

*Lady Hester Pulter's The Unfortunate Florinda: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Rape**

by PETER C. HERMAN

In the mid-1990s a manuscript was discovered containing the poetry and prose of a previously unknown female author, Lady Hester Pulter. The poems, likely written during the 1640s–'50s, demonstrate Pulter's wide reading and her near-fanatical Royalism. The prose romance, The Unfortunate Florinda, however, displays a very different politics. Basing her fiction on the legends surrounding the Muslim conquest of Spain, I argue that Pulter adjusts her sources to present an alternative, Augustinian view of rape, one that blames the rapist, not the victim. The monarchs in Pulter's fiction use absolutist rhetoric to justify rape, and, contra her earlier poetic denunciations of Charles I's execution, rape now justifies regicide. I suggest that the sexual corruption of Charles II's court prompted Pulter to create a romance with distinctly republican overtones in which chastity is the highest value, sexual corruption the lowest vice, and rulers who commit such crimes forfeit both their right to rule and their right to live.

1. INTRODUCTION

Until very recently, Lady Hester Pulter (ca. 1605–78) had no place in literary history.¹ While John Milton evidently knew the family — in Sonnet 10, he refers to Hester's father, Sir James Ley, as “that good Earl,” and to Hester's sister, Lady Margaret Ley, as “Honour'd *Margaret*”² — he does not mention Hester. Also, despite the literary connections on both sides of the family — Hester's mother, Mary Petty, was the niece of George Pettie, author of the Elizabethan romance *A Petite Pallace of Pettie His Pleasure* (1576; multiple editions by 1613), and Anthony à Wood was a distant cousin³ — from all outward appearances Hester Pulter led a quiet

¹While I acknowledge specific debts in the notes, special thanks go to Elizabeth Clarke and Sarah Ross. Professor Clarke introduced me to Lady Hester Pulter's works, and her centrality to Hester Pulter's contemporary revival must be acknowledged. Professor Ross graciously and continuously provided counsel, information, and challenging questions. Both helped me enormously over the course of this essay's gestation, and I remain very grateful.

²There seems to be uncertainty as to Hester Pulter's birthdate. Robson, 2004, says 1595/96; Eardley and Verbeke, 178, say 1605.

³*The Complete Poetry*, 147 (Sonnet 10). Phillips, 64, calls Margaret a “Woman of great Wit and Ingenuity [who] had a particular Honour for [Milton].”

⁴Ezell, 343n29, citing Dr. Alice Eardley.

life that gave no indications of intellectual or literary ambitions.⁴ In 1623, she married Arthur Pulter (1603–89) of Hertfordshire, and the couple produced fifteen children: seven sons, eight girls. Arthur Pulter was active in civic life, serving as justice of the peace, captain in the militia, and, in 1641, High Sheriff of Hertfordshire. But with the advent of the Civil War, he “declin’d all publick Employment, liv’d a retired life, and thro’ the importunity of his Wife, began to build a very fair House” at his manor, Broadfield, in Hertfordshire.⁵ Hester Pulter outlived all but two of her children, and was buried on 9 April 1678; Arthur Pulter outlived his wife and all of his children, dying on 27 January 1689.

It would seem that the Pulters were relevant only to the late seventeenth-, early eighteenth-century antiquarian Sir Henry Chauncy, who published a history of Hertfordshire in 1700.⁶ This assessment changed radically in the mid-1990s, when Mark Robson discovered a miscatalogued manuscript in the Leeds University Brotherton Library containing Hester Pulter’s original verse — approximately 120 poems, including an original book of emblems — under the title “Poems Breathed Forth by the Nobel Hadassas” (fig. 1), and an unfinished prose romance, *The Unfortunate Florinda* (fig. 2).⁷ The poems, likely written during the 1640s–’50s and copied in the mid-1650s, demonstrate not only Pulter’s wide reading in literature, alchemy, and astronomy, but also her near-fanatical Royalism.⁸ While her husband may have tried to not take sides (hence his retirement at the start of hostilities), Hester Pulter, as Margaret Ezell writes, was far from “silent, resigned or detached about contemporary political events.”⁹ She poured her outrage at the Civil War’s progress and the execution of Charles I into poems with titles such as “Upon the Imprisonment of his Sacred Majestie that unpareld Prince King Charles the First” and “On the Horrid Murder of that incomparable Prince, King Charles the first.”¹⁰ Pulter seems to have written the romance after she finished her verse. More specifically, *The Unfortunate Florinda* seems to have been transcribed between March and

⁴I have relied upon Robson, 2004, for the details of Pulter’s life.

⁵Chauncy, 1:145.

⁶Chauncy’s inclusion of the Pulter family (a family tree is at *ibid.*, 1:146) in his history may have been influenced by his daughter, Martha, having married Hester and Arthur’s grandson, James Forester: *ibid.*, 1:147.

⁷Clarke, 2, notes that Pulter’s verse occupies the first 130 folios of this manuscript.

⁸See Robson, 2005; Archer; S. Hutton, 78, who demonstrates that Pulter’s poems reveal both “an up-to-date knowledge of contemporary science” as well as an “acquaintance with the writers of her day — e.g., Donne and Marvell.”

⁹Ezell, 343.

¹⁰For texts of both poems, see Ross, 2005.

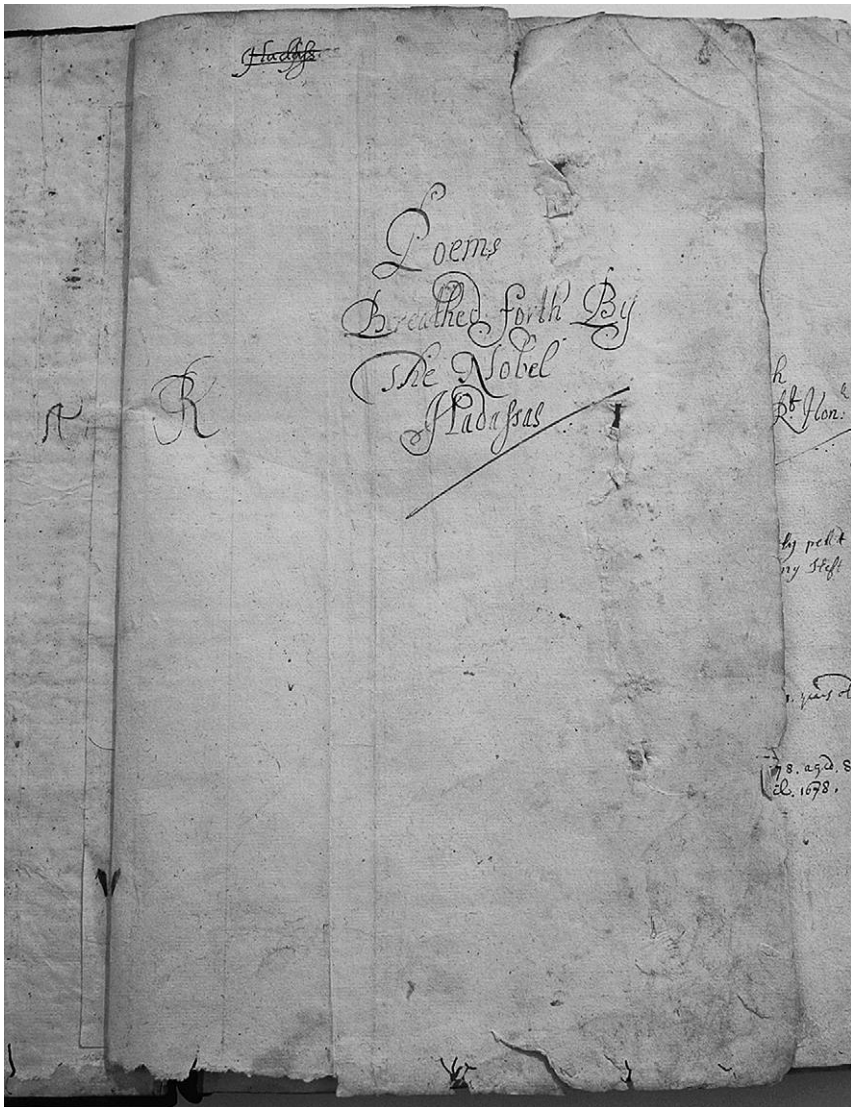


FIGURE 1. Title page of Hester Pulter, *Poems Breathed Forth by the Nobel Hadassas*. Reproduced with the permission of the Brotherton Collection, Leeds University Library.

December 1661 — post-Restoration, in other words, which is of considerable importance to understanding the politics of this work.¹¹ Yet for all the effort and sophistication of Pulter's literary works, there is no

¹¹Ross, 2000, 158.

