social death. Dennis uses captivity and explicitly invokes his gendered preoccupations to embody the troubled impact of colonial exchange on familial and tribal relations. That only family and not tribe hold affective force in terms of identification demonstrates how colonial pathos invariably has ulterior motives on the English stage. It differentiates England from both those pitied and those responsible for that pity. The subject-subject or subject-object fusing, on the other hand, legitimates new models for appropriate colonial practice. In this process the explorer-ethnography is an essential guidebook, outlining new “hints” for kindly suppressing the potentially harmful sorrows indigenous abductees express.

Oriental America and the Marriage Plot

Unlike Sakia, Okima and Frontenac, the play’s Moorish character names, Ulamar, Irene, Arimat and Zephario, exist nowhere in *New Voyages*. Explorers and travelers, however, often interchanged Native America with Asia and the Levant, subordinating Native Americans by fitting them into Western and other exotic cultural traditions made visible in print and theater.^{xxxix} As Lahontan heads further west, he defers to second hand

observations, and his depiction of America becomes a strange reminder of America's vestigial status as a trade route to Asia. Decidedly improbable Moorish names appear, such as the Gnacsitares, Mozeemleks, Tahuglauks and Esnapes. Customs too seem to belong to other places: "Tahuglauk's wear their Beards two Fingers breadth long... they cover their Heads with a sharp pointed cap... their women never shew themselves." The seamless shift in *New Voyages* from explicitly biased "facts" to overheard fictions suggests that Lahontan's readers may not have cared about the relative accuracy of one form of information over the other, allowing a playwright such as Dennis to use both indiscriminately, for his own ends.

Dennis's naming, in this sense, aligns with contemporary first hand views of North America. Ulamar and Irene, the play's Angie-English adopted hero and his Angian bride, were in fact both figures in different contemporary Turkish dramas. Ulama had a minor role, while Irene was a particularly popular and typically tragic figure in a number of plays.^{x1} While the characters' fates change notably with their new settings, *Liberty Asserted* gestures toward its inter-texts through their comparable agony. The subtext for these tensions begins with Beaufort and Ulamar divided in their love for Irene, and it reaches its sentimental climax when Ulamar and Irene, now married, contemplate suicide under the watchful eye of their French guards.

Marriage not captivity preoccupies the middle and latter sections of the drama, but both customs serve to stage the troubled negotiation of gender relations in colonial contexts. Concern over Sakia's power as a woman never leaves, but it is complemented by an equally pressing concern for Ulamar's weakness as a man. As the play begins, we learn that superior military prowess will determine whether Irene will be betrothed to

Ulamar or Beaufort. Public and private acts function in accord here because they uphold established gender roles. When Beaufort gives Irene to Ulamar, he exemplifies more than his much heralded generosity. As a metonym for England, he maintains his distance from conquest and imperial avarice by avoiding inter-marriage. Like the explorer-ethnographer, he must have a strategy for appearing unchanged by his contact. At Sakia's insistence, Ulamar breaks ties with Beaufort and allies with the French. His poor decision turns past and future colonial practice into a deliberate effort to rob Native men of their manliness. Beaufort's uncanny awareness is telling: "Yes, I guess'd the Cause; Ah, this is what has captivated Europe, Where their domestick Interest most prefer before the Weal and Honour of their Country." Because of his distance from the circumstances he created when he gave up Irene, he can turn inappropriate emasculating indigenous behavior into the grounds for a critique of continental Europe.

In *New Voyages* the administration of marriage produces a comparable critique. Lahontan satirizes the French "sale" of the "King's daughters" to governors, officers, merchants and the courers de bois. These women, according to Lahontan, were brought over from New France for marriage and selected auction-style, much as a "Butcher do's an Ewe": "the fattest went off best, upon the apprehension that these being less active, would keep truer to their Ingagements, and hold out better against the nipping cold of the Winter" (NV, 787). As Gordon Sayre points out, Lahontan's depiction of Huron marriage simply inverts his disgust with the French marriage trade: "the young Women taking a view of the Naked parts, make their choice by the Eye...any Woman may be well assur'd what she has to expect in a husband" (NV, 792).^{xli} This representation of marriage appears in the same volume as the orientalist observation mentioned above ("women

never show themselves”). Wildly different images of female sexuality cannot be explained solely by their tribal distinctions. Lahontan’s indigenous North America disregards coherence because its contrasting representations of marriage and gender hierarchies function primarily to critique the European self rather than to explain indigenous others.