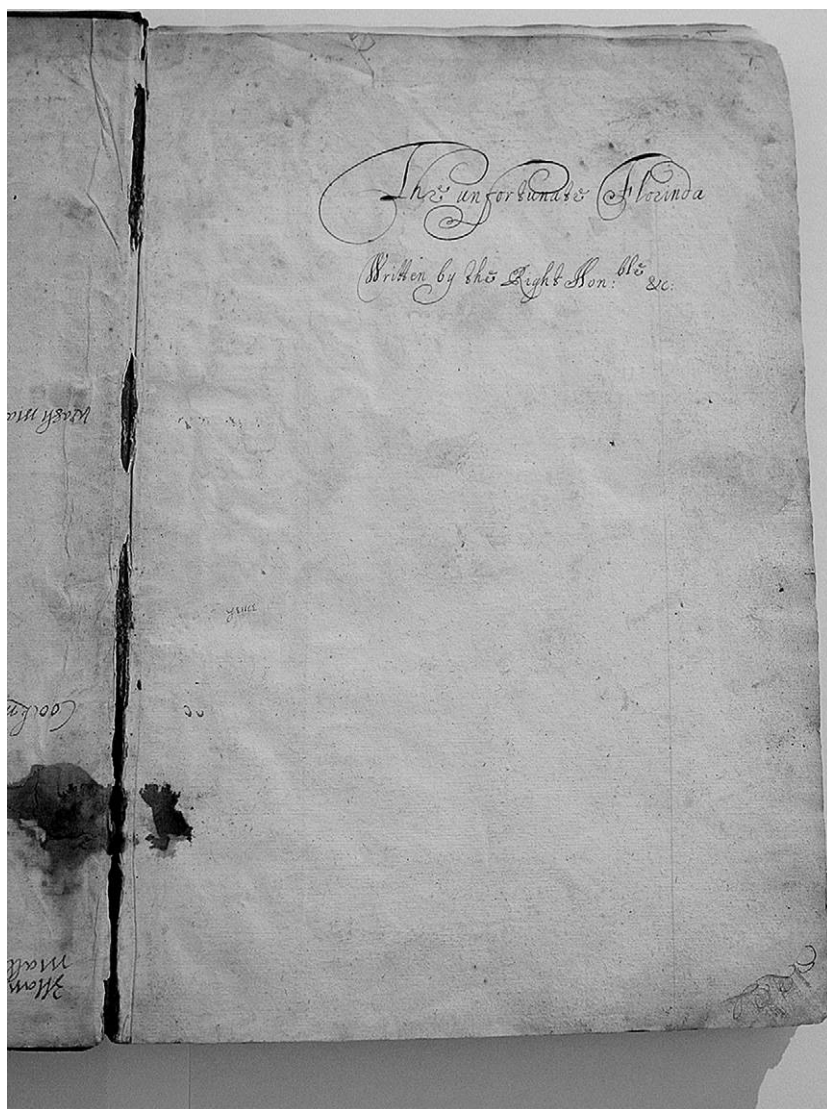


FIGURE 2. Title page of Hester Pulter, *The Unfortunate Florinda*. Reproduced with the permission of the Brotherton Collection, Leeds University Library.

evidence of their circulation beyond the confines of this manuscript, even though, as Sarah Ross writes, “Pulter’s first and second poem series are clearly transcribed for perusal by an audience.”¹²

¹²Ibid.

The discovery of a previously unknown woman writer of the seventeenth century has, as one might expect, caused something of a stir, and Pulter's verse has received significant and increasing attention.¹³ But aside from a brief notice by Sarah Ross in Elizabeth Sauer's anthology *Reading Early Modern Women*, and two perceptive sentences by Elizabeth Clarke, *The Unfortunate Florinda* has been completely ignored.¹⁴ In one way, this inattention is strange: like the poems, *The Unfortunate Florinda* demonstrates Pulter's wide reading, both classical and contemporary. For example, she alludes explicitly to Plutarch¹⁵ and to the frontispiece of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.¹⁶ Several passages suggest an acquaintance with Milton's *Areopagitica* and his writings on divorce.¹⁷

Yet *The Unfortunate Florinda* also presents significant obstacles. The transcription itself suggests that the romance was something of an afterthought, even though Pulter used the same scribe as she did for the

¹³See Millman and Wright; Robson, 2000 and 2005; Clarke; Ross, 2005; Chedgoy, 144–53. Nigel Smith describes Pulter as a “kind of Virginia Woolf figure who writes in an extremely unusual way”: see Dienst.

¹⁴Ross, 2004; Clarke, 2. Ezell, 353, also restricts her treatment of the romance to a “quick summary of the plot and characters” of *The Unfortunate Florinda*.

¹⁵In *The Unfortunate Florinda*, Fidelia, in her defense of women, says “First it is made plain by the Custome of those Nations (as Plutarch sais, and where I have been)” that women are given priority in funeral rites (sig. 26^r). All references to *The Unfortunate Florinda* will be to Pulter (the microfilm of Brotherton MS Lt q 32, Brotherton Library, Leeds University). Folio numbers refer to the numbers penned at the top of each page. References to the second part of the romance will be to the loose sheets in Pulter's hand rather than to the scribal version. An “A” has been added to the folio numbers of these pages. Pulter filled this section of the manuscript with many crossings-out and corrections, which I have silently deleted from the quotations. I have also heavily relied upon Dr. Alice Eardley's transcription of this romance, prepared for an earlier version of this project. Dr. Eardley is currently editing an edition of Pulter's complete works for the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies Publications.

¹⁶Pulter, fol. 5^r: “[S]hee espied this malecontented Lover walking (just like the picture in the frontispiece of Democritus junior with his hat over his eys as if noe object was worthy of his view. . .).”

¹⁷For example, Florinda, at *ibid.*, fol. 24^r, responds to Castabella's urging her to leave the sexually corrupt court by saying, “dear Castabella, what merrit is it to be constant where there is no inducement to the contrary?” This might echo Milton's famous statement in *Areopagitica*: “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary” (Milton, 2007a, 939). Similarly, Florinda's mother, Castara, assures herself that her daughter will never marry “untill shee found one whose noble mind did sympathize with hers” (fol. 4^r), a statement that possibly echoes the assumption in the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (Milton, 2007b, 871), that marriage is intended for “the solace and satisfaction of the mind,” not of the body.

final versions of her poems.¹⁸ The volume was inverted, and *The Unfortunate Florinda* “begins from the back,” after these pages “were originally designated for another use,” specifically, for recording household accounts.¹⁹ While the second part exists in two versions — a draft in Pulter’s own hand with extensive corrections, additions, scorings out, and marginal corrections (fig. 3), and a later, fair copy — Ross speculates that “the inversion of the volume and the presence of accounts from both before and after the romance’s transcription would suggest that Pulter and her scribe saw the tale as exhibiting a different — and perhaps lesser — literary skill on her part than do her poems.”²⁰ The romance’s marginal status seems to be confirmed by Pulter’s having abandoned the project before concluding the story, as the last lines descend into incoherence, breaking off in midsentence.

For reasons detailed below, I would replace “lesser” with “unconventional,” even “extraordinary,” as nearly every part of *The Unfortunate Florinda* goes against expectations. While her earlier poems are deeply Royalist, Pulter adapts the historical legends of how King Roderigo’s raping the daughter of Count Julian led to the Islamic conquest of Spain to express her dismay at the sexual corruption of King Charles II’s court. Pulter’s rethinking of her earlier political views seems to have led to a more general willingness to question the fundamental discourses of early modern England. She challenges the primacy of Christianity by giving a sympathetic portrait of pagan belief; the dominant view of sexual violence by endorsing the Augustinian view of rape as blaming the rapist, not his victim; and conventional views of race by depicting the African women as fair while contrasting their virtue with the sexually corrupt West, Spain in particular. By implication, the Islamic conquest of Spain is not a disaster for Christianity, but a justly deserved punishment. As we will see, these themes overlap and support each other. Pulter’s defense of women’s education, for instance, participates in the reevaluation of blackness, which also contributes to the work’s political resonances, such as Pulter’s revision of her earlier unqualified Royalism. *The Unfortunate Florinda* thus constitutes a fascinating achievement, one worthy of recovery and sustained attention, for in this work Pulter makes significant and ultimately original contributions to the current debates over gender, politics, and rape.

¹⁸Ross, 2000, 160.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid, 160–61.

2
33A

Obtaine my self and kingdome will be
 out my command the ^{earthly} ~~earthly~~ ^{power} ~~power~~ ^{that} ~~that all the
 kingdoms (not only on this Orbe but the
 worlds in every state) weare too inconfiden-
 able ~~to~~ ^{to} when vertue was laide in the scales
 maye then saide the iraged kinge if you will
 not yeald vpon honourable termes I must take
 you by storm, and notwithstandinge all
 her praires and teares, and scramenge and
 revenge beeing much stronger she
 hee violated the unfortunate Florinda
 who still ~~thought~~ ^{breathed} out curses and depre-
 cations against him call and ~~with~~ ^{with}
 floods of teares implored ~~revenge~~ ^{revenge} devine
 vengeance. soe that now the kinge found it
 as difficult to still her complaints as before
 to pervoide her till the Diuell or his own
 cruell nature promised him hee said my
 deare Florinda ~~my~~ I have soe much affection
 for thee that if thou wilt out conceal this
 violent expression of my love I will per-
 forme more then I at first ~~promise~~ ^{promise}, but if
 you still refuse my love I will immediatly
 reach up the most detoured negro ~~have~~ ^{have} in
 my black gaud and make him a flower you
 and then run my sword through you both
~~that~~ ^{that} you ~~are~~ ^{are} in horred infamy ~~you~~
 Florinda ~~who~~ ^{who} had ~~that~~ ^{that} whose soul did boyle
 with revenge and beeing both to see all
 infamy vpon her name
 soore Florinda whose soul boyled with revenge
 and abhorringe infamy thought best
 to return this desendinge replie, but I cannot
 but loock vpon this violence of yours as proceedinge
 from an unwelestable passion and shall willingly
 ioyne with you in ~~concealing~~ ^{concealing} ~~it~~ ^{it} ~~lost~~
 the knowledge of it should bee an eternall
 Corruptive to the hearts of my deare and tender hearted
 Parents who perhaps maye not bee soe redely
 to excuse you as I who have all alonge ~~known~~
 but too sensible of your sufferinge thus~~

*words since
the row*

*and then
I up
mye and
weere
I
in who
nor but
islands
stis*

FIGURE 3. Fol. 33a^r of Hester Pulter, *The Unfortunate Florinda*. Reproduced with the permission of the Brotherton Collection, Leeds University Library.

2. SOURCES

As both Ezell and Ross have indicated, Pulter had clearly absorbed the romance tradition.²¹ *The Unfortunate Florinda* is filled, as Ross puts it, with “shipwrecks and pirates, usurped kingdoms and disguised princesses,” to which one can add miraculous reunions, cross-dressing, and the ultimate triumph — in the case of one couple — of true love.²² *The Unfortunante Florinda* has a two-part narrative. The first part takes place in Spain, where King Roderigo has usurped the Spanish throne. A group of African aristocratic women on what was supposed to be a pleasure cruise find themselves shipwrecked after a storm on the Spanish coast, and Roderigo falls in love with the daughter of the Moorish king, Zabra, who quickly converts to Christianity and marries Roderigo. The Spanish king, however, then falls in lust with Florinda, the daughter of Count Julian, a Spanish courtier-diplomat, and Roderigo uses the good offices of his friend, the misogynist Alphonso, to prosecute his suit. Florinda rejects the king’s advances, turning Roderigo’s infatuation into implacable hatred. At this point, Fidelia, the queen’s companion from Africa, unexpectedly arrives at the court and launches into her own narrative of danger, pirates, escapes, and improbable reunions. This African king (Pulter does not name him) is also licentious, and demands that Fidelia’s father deliver up his daughter to be his mistress, on pain of death. Fidelia and her lover, Amandus, the Prince of Naples, then kill the king through a bed trick. They escape, but are captured by pirates and separated. Returning to the main narrative, Roderigo rapes Florinda, threatening her afterward with terrible consequences if she reveals what happened. Florinda vows revenge, informs her father, Count Julian, of what happened, and he vows revenge as well. The entire family and their friends, outraged by what the “lascivious prince” has done, also vow revenge, and they go to Almanzar in Africa to request that he invade Spain to avenge this despicable deed. Almanzar agrees. At this point, the narrative ceases to make sense.

This romance’s (few) commentators, however, have missed that — fantastic as the plot may seem — one part of *The Unfortunate Florinda* is also a historical romance. The Florinda story is not a product of Pulter’s imagination, but drawn from the legends surrounding the last Visigothic King of Spain, Roderigo — variously spelled Roderic and Roderick in the English sources — who raped the daughter of one of his courtiers,

²¹Ezell, 353.

²²Ross, 2000, 160.

Count Julian.²³ In revenge, Julian helped the Moors conquer Spain and depose Roderigo. While in all likelihood these events, the characters, their actions, and their imputed motives are legendary,²⁴ this story circulated widely among both Spanish chroniclers and balladeers.²⁵ Some accounts, as David Nicol points out, “call Roderic a rapist, others call Florinda a seductress,” but the tradition unanimously connects Florinda’s rape with the Muslim conquest of Christian Spain.²⁶ How, precisely, this story made its way into early modern England remains obscure, but it can be found in a variety of Elizabethan and Jacobean historical texts:²⁷ the legend formed the basis of William Rowley’s tragedy, *All’s Lost by Lust* (performed 1613, published 1633).²⁸

Pulter took a name, Fidelia, and key details about Florinda’s reaction to her rape from Rowley.²⁹ The immediate source, however, for Pulter’s romance is *The Life and Death of Mahoment, The Conquest of Spaine, Together with the Rysing and Ruine of the Sarazen* (1637), as shown by many details unique to both texts and a number of precise verbal parallels. For example, *The Life and Death* is the only English source to name Julian’s daughter Florinda.³⁰ Also, Pulter repeats almost verbatim *The Life and Death*’s version of how Zabra arrived in Spain and Roderigo’s subsequent infatuation with her. For example, *The Life and Death* reads:

²³I gratefully acknowledge my debt to Professor Howard Mancing of Purdue University, who tactfully informed me, after hearing a paper of mine on *The Unfortunate Florinda*, that Roderigo, Julian, and Florinda are historical figures, not inventions by Hester Pulter, and who supplied me with many articles on the same. His generosity led directly to my discovery of Pulter’s sources for *The Unfortunate Florinda*.

²⁴Glick, 31–33. See also Chew, 518n3; Thompson, 250–51.

²⁵Cuder-Dominguez, 322–24.

²⁶Nicol, 180.

²⁷*A Notable Historie of the Saracens*, sigs. K-L; Lodge, sig. H3; Turquet, sig. O5^r–O6^v. I owe these references to Nicol, 189n16. I have silently adopted the modern usages of *ilj* and *u/v*.

²⁸See the bibliographic entry for this play in Farmer and Lesser.

²⁹It is not clear if Pulter’s use of Rowley’s play reflects a deep immersion in drama. On the one hand, Pulter wrote a poem about William Davenant’s near-loss of his nose to syphilis — “To Sr. W. D. upon the unspeakable loss of the most conspicuous and chief ornament of his frontispiece,” fols. 83^r–84^r — but her attraction to Davenant may have had as much to do with Royalist politics as a taste for plays. On the other hand, Rowley’s play was certainly obscure, having never been republished by the time Pulter decided to write her romance. It is possible that Pulter discovered this play, not through collecting playbooks, but through researching the English versions of the Florinda story.

³⁰Lodge gives a version of this story, but does not give her a name; in both Turquet, sig. O5^r; and the anonymous *Historie of the Saracens*, sig. K^r, she is called Caba — Arabic for “whore” (although neither author gives any indication of knowing what the name means); and in Rowley’s play she is Jacinta.

At that time there lived in the Easterne part of Affrica a Moore King called *Mahomed Abdenbedin* whose only daughter and heire, *Zabra*, with other young Ladies her attendants (wantonly disposed to be sea-sicke) the weather inviting them to it: put to the sea; but this faire calme was suddainly clouded with a storme, and such a continued fret ensued, as that for safetie of their lives, they were enforced to spoone before the wind; which continuing for many dayes together, at last cast them upon the coast of Spaine, where with difficultie (sicke and weather-beaten) they arrived at a place called Caba de Gata, taken prisoners and sent to *Don Roderigo*, who after a fewe daies enchanted with her beautie, became her prisoner.³¹

In *The Unfortunate Florinda* the passage above becomes:

but Fortune by rare contingency fulfilled [Roderigo's] desire [to marry], for Zabra (Daughter and Heir to Mahomet Abnehedin an African Moorish King) with other Young Ladyes wantonly disposed to be sea sick; the fairnes of the weather inviteing them but noe sooner were they out at sea (and viewing the pleasure of the Ocean) delighted much to see the Dolphin leap and Dance about their vessell, when loe their Calm was turn'd into a storm, and such a Continued fret ensued as for safty of their lives, they were forced to spoon before the Wind for many dayes, which at last cast them upon the Coast of Spain miserably affrighted and sea sick: with much difficulty they arrived at Cabo de Gato, there being taken prisoners they were sent to Roderigo, who satiated with home bred Beauties, very much rejoyced in the takeing of soe Beautifull a bootie, In a few dayes hee became soe enchanted with her beauty, that he was a slave to her whose captive shee was.³²

Pulter was very likely attracted to this story's treatment in Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust* and *The Death of Mahomet* because together they provided the seed for an alternative narrative of rape and its consequences, one that has its roots in Augustine's treatment of the Lucretia myth and forms the basis of T.E.'s unconventional treatment of rape in *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights* (1632). However, to understand the full force and scope of Pulter's intervention (as well as its limitations), I first want to explore Pulter's revisionary treatments of other key issues in this romance.