While Dennis’s attentiveness to decorum prevents him from including sexually suggestive language of any kind, he too employs contradictory representations of Native peoples to critique or redefine existing colonial practice. His characters are at once pathetic and powerful, masculine and emasculated, Native American and Moorish. Their fluctuations have more in common with the language and logic of the explorer-ethnography than critics have noted. The play resolves its tensions by bringing together Sakia, Frontenac, Ulama and Irene. Its optimistic conclusion reforms the tragic Turkish dramas from which it draws its newly married characters, proving that North America may serve as a site for the successful reformulation of exotic others under the image of an English empire. If the captivity subtext which began the drama fissures family, then marriage recreates and seals it anew. The political implications of this custom reflect contemporary trends in travel writing. Early 17th century explorer and missionary accounts often structured their narratives around successful proselytizing. They might conclude with cultural practices of mourning just as they began with those of birth, implying that their subjects of inquiry could in time be reborn as Christians. By Lahontan’s and Dennis’s time, it had become less essential to discuss Native American culture primarily in terms of Christianity. Sakia and Ulamar’s explicit conversion confirms this shift, as it occurs early in the drama and is not mentioned again. England

rescues “sinking nations,” according to Ulamar and Beaufort, not through the rhetoric of conversion but through a “wonderful deliverance” toward inherent reason and law. This inclusive, Lockean emphasis on social contract theory defines England just as Lahontan does, in opposition to French tyranny and corruption. Tellingly, Ulamar outlines political philosophy to celebrate the English; then Beaufort does the same to critique the French. This final formula allows inherent liberty to come from somewhere else without its origins ever being asserted by its embodied, generous advocate.

Reading *Liberty Asserted* in relation to *New Voyages* confirms a direct and an indirect connection between late Restoration drama and explorer narratives. By the start of Queen Anne’s War, England had a century’s worth of documents from the “new world.” English drama, preoccupied by colonial competition and fascinated by foreign encounters, incorporated these documents in visible and less visible ways. Their inclusion appropriated difference claims that had been elaborately registered and strategically presented by those in direct conversation with the subjects of these plays. As such, what the playwrights borrowed through their use of minor character names and plot details was a fluid representation of colonial others and a strategic disavowal of imperial conquest. John Dennis’s *Liberty Asserted* may well owe its success to more than just Whig affiliation or even its advertised, more expansive English nationalism. The patriotic enthusiasm Dennis hoped to instill relied heavily upon the recognizable terms from and the recognizable tropes of North American ethnography.

ⁱ John Dennis, *The Complete Works of John Dennis* ed. J. Darby vol. I, II, III (London: Batholomew-Close, 1898) All other references to these additions will be made parenthetically.

ⁱⁱ The most recent critical intervention into the drama appears to come from Avon Jack Murphy, *John Dennis* (Boston: Twayne Publishers 1984) 75. Murphy’s reading lacks any emphasis on parliamentary

politics but in tenor it does sound quite similar to Braverman's at the level of setting: "*Liberty Asserted* demonstrates how in a primitive setting one can learn these "Instructions" by being forced into a moral dilemma."

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics & the Body Politic in English Literature 1660-1730* (Cambridge Press, 1993) 256.

^{iv} Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo American Emotion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999) 78.

^v Bridget Orr, *Empire on the Stage: 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

^{vi} Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites LL.D vol. I, II (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co.) All other references to this text will be made parenthetically.

^{vii} Quoted in Troy O. Bickham's, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) 1.

^{viii} Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 6. Colley's point is that North American customs were alien to the English during the late restoration. My point is only that they varied in travel narratives to the degree that they appear alien. Their proliferation conditions their facility with use as pretence to accuracy, not as accuracy per se.

^{ix} Numerous critical accounts inform this point. Steven Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (Routledge, 1992) and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Editor's Introduction: Writing "Race" and the Difference it Makes" in "*Race, Writing, and Difference*" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) are two primary examples.

^x Armstrong, 23.

^{xi} Alok Yadav, *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2004) Yadav's argument is heavily substantiated by circulation and print data. His assertions offer leverage for my analysis to the extent that the turn of the century saw military and literary changes which prompted a shift from provincial to more cosmopolitan sensibilities best exemplified by the relationship between the travel narrative and the drama.

^{xii} I will make passing reference to the cultural distinctions between French settlement and the English in my reading of the play, but it seems important to note here that while financial motivations occasion the proliferation of both English and French colonies, religious differences underlying added motives for English emigration and conditioning distinct relationships with Native Americans in terms of conversion, trade and intermarriage all come to inform the type of settling practiced by each Nation.

^{xiii} An irony worth noting here is of course that travel accounts often explicitly advertised themselves as guides to successful conduct in the colonies, yet due to the transatlantic nature of 17th and 18th century publishing, these works, often written belatedly, frequently remained for consumption only in England. The narrative I piece together here finds primary focus in the early 18th century French text I go on to mention. Earlier 17th century French and British examples can be found in Sayre with detailed biographies.

^{xiv} Gordon M. Sayre's *Les Sauvages Americains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

^{xv} Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen" in "*Race, Writing, and Difference*" ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 138-163. Even though Pratt's account considers 19th century travel narratives in South Africa in particular, her work still remains the most cogent reading of the formal elements of travel narratives. This is not to suggest, as I do later, that the form of the narrative does not change. In response to the market, aspects of Pratt's comprehensive reading are simply amplified, just as the travel narrative did in the 17th and early 18th century.