3. RELIGION, RACE, AND GENDER

By 1660, the subject of romance had shifted considerably. Numerous scholars have noted how romance fictions — fantastic tales featuring travel, shipwrecks, wandering knights, miraculous reunions, and the

³¹Lodge, sigs. D2^v–D4^r.

³²Pulter, fol. 3^r.

triumph of chaste love — had long been a staple of the early modern book market.³³ As the seventeenth century progressed, the political aspect of romance started to dominate;³⁴ after the Parliamentary triumph, romance took a decidedly Royalist turn.³⁵ For example, both Sir Percy Herbert's *Princess Cloria: Or, The Royal Romance* (1661) and Richard Brathwait's *Panthalia: Or the Royal Romance* (1659) include portraits of Charles II opposite their title pages, and the anonymous *Theophania* (1655) ends with a warning about Cromwell's increasing power.³⁶

Now, as Ross and others have pointed out, Pulter's poetry reveals her to be a fervent Royalist.³⁷ For instance, in her twenty-fifth emblem poem, Pulter compares a stricken deer to the equally beset Charles I:

Soe have I seen a Hart with Hounds opprest
 An Arrow sticking in her quivering Breast
 If shee goes on her guiltless blood still Flows
 If shee stands still shee Fals amongst her foes
 Soe have I known (oh sad) the Best of kings
 (My mee the thought of this such horrou brings
 To my sad soul) his Princely spirit posed
 In strange Delemmas every where inclosed³⁸

³³See Salzman, 1985, 59–83; Mentz, 17–46. The chivalric romance tradition was supplemented in the Elizabethan era with the revival of Greek romance, in particular, the translation of Heliodorus's *Ethiopian History*, in which, as Pigeon, 21, writes, “chastity and piety are constantly glorified, and even the robber chief turns out to be a noble character.” Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, first published in 1590 and a bestseller throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, combined these two strands with a third element, politics, with the adventures of Basileus, Pyrocles, and Musidorus functioning as a vehicle for examining the various political philosophies circulating in sixteenth-century England: see Worden.

³⁴Salzman, 1985, 148–49. Lady Mary Wroth's *Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, which also brought a feminine perspective to the genre, had to be withdrawn because of its perceived allusions to her contemporaries, and John Barclay's *Argenis* (1621), extremely popular in England during the years leading up to the Civil War, allegorizes the French Wars of Religion.

³⁵See Smith, 233–49; Salzman, 2001, 215, 221–28. The exception to this rule would be Margaret Cavendish's “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” published in 1656 as part of *Nature's Pictures*, in which, as Burks, 84, points out, “the rape is perpetrated not by an easily dismissed, ultimately unimportant merchant, but by a Prince,” who is first described as a “great monopolizer of young virgins”: Cavendish, 50. While there are no plot parallels between *The Unfortunate Florinda* and “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” that would argue for a direct influence, both works draw on the anti-monarchist rhetoric associating sexual debauchery with Royalism. Furthermore, Cavendish was certainly popular enough that Pulter, who was evidently a voracious reader, may have read her works.

³⁶Pigeon, 11.

³⁷See Ross, 2005; Ezell, 342–43.

³⁸Pulter, fol. 107^v; quoted in Ross, 2005, 3.

Bemoaning Charles's imprisonment, Pulter writes: "They have his sacred Person now in hold / They have their king, and Countrey bought & sould / And hope of Glory all for Cursed Gold."³⁹ After his execution, Pulter complained — in a poem titled "On the Horrid Murther of that incomparable Prince, King Charles the First" — "When such a king in such a manner dies / Let us suspire our soules, weep out our eyes"; and in the following poem, entitled "On the Same," she explicitly refers to Charles as "our Martyrd king."⁴⁰ As Ross points out, "Pulter's political occasional verses . . . all engage in contemporary royalist culture through their construction of Charles I as a Christ-like martyr."⁴¹ One might expect that her romance would seamlessly continue the political themes of her verse, and thus conform both to previous positions as well as to generic expectations.

One might expect so, but one would be wrong, as Pulter departs from convention in a number of important ways. The opening sentence establishes the romance's main themes: "When that voluptuous Prince Roderigo had driven his Infant Nephew and King (as innocent as unfortunate) whose Guardian he was (with his distressed Mother) into Africk to beg succour of the great Almanzar, to raise Warr in Spain to recover his right, but fate had otherwaies disposed."⁴² This sentence is surely based on the following from *The Life and Death of Mohamet*: "Hee assured him that she was gone into Affrica to demand succour and raise war in Spaine."⁴³ Yet as the romance progresses it becomes increasingly evident that Pulter significantly alters her sources, thereby changing completely the original meaning of this action.

First, both Rowley's play and *The Life and Death* make explicit that the "great Almanzar" is Muslim: Zabra, for example, is "a Mahometan borne," and therefore both Julian and his daughter are responsible for the Muslim conquest of a Christian nation.⁴⁴ In *The Unfortunate Florinda*, however, none of the African and Moorish characters are Muslim — even though Almanzar is a "Caliph" — but pagan.⁴⁵ They

³⁹Ross, 2005, 9.

⁴⁰Ibid., 10.

⁴¹Ibid., 4.

⁴²Pulter, fol. 2^v.

⁴³[Raleigh], sig. C12^f. This source will be subsequently cited as *Mahomet*.

⁴⁴Ibid., sig. D4.

⁴⁵Pulter, fol. 2^v.

worship the Roman pantheon, not Allah.⁴⁶ At the tale's start, the Bishop of Toledo converts Zabra, so that she "was Married, Crowned, and Baptized all in a day," but it is not immediately evident what religion Zabra belonged to initially.⁴⁷ This mystery is resolved once Fidelia arrives at Roderigo's court and begins her narrative by giving thanks for the "bounty of the Gods in generall, and of the great Diana (the Protectres of Virgins in perticular)."⁴⁸ Pulter then engages in a fascinating balancing act between asserting Christianity's superiority and giving a highly sympathetic portrait of a culture that genuinely believes differently.

In her narrative, Fidelia recounts that just before her mother died, she enjoined her daughter to adhere to her religion, although she allows that the cessation of oracles indicates that paganism's time has passed: "Fidelia, to epitomise them seeing my breath and life are too short to dilate on them First bee not drawn away from that Religion which hath been infused in you from your infancy seeing it was soe disposed by providence unles you bee convinced by strength of reason, neither bee too obstinate in that you profes, for the Cessation of Oracles doth manifest to the World that a greater height is rising, whose splendour will dispell all former Mists of Ignorance and superstition like Clouds before the Morning Sun."⁴⁹ Similarly, after he arrives in Africa, Amandus, the Prince of Naples, does his best to convert Fidelia, and gives this account of paganism's origins: "hee with a new language infused into us another Religion perswadeing us that all those multiplicity of Gods, which wee adored, were noe Gods, for said hee, when all the Knowledg that the wisest men could attaine to, was still too too narrow to comprehend an infinite Diety, they divided his Immensitie into as many severall Gods and Goddesses, as there are attributes and qualities in

⁴⁶While the term *pagan* could refer to any non-Christian, early modern writers also distinguished between Islam and the Greek and Roman pantheons. For example, in *A New Booke of Purgatory*, Rastell, 407, 411, stages a dialogue between a "christeman callyd Comyngo" and "a turke called Gyngemyn borne under Machometys law," in which each agrees to forswear referring to their holy texts, which for Gyngemyn includes "the Alcoron nor of any other boke of thy Machometys lawe"; see also Herman, 5–11. Closer to Pulter's time, Maurus similarly understands that Islam is its own religion. Anyone familiar with the story of Roderigo and Florinda (had there been any beyond her immediate family) would have recognized Pulter's erasure of Islam and replacing it with paganism as both odd and deliberate.

⁴⁷Pulter, fol. 3^r.

⁴⁸Ibid., fol. 8^v.

⁴⁹Ibid., fol. 9^r. Fidelia's mother's final words may have been patterned after Leigh (fifteen editions between 1616 and 1685). The praise of chastity, at Pulter, fol. 9^v, for example — "but valed Chastitie infinitely above your life, and modesty as its Cristall Case" — parallels the privileging of this virtue at Leigh, sig. C4^r: "as if our God should (as he doth indeed) in briefe comprehend all other vertues under this one vertue of chastity."

that divine Essence till at last Heaven, Hell, Earth, and Ayre, and Water were all Filled with Dieties, and not onely the Vertues, graces and Muses, for that had been tollerable, but even the Passions of the Mind the Sins of their Souls, the diseases of their Body were all Diefied, and Temples built to every one of them, nay the seasons of the Year the hours of the Day were not left out.”⁵⁰ And yet, while Pulter obviously stacks the deck against paganism, she allows her characters to passionately believe in the validity of their religion. When Leonora, a member of Zabra’s party who elected to return to Africa, informs Mahomet Abnehedin, the “African Moorish King,” that his daughter has converted, she does so in terms that clearly do not celebrate this fact. She tells the king: “your Fair Daughter enjoys as much Terrestrial Felicity as Humanity is Capable of: onely to our unexpressible sorrow shee hath left thirty five Thousand Gods and Goddesses for our unknown Diety, being by that means to us irrecoverable and eternally lost.”⁵¹ Upon hearing that his daughter has abandoned her religion, Mahomet Abnehedin “sunck instantly down stone dead.”⁵² And even though Fidelia converts to Christianity, she does so reluctantly and with a full acknowledgment of the personal cost. Bemoaning how escaping with Amandus means losing her friends and her country, she concludes: “and that which summs up all my Infortunities, I must for ever bid Adiew to all those multiplicitie of Dieties, which my Progenitors adored, whom I must condemne, and can I burie all these with out Tears?”⁵³

It is not that Pulter considers Roman religion to be Christianity’s equal. She does not. In fact, Pulter depicts paganism as a fraud, as shown by the invention of an oracle after Mahomet Abnehedin demands to know why “they had an answer for every one in their extremity, and is there none for mee?”⁵⁴ Either the oracle produces an answer, or the king will destroy the temple. Faced with such a choice, and aware of the danger “not only they, but even their Religion was in,” the “chiefest Virgin [goes] into her Closet” and writes an oracle supposedly from Apollo.⁵⁵ But Pulter can extend imaginative sympathy toward those who do sincerely believe in Apollo, Jupiter, and Diana. Significantly, Islam is not completely absent from this text. When Amandus first meets Amicla — a French prince, who, captured by the Moors, faces circumcision and castration — Amandus tries to remedy his despair: “I hoped he was not infected with the Malumetant

⁵⁰Pulter, fol. 12^v.

⁵¹Ibid., fol. 11^v.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., fol. 22^r.

⁵⁴Ibid., fol. 10^v.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Tenant” that fate is irrevocable.⁵⁶ Islam, it seems, remains the Other, and Pulter does not want to associate Fidelity with a religion that could detract from their moral standing in this text.

Pulter’s paganization of the Moors who landed in Spain also forms part of her redefinition in this text of her culture’s (and her sources’) assumptions about Africans. On the one hand, Pulter repeatedly stresses that Zabra and Fidelity hail from Africa. Zabra, for instance, is “Daughter and Heir to Mahomet Abnehedin an African Moorish King,” who, upon seeing Fidelity in the Spanish court, embraces her, exclaiming: “I have between my arms all my former African delights.”⁵⁷ The unnamed tyrant tries to convince Fidelity’s father to allow her to become his mistress by telling him that “when ever shee shall desire to Marrye shee shall command the greatest Prince in Africa,” and when Amandus convinces Fidelity to escape this tyrant’s clutches, he does so in part by assuring her that Fidelity will not “leave the pleasures of Africa for a Climate less benigne.”⁵⁸ Their skin color, therefore, is not tawny, not tan, but black, which thoroughly confuses Amicla after he convinces Amandus to show him the picture of Fidelity he has been carrying around. Amandus has tried to fob off Amicla’s request by telling him that the picture is of the Blessed Virgin, but when Amicla finally sees the image, he asks “what is the reason that this Picture (though it be incomparable lovely) hath so dark a shadow? and all that ever I saw of the Immaculate Virgin are infinitely faire.”⁵⁹ Amandus answers by saying “our Lady of Lauretta is much blacker (even as black as an Ethiopian) but what the reason is I know not,” and quickly moves to “devert him from this discourse,” but the point is clear: Fidelity is not white.⁶⁰ And neither is Zabra nor any of the other ladies in their trains.

As Kim Hall and others have firmly established, blackness in early modern literature is rarely, if ever, associated with virtue.⁶¹ In the opening

⁵⁶Ibid., fol. 28^v.

⁵⁷Ibid., fol. 8^v, fol. 3^f.

⁵⁸Ibid., fol. 20^v, fol. 22^v.

⁵⁹Ibid., fol. 29^v.

⁶⁰Ibid. Pulter’s making African women the heroines of her romance is, so far as I know, entirely original. The closest analogue would be Chariclea in Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica*. But while Chariclea may come from Ethiopia, she does not share their skin color, which is why her mother abandoned her at birth: “when I brought for thee a White Child, an unusual Colour to the *Ethiopians*; I my self knew the cause [she was conceived before a picture of Andromeda]; wherefore to deliver my Dignity and Person from an Ignominious Death, assuring my self thy colour would convince me of Adultery . . . I resolved from the hour of your Birth, to commit you to the uncertainty of Fortune”: Heliodorus, sig. K8^{r-v}.

⁶¹See Hall; Boose.

scene of Rowley's *All's Lost for Lust* — a key source for Pulter's romance, as we will see shortly — King Rodericke informs the court of an impending invasion by the Moors with a report filled with negative references to skin color. He has been told, the king says, “of a hot invasion / The barbarous and tawney Affricans, / Intend upon our confines.”⁶² The enemy, Rodericke continues, relies upon their skin color as a weapon: “They would deter us with their swarty lookes: / Were they the same to their similitude, / Sooty as the inhabitants of hell,”⁶³ and he swears to “Scourge backe agen those halfe-nak't Infidels / Into their sun-burnt Clymate.”⁶⁴ The Moors are equally conscious of their skin color. Mully Mumen, king of the Moors, similarly views the conflict in terms of skin pigmentation, and he appropriates the Aesopian proverb, “to wash an Ethiop white,” for his own purposes:

Descend thy sphaere, thou burning Diety,
Haste from our shame, go blushing to thy bed;
Thy sonnes we are, thou everlasting ball,
Yet never shamde these our impressive brows
Till now; we that are stamp't with thine owne seale,
Which the whole ocean cannot wash away:
Shall those cold ague cheeks that nature moulds
Within her winter shop, those smoothe white skins,
That with a palsey hand she paintes the limbes,
Make us recoyle.⁶⁵

And yet, going against expectation and type, Pulter repeatedly refers to her African ladies as fair as much as she refers to the European Florinda as fair. When Zabra discovers the identity of the woman who has arrived at the Spanish court, she falls “upon the neck of this fair stranger” who is in fact Fidelity.⁶⁶ Amandus likewise refers to his beloved as “the Fair Fidelity.”⁶⁷ After hearing of the tyrant's demand that Fidelity have sex with him or face execution, Ithocles, Fidelity's brother, tells her to “then cheer up those faire brows”; and “the great” Almanzar's daughter is “the fair Gloriana.”⁶⁸

⁶²Rowley, 81–82 (1.1.21–23).

⁶³Ibid., 82 (1.1.31–33).

⁶⁴Ibid., 83 (1.1.86–87).

⁶⁵Ibid., 104 (2.3.1–10). On the proverb, see Newman, 141–42.

⁶⁶Pulter, fol. 8^v.

⁶⁷It should also be noted that the fear of miscegenation, one of the animating forces of Shakespeare's *Othello* (Newman, 144), is completely absent from this text. There is no sense that when Amandus falls in love with Fidelity, or when Alphonso initially falls for Florinda, that there is anything untoward or unnatural about the match.

⁶⁸Pulter, fol. 18^r.

Certainly, describing nearly all of the women in this text as fair is part of Pulter's overall defense of the female sex in *The Unfortunate Florinda*. Pulter undoubtedly knew that many did not endorse the education of women, and she incorporates a refutation of this belief into her romance. At first, Fidelia resists her brother's suggestion that Amandus instruct her in languages because she knows that "knowledg by most men esteem'd noe ornament for a Woeman."⁶⁹ She overcomes this impediment by remembering that "by that means I might read many Excellent books written in those Languages."⁷⁰ And Fidelia's mother's last words to her daughter begin with a defense of educating women: "my dearest Fidelia, as the whole busines of my life (next to the eternall injoyments of my soul) hath been employed in the vertuous erudition of you, that you might not only bee vertuous by customary education, but out of choice and reason, bee convinc'd of the Lovlines of all those vertues, which are a greater ornament to a Noble Lady then all the jemms the Orientall Indies e're produced."⁷¹ The major set piece, however, is the extended debate between the misogynist Alphonso and the fair Fidelia over the status of women.