^{xvi} *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (May 28, 2008)

^{xvii} One of Dennis's more comical and possibly spurious anecdotes involved one of his inventions. A London theater company, while refusing to perform John Dennis's last drama, purloined his new "thunder producing" device and used it in their staging of *Macbeth*. Upon hearing of the theft, Dennis unwittingly authored the phrase "stealing my thunder." John Ayto, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (West Link Park: Collins, 2006)

^{xviii} Orr, 59.

^{xix} Joseph Roach, "The Enchanted Island: Vicarious Tourism in Restoration Adaptations of *The Tempest*" in *The Tempest and its Travels* ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion Books,

2000) 60-72.

^{xx} Mita Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theater, 1660-1800: Identity, Performance, Empire* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000) Choudhury makes this point in her introduction, echoing Roach's contention with more specific evidence that the late 17th century is the emergence of the theater as an "entertainment industry."

^{xxi} Orr, 46.

^{xxii} Here, I am referring in particular those readings noting the connection between *The Tempest* and Strachey's shipwreck in Bermuda.

^{xxiii} Orr, 46.

^{xxiv} A clear account of Dennis on poetic justice can be found in Avon Jack Murphy's literary history. In it he notes clearly that for Dennis drama had to punish the unjust because, unlike the world outside the stage, drama had no afterlife with which to level the field of justice.

^{xxv} Dennis, 422.

^{xxvi} The conflation of clothing as dress and rhetoric in civilizing missions is discussed by Eric Cheyfitz in *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) and Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century" in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World upon the Old* ed. Fredi Chiappelli, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)

^{xxvii} Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981) 69.

^{xxviii} Lyn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

^{xxix} Festa, 6.

^{xxx} Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993)

^{xxxi} With his recent critical attention to the excursion of the "Mohawk Kings" Troy Bickham argues that a more attentive state and church apparatus and a more provincial public explains the disconnect between the political motive for the trip and the public response. I would argue that such events, because traveler and explorer accounts preceded them, indicate that citizens were becoming less provincial, indebted in different ways to the knowledge they could use from these texts. Bickham, 24. Other readings of the Mohawk Kings include Eric Hinderaker, "'The Four Indian Kings' and the Imaginative Construction of the First British Empire", Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Richmond P. Bond's *Queen Anne's American Kings* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1952).

^{xxxii} While the exact circulation numbers are unknown, Lahontan's text does seem to refine Catherine Armstrong's argument that voluminous travel accounts were typically only available to the wealthy, as it was the very coffee shop culture that prompted Lahontan's dialogues to be so well circulated in print once they were translated into English

^{xxxiii} Sayre, 6.

^{xxxiv} Sayre, 61.

^{xxxv} The plot of *Liberty Asserted* might be said to use the character Frontenac to develop a wishful version of Lahontan's actual life, just as it uses Angie to develop a wishful English project for New France. Both fictive Frontenac and Lahontan begin as military adherents to the monarch and end as anti-French, pro-English exiles, but with the added twist that fictive Frontenac unlike Lahontan gets to receive his inheritance.

^{xxxvi} Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" in *Race, Writing and Difference* ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 81.

^{xxxvii} The irony here, and a point worth noting in a reading of Lahontan's narrative as an advertisement for English colonialism against the French is that Lahontan's dictionary is Algonquin while his most frequent subjects of depiction are the Huron. Huron or the Wyandot spoke a language typically classified under the Iroquoian language. Algonquin languages on the other hand were typically spoken by tribes throughout New England and down the eastern coast.

^{xxxviii} Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present*

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). While this paper does not pretend to offer the kind of “persistent dredging operation”, advocated by Spivak, it does bear noting that the use of Okima here as a form of undisclosed leader, mirrors the strategic deployment of a figure invoked as a primer mover within colonial discourse who is subsequently foreclosed.

^{xxxix} Orr, 61. In Orr’s reading the early forms of Orientalism seem to take root on the stage in the late 17th and early 18th century in ways that reflect the importance Asian and Levantine civilizations held for emerging English empires. Orr argues that America’s “discovery”, did not “displace Asia as the most powerful political, cultural and religious alternative to Europe.” While the scope of this paper will not fully bear out the nuances of such an argument, as America came into focus in English eyes in this period it became not an alternative to Europe by any means, but a locale for the re-signification of difference. In other words, it was an alternative-(re)making site for the confirmation of Englishness. This seems demonstrable in the process of naming here.

^{xl} Orr, 77, 80-86. Ulama is the suicidal lover in *Ibrahim, the Illustrious Bassa*. In its continental form it appears that this story first appeared in France in a novel by Madeline de Scudery. The Irene plays all included variations on this tragic female character.

^{xli} Sayre, 40.