The debate begins with Alphonso asking "what can be said of that despicable Sex? but that they are Ambitious, Prowd, Scornfull, Cowardly, Cruell, Wanton, Simple and inconstant"; an offended Fidelia then asks permission to "vindicate my injured sex and give a true Character of that animall called Man."⁷² The king is delighted at the prospect of a debate between these two, "seing Don Alphonso is both learned and eloquent, and the lady Fidelia (considering her Sex) is so too," and Alphonso begins his case by stating that "woemen were created only to be subservants to men, for in all those numberless Nations which are guided by the unerring light of nature, the woemen are absolute slaves; and among the Jews and Mahometans they are little or nothing better."⁷³ Indeed, the inferior status of women under Christianity's main competitors constitutes these religions' one major advantage over the (supposedly) true religion: "The greatest blemish the Christian Religion hath, is the high honour they give to woemen, making them one and so in a manner equall with their husbands, when the greater and wiser Nations keep closs to the Primitive Institute of Nature, which doth not confine Man (who is so vast in his desires) to one individuall woman, all of them (but the narrow spirited Christian) living (according to Nature) in common or allowing Polligamy or

⁶⁹Ibid., fol. 12^v.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., fol. 9^f.

⁷²Ibid., fol. 25^f.

⁷³Ibid.

divorce at the husband's pleasure, For iss it not unreasonable? that Man the Noblest and free'st Creature should be tied in the Flower of his age, and all his life time to converse with a simple sluttish woeman."⁷⁴

Fidelia responds with equal vigor. After first twitting Alphonso for raising men at the expense of women, she declares that she will not spend time trashing men, but will rather argue only in praise of women: "Illustrious Princes it shall be my care in setting forth the true Honour of my Sex, to wave as much as possible the villeepending the sex of my antagonist: it being much below a noble mind, to raise their own worth from the dishonour of others, only I shall take leave to Preferre the Female Sex before the Male. First in respect of their Creator: next in their Composition being of a more refined Nature, for according to your perswasion, the works of the Creation riseing by gradations, untill the woman who was the last and choicest of the works of Nature was Composed, so that contrary to that learned Athiest (so magnified by my Lord Alphonso) shee was in the Classes of the Creatures above that arrogant animall Man."⁷⁵

Some of Fidelia's evidence may seem less than entirely persuasive today, although it demonstrates Pulter's acquaintance with classical learning. She has Fidelia prove that women are composed of superior elements by citing "the Custome of those Nations (as Plutarch sais, and where I have been) which burn their dead, they alwais referring one woman to ten men to inkindle the Fire, they being of a more Unctious Nature Ayrey or AEthereall Nature then Man."⁷⁶ Furthermore, their physical beauty also proves their superiority to men: "so their Corporall parts doth excell Mans, so their Souls must needs transcend: and that it doth so, is apparent by the Splendency of their vertues; some being peculiar to them, as Chastity, Modesty, Mercy, and compassion: and those which they have in common with Man are supereminently in them; and for Vices, they are free from many which abound in Man."⁷⁷ In answer to Alphonso's disparaging of women's occupations — "For I am afraid I should extreemly have repined against Nature, if I had been designed Card and Spin, Knit, wash, starch, and stitch, to pick Payles, Violets, eye bright, Bittony, Rosemary Flowers, and other such Pidling employments or to be a Nurse"⁷⁸ — Fidelia asserts "I think I have much more reason to applaud my Stars, that I am not a Man, for it would a been below my Spirit to have been a Tinker, a Butcher, a Taylor, a Hangman, etc."⁷⁹ Fidelia adds that the

⁷⁴Ibid., fol. 25^v.

⁷⁵Ibid., fol. 26^r. I have not been able to determine the identity of the "learned atheist."

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., fol. 25^v.

⁷⁹Ibid., fol. 26^r.

superiority of women's souls is demonstrated by their early aptitude for learning, and she concludes with a sharp comment about how most women are denied education: "And for the faculties of their Souls, look on little Children, and you shall see that Girles do far out goe boys in will and spirit, and nimblenes of apprehension and so it is where learning hath not made a difference, For all possible knowledg is infused into Men, and woemen are bred up in as much Ignorance as is possible, notwithstanding which, it is common for Simple Maids (as they call them) to fool the wisest and best bred Men."⁸⁰ Fidelia's oration ends with her turning Alphonso's disparaging of marriage into an *ad hominem* argument: "but seing he is soe presumptuous as to strike at the Institutor of Mariage, I shall only wish his Father had bin of the same mind."⁸¹ Unfortunately, at this point the debate is interrupted by the arrival of an "Embassador Extraordinary," who turns out to be Amandus in disguise.⁸²

4. THE POLITICS OF RAPE

While a previously unknown early modern defense of women would be remarkable enough, this scene forms part of Pulter's larger project of altering the moral faultlines of early Restoration England.⁸³ The great divide in *The Unfortunate Florinda* is not between East and West, between European and Islamic (or pagan) Other, or even between white and black — although we should remember that the defender of women in this text is an African woman, and that her mother defends women's education. Rather, Pulter situates the divide between the chaste and the licentious, between men as sexual predators and women as their prey. However, as we will soon see, this divide returns to the question of politics, and Pulter will use her narrative to revisit her earlier positions.

Pulter's main source, *The Life and Death of Mohamet*, describes Roderigo as a paragon of sexual corruption. After securing the Spanish crown, "he thought he might . . . give lawes and take his pleasure, which hee

⁸⁰Ibid, fols. 26^{r-v}.

⁸¹Ibid., fol. 26^v.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³At first blush, the combination of Royalism and protofeminism might seem paradoxical because, as de Groot, 195, notes: "For Royalists, national identity was gender-based and centered upon male hierarchies and the King himself. . . . Women, in particular, were castigated if they attempted to interrogate their social and political definition." Yet as Gallagher, 134, has demonstrated, Royalism seems to have provided a framework for some of the "earliest systematic assertions of women's rational and moral equality with men"; see also Chalmers, 1–2. I am grateful to Amelia A. Zurcher for correcting my understanding of Royalism and women.

spared not sensually to follow in enticing and forcing (without respect of qualities) mens wives and daughters";⁸⁴ two pages later, the author describes Roderigo as "wallowing in his pleasures, and in them never satisfied."⁸⁵ Pulter conflates both passages in her romance's opening: "Established in a durable felicitie, he thought he might give Laws and take his pleasure, which sensually he pursued, inticeing mens Wives and Daughters without any respect of quality or vertue but although he wallowed thus in impure delights, hee was desirous of Lawfull Issue to settle his Posterity."⁸⁶

Significantly, the *Fidelia* subplot, which is entirely Pulter's invention, follows the same pattern. After the death of Zabra's father Mahomet Abnehedin, the nobility feared that "some Forreigne Prince should (in that time of confusion) conquer the Nation," and so they decided to send a delegation to "the great Almanzar, hee being the indubiate Heir" to offer him the kingdom. Almanzar agrees, and sends his nephew, "the Valiant Mully Hamet," to rule in his stead, presumably the same "Mully Hamet" who is a monster in Rowley's play.⁸⁷ But before Almanzar's rule begins, an upstart, like Roderigo, grabs the throne by force and, again like Roderigo, immediately uses his newfound position to indulge in sensual pleasures — thus *Fidelia* does her best to avoid any personal contact with the king — "the new King being puft up with the comand of soe rich a Kingdome, began to scorn the old Nobility, soe that they were faine to fawn Flatter, and make him Noble Treatments and balls, where to all the choice beauties of the Kingdome were invited, to make the entertainment the more splendent, and I among the rest, but I still waded these meetings, pretending alwaies some indisposition: for my thoughts were wholly taken up with the contemplation of Amandus Excellencies; and besides I knew I could gaine noe Honour by it, for the King was extream Licentious, glorying in nothing soe much as in ruining the Honour of Virgins; and Flattering of Ladyes from their loyalty for their Husbands."⁸⁸

While the male rulers wallow in their illicit pleasures, the women in both Spain and Africa are almost always characterized by their virtue, and even more specifically by their chastity. Zabra's attendants include Castabella, "daughter to the Duke of Medina a Lady of an Heroick mind and chaste even to severity," whose "modesty did repell the wantonest glances that could bee darted at her, for which the vertuous Queen did

⁸⁴ *Mabomet*, sigs. D2^{r-v}.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. D4^r.

⁸⁶ Pulter, fol. 2^v.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 12^r.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 16^v.

highly favour her.”⁸⁹ Florinda is “of an Electri[c]all beauty superlative in all vertues, especially Chastity (an ornament peculiar to that Noble sex),” and “the chast Castara” is her mother.⁹⁰ The “Young Lady in a Moorish habit” who arrives suddenly at the Spanish court is “the vertuous Fidelia.”⁹¹ When Don Alphonso starts moping because he is smitten with Florinda, his mother sends Alphonso’s sister, “the vertuous Castabella,” to find out what is the matter.⁹² She asks Alphonso what could be wrong, since among other advantages, “your Mother [is] supereminently virtuous.”⁹³ And Fidelia’s mother begins her last instructions to her daughter by exhorting her to “valew Chastitie infinitely above your life,” stating that she has educated Fidelia so that she would “out of choice and reason, bee convinc’d of the Lovlines of all those vertues, which are a greater ornament to a Noble Lady then all the jemms the Orientall Indies e’re produced.”⁹⁴ We are now in a better position to understand why Pulter would consistently use the word *fair* to describe African woman: the term refers, I suggest, as much to their moral condition as to their beauty.

Furthermore, the action in both Africa and Spain centers on the monarch’s sexual attack on one of these virtuous women. In Africa, Fidelia becomes the focus of the unnamed licentious king’s lust. At first, the king pretends that he wants to marry Fidelia, and her father, “a little ambitious to have his Daughter a Queen,” does everything he can to forward the match — even though Fidelia’s brother Ithocles “declared his unwillingness saying, first that hee was various, and inconstant in his desires, and might, perhaps pretend Noblyly, and mean dishonourably, for soe hee had formerly don.”⁹⁵ Despite his father’s threats, Ithocles remains adamant that the king cannot be trusted, proclaiming “I will dye a Thousands Deaths before I will see soe lovely a Virgin prostrate to the lust of a Tyrant” — and with good reason, for the king soon tells Fidelia’s father that he is to marry Almanzor’s daughter, Gloriana, and that Fidelia is to be his mistress rather than his wife.⁹⁶ Fidelia’s father is

⁸⁹Ibid., fol. 3^v.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., fol. 8^f.

⁹²Ibid., fol. 4^v.

⁹³Ibid., fol. 5^f.

⁹⁴Ibid., fol. 9^f.

⁹⁵Ibid., fol. 17^f, fol. 17^v.

⁹⁶Ibid., fol. 18^f. Earlier, *ibid.*, fol. 13^v, implies that Ithocles is in love with and possibly engaged to Gloriana: he wants to ingratiate himself with Almanzar partly because of “the affection hee had for the beautifull Gloria (Daughter to Almanzar).” It is possible that Pulter intended to extend these hints into a third digression.

horrified, incredulously wondering “shall shee bee your whore!” and swearing that he would rather “offer her up (Agamemmon like) a Virgin Victime to Diana.”⁹⁷ The king then issues this threat to both Fidelia and her father: “if I enjoy not the Fair Fidela to morrow night, I will (Traytor like) offer up your Reeking heart, a sacrifice to the Raidient Apollo, and hang your scorned Carcase upon the highest Pinnacle of your own Pallace, to be a Terrour to all resistors of their sovereigns pleasure, and as for you Lady, I could in reveng of your unheard of scorn, find in my heart to prostitute your Pride to your Fathers Hangman; before which I hope you will prefer the amorous embraces of a King, who will make it his chiefest study to Honour you and all your Family.”⁹⁸ And in Spain, the “lasivious Kinge” Roderigo brutally rapes “the unfortunate Florinda” after she too rejects his advances: “then saide the intraged Kinge iff you will not yeald upon honourable termes I must take you by storm and notwithstanding all her praises, and tears, and scrameinge and striveinge beeing much stronger the[n] shee hee violated the unfortunate Florinda.”⁹⁹

The responses to these outrages also echo each other. In Africa, Fidelia, her brother Ithocles, and her beloved Amandus successfully scheme to use a bed trick to kill this king. The moment the king thinks he sees the object of his illicit desire, he “sate up in his Bed, and spreading open his arms ready to embrace her, gave the valiant Amandus a juster aime at the Heart of that Tyrant, which blow soe cooled his Flame, that instantly he expired.”¹⁰⁰ While these actions are remarkable, they are nonetheless conventional: Fidelia remains unscathed, and she devolves the actual murder upon a male. However, Florinda’s reaction to her rape, and the consequences of this act in Pulter’s romance, draw on a counter-discourse concerning rape in this period.

As numerous critics and historians have pointed out, the dominant paradigm concerning rape in early modern English culture was highly unsympathetic to the victim. The common tropes, as Jocelyn Catty notes, are that “female beauty [is] responsible for rape, and the idea that rape pollutes the victim.”¹⁰¹ And because rape was also defined as a property crime — the theft of a woman by her rightful owner, i.e., her father or her husband — women had little agency in reacting to the outrage committed

⁹⁷Ibid., fol. 18^v.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid., fol. 32A^v, fol. 33A^r. These consummated rapes constitute another way in which Pulter breaks with convention in *The Unfortunate Florinda*. As Davies, sig. A2^r, points out, one of the many clichés of the romance genre is the damsel certain “to be *relieved* just upon the point of *ravishing*.” See Zurcher, 174–75, to whom I owe this reference.

¹⁰⁰Pulter, fol. 20^{r-v}.

¹⁰¹Catty, 11.

upon them.¹⁰² As exemplified by the Lucretia story, the most common response by raped women in literature is death, either by suicide, as with Lucretia, or at the hands of a male relative, as with Lavinia in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. At the very least, the defiled woman was expected to isolate herself. The degree to which these concepts permeated early modern thinking about gender roles is suggested by how they show up in places where one might imagine a more compassionate view to obtain. For example, in her advice book, *The Mother's Blessing* (1616), Dorothy Leigh praises heathen women who, "so far they have beene from consenting to any immodestie, that if at any time they have been ravished, they have either made away themselves, or at least have separated themselves from company, not thinking themselves worthy of any society after they have once bin deflowered, though against their wils."¹⁰³ Avenging or prosecuting the rape is not an option open to the victim: rather, responsibility devolves upon the father or husband.

The early versions of the Roderigo-Florinda story in English follow these conventions closely. In all three, the victim of the crime is not the woman raped, but her father. In *A Notable Historie* (1575), the anonymous author reports that Caba (as the character is known in this text) reports the crime to her father, who, "dissimuling as though he had knowne nothyng of this injurie done to him in his Daughter," immediately starts to plot his "just revenge."¹⁰⁴ The marginal notation reads "Beautye of a Woman causeth much mischief." In *The Life and Death of William Long Beard* (1593), Lodge has Julian "understanding the heavie case and estate of his daughter"¹⁰⁵ — Lodge does not make explicit how Julian knows — who immediately tells the governor of Africa "of the outrage doone him by the king" and "what desire he had to revenge him of the injurie doone unto him by the king."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in Turquet's *The General Historie of Spaine*, Julian is "transported with the dishonour done unto his house."¹⁰⁷

And yet, this view did not go unchallenged. Another view of rape, one that blames the rapist, not the victim, also had considerable authority. In *The City of God*, Augustine explicitly states that rape does not defile the victim — "whatever anyone else does with the body or to the body, provided that it cannot be avoided without committing sin, involves no blame to the sufferer" — and he discredits Lucretia's response to her rape because "the guilt

¹⁰²Ibid., 12.

¹⁰³Leigh, sig. C5^{v-r}. Cf. Catty, 129.

¹⁰⁴*A Notable Historie*, sig. K^r.

¹⁰⁵Lodge, sig. H3^v.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., sig. H3^v, sig. H3^r.

¹⁰⁷Turquet, sig. O5^r.

attaches only to the ravisher, and not at all to the woman forcibly ravished.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, as Corrine Saunders notes, Thomas Aquinas also “stipulated that those violated against their will are not to blame”: this concept thus found its way, not only into canon law, but also into medieval penitential handbooks.¹⁰⁹ Moving closer to Pulter’s milieu, T.E., author of *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632), devotes his final chapters to rape. Before setting out the history of statutes against rape, T.E. describes the tremendously vulnerable position of women in early modern England. If “sweet words” and flattery do not work, he writes, the men resort to “rough handling, violence, and plain strength of armes. . . . So drunken are men with their owne lusts, and the poison of Ovid’s false precept, *vim licet appellat, ves est ea grata puellis* [you can call it strength, but a strength that pleases a young girl] That if the rampier of Lawes were not betwixt women and their harmes, I verily think none of them, being above twelve yeares of age, and under an hundred, being either faire or rich, should be able to escape ravishing.”¹¹⁰ Following Augustine (although he does not cite him), T.E. defines rape as “a hideous hatefull kinde of whoredome in him which committeth it, when a woman is enforced violently to sustaine the furie of brutish concupiscence.”¹¹¹ Not only does T.E. place the blame squarely on the rapist, but he also transfers to him the charge of sexual corruption usually leveled at rape’s victims.

Yet the Augustinian–T.E. view of rape remained a minority view in the period. *The Lawes Resolutions*, we should remember, exists in only one edition, and the lack of a second printing suggests that the volume did not sell well. Lucretia and her suicide remained, as Kim Solga writes, “the icon to whom many a ravished maiden aspire[d] on the early modern stage.”¹¹² As if to illustrate the controversy over where to place the blame, the lords accompanying Colatine in Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece* try to prevent her suicide by repeating the Augustinian view — “Her body’s stain her mind untainted clears” — but Lucrece rejects that argument: “‘No, no,’ quoth she, ‘no dame hereafter living / By my excuse shall claim excuse’s giving.’”¹¹³ The larger culture was not much more empathetic. While so far as we know women neither committed suicide nor were shunned because of rape, the

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, 26, 28 (bk. 1, ch. 19). It should be noted, however, that Augustine’s main object in these chapters is to praise the virtue of Christian women and to destroy all justifications for suicide.

¹⁰⁹ Saunders, 93, 99–119. I am grateful to Amelia Zurcher for alerting me to this tradition and for directing me to Saunders’s book.

¹¹⁰ T.E., sig. Bb5^r.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Solga, 55n8.

¹¹³ Shakespeare, 1974, 1714–15.

authorities largely ignored this crime. Regardless of the extensive legislation described by T.E., rape constituted only about one percent of indicted felonies, and while those convicted were hanged, guilty verdicts were rare.¹¹⁴

Pulter's source, *The Life and Death of Mahomet*, adjusts the dominant paradigm slightly by having the violated Florinda write letters to her father in which she "complained her mis-fortune [and] praying him to revenge of her wrong."¹¹⁵ But while the author allows Florinda a little agency in urging her father to avenge the rape, the narrative also makes clear that the crime affects the father as much, if not more, than the daughter. Don Julian is "sensible of her daughters dishonor (which reflected upon him)."¹¹⁶ And while the entire family gets involved, it is because the crime affects them as well. After he returns to Spain, Don Julian gathers his friends and family, and then "relate[s] unto them the particular wrong done to his daughter and the dishonor cast upon their family, wherein they were all interested."¹¹⁷ Similarly, when Julian asks Almanzor's lieutenant, Mura, to assist "in the revenge," it is because of "the dishonor cast upon their familie" by Florinda's rape.¹¹⁸

But, as David Nicol has convincingly argued, Rowley's *All's Lost for Lust* provides a different perspective, one indebted to T.E. and Augustine: Jacinta does not "respond to the rape with suicidal shame, but with angry cursing."¹¹⁹ After Roderick's servant Lothario says to "Quiet your tongue," she vitriolically responds:

Quiet my tongue? Art officer of hell!
 The Jaylor to the devil, fleshy fiend,
 I'le waken heaven and earth with my exlaimes,
 Astonish hell for feare, the fire be doubled
 In the due vengeance of my heinous wrong,
 My heavy heinous wrong.¹²⁰

To be sure, shards of the dominant paradigm remain. Jacinta compares herself to "Lucrece," and Julianus begs her pardon for having "brought thee to a shame stains all the way / Twixt earth and Acheron; not all the clouds / (The skies large canopy) could they drowne the Seas / With perpetuall inundation, / Can wash it ever out."¹²¹ But unlike the fathers who believe that the crime requires killing their violated daughters, Julianus explicitly

¹¹⁴Walker, 1. See also Chaytor; Bashar.

¹¹⁵*Mahomet*, sig. D5^r.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid., sig. D6^r.

¹¹⁸Ibid., sig. D6^v.

¹¹⁹Nicol, 180.

¹²⁰Rowley, 113 (3.1.3–8).

¹²¹Ibid., 143 (4.1.100), 135 (4.1.19–23).

reaffirms the filial bond — “Jacinta welcome, thou art my child still / No forced staine of lust can alienate / Our consanguinitie” — and they jointly appear before their friends and relatives: “She sounds the Trumpet, which draws forth my sword / To be revenged.”¹²²

However, rather than following the depiction of the rape in *The Life and Death*, Pulter takes Rowley’s “departures from convention” as a springboard for writing a story that fully embraces Augustine’s and T.E.’s views, and thus adds her own contribution to early modern culture’s complex and contradictory *mélange* of opinions about rape.¹²³ Immediately following her violation, Florinda (like Jacinta) “breathed out cursses and deprecations against him and with floods of tears implored devine vengeance.”¹²⁴ Pulter, however, goes much further. After the rape, Roderigo threatens that if she does not grant him her love, he will “imediately fetch up the most deformed negro slave in my black gard and make him deflower you and then run my sword throug you both and then [call] up the King and Queene who [ca]nnot but [ap]plaude my [ju]stis.”¹²⁵ But rather than preferring death to embracing her violator, she pretends — her “soule boyelinge with revenge” — to agree to Roderigo’s demands so that she would “live to revenge her dishonour,” thus implicitly repudiating the tradition established by Lucretia.¹²⁶

After Castabella, the misogynist Alphonso’s sister, discovers what has happened, the two engage in a debate over the proper response. On the one hand, Florinda seems to have internalized the assumption that rape pollutes the victim — “I live (or rather dieinge live) in horrid infamie” — and she later asserts that rape constitutes an “irepaireable Injury.”¹²⁷ But rather than following this paradigm’s logic and directing violence against herself, she focuses her murderous rage against Roderigo: “oh you Celestiall Powers lett mee but live to bee revenged and then welcome oh welcome eternall death or annihilation.”¹²⁸ Echoing Augustine and Aquinas, Castabella immediately

¹²²Ibid., 131–32 (4.1.36–39), 134 (4.1.108–09).

¹²³Nicol, 180. As Catty, 127, points out, women writers on rape tend to approach the topic “tangentially,” concentrating on “seduction as the chief signifier of male subjection of women.” Furthermore, while rape is conventional in chivalric romance, it is perhaps significant that the only woman to publish such a romance in the seventeenth century, Lady Mary Wroth, does not include a single successful rape in *Urania*: *ibid.*, 184.

¹²⁴Pulter, fol. 33A^r.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., fol. 33A^v.

¹²⁸Ibid. The list of female avengers in early modern English writing is very small. See William Henmingses, *The Fatal Contract* (1653; reprint 1661), and James Shirley’s *The Cardinal* (1641). I am grateful to Julie Sutherland and to Elizabeth Adams Blake for these references.

and categorically rejects this plan: “ah deare Florinda lett not the sinne of others provoke you (by reuengefull thoughts) to sully your unspotted soule which remains still in itt^s vergin Purity.”¹²⁹ Less conventionally, Florinda explicitly rejects the Christian remedy for adversity in her encomium for revenge. Against Castabella’s urging of patience, Florinda exclaims, “what have the Heathens their Nemuses, and Ramnusins, their Adrastes to avenge their wronges and Christians must bee putt of with Patience[.] beleeve itt the thought of nothings is soe delectable to an Injured soul as reuenge, ah sweet reuenge tis for thy sake I live or els I vow by my eternall hopes I would skorn to breath a minnute, nether is itt a singlge reuenge that will satisfie the vastness of my desire.”¹³⁰ But having embraced Augustine’s views on rape — which, we should recall, remained a minority view during the period — and having altered her sources by turning her romance into a revenge tragedy, Pulter further departs from convention by dropping the tragedy.

In virtually all early modern revenge plays, while the revenger suffers grievous harm, he is inevitably isolated and dies at the play’s end, the moral distinction between victim and avenger having been erased, or at least greatly blurred. Furthermore, as Karen Robertson notes, in the revenge-play tradition, “women are excluded from participation in the activities of just vengeance and become repositories of monstrous illegitimate cruelty that must be cast out of the state.”¹³¹ Yet exactly the opposite happens in Pulter’s romance, for not only is Florinda not excluded from participation, but she actually becomes the focal point of an ever-widening circle of revengers. When Florinda informs her father, Count Julian, “of this high dishoner offered to his Deare and only Childe [he] was soe intraged att itt and did soe swell with desire of reuenge” that he immediately left Barbary and returned to the court of Spain.¹³² In the sources, however, Julian becomes the avenger: Pulter thus transforms vengeance into a communal activity that includes, rather than excludes, the victim. When Florinda’s mother discovers what has happened, “she was soe senceable of this dishonour that she more earnestly incited her husbände to reuenge this unparralild Injury, sayeing now their name must end in Infamie, but iff itt must bee soe said shee lett us studdy som horred reuenge though wee all perrish in the action.”¹³³ Julian agrees, and he too speaks in terms of a collective revenge: “Count Julian related to

¹²⁹Pulter, fol. 33A^v.

¹³⁰Ibid., fol. 34A^r.

¹³¹Robertson, 220.

¹³²Pulter, fol. 35A^{r-v}.

¹³³Ibid., fol. 35A^r.

them how they must still desemble their sorrow and they should soone see an ample revenge taken of that ungratefull Ravesh. ”¹³⁴

Count Julian then invites “all his noble relatives and Friends to com and rejoyce with him for his safe return out of Barbury,” but instead of a traditional after-dinner entertainment, they are treated to a bizarre living emblem.¹³⁵ The guests are led into a room hung with black velvet, and in the middle sits the “unfortunate Florinda all in mourninge her haire disheveled her neck and armes naked in each arme a vaine prick’d her Father and Mother in mourninge stood on each side of her with their fingures on the Orifes to stave the blood their other hands hild two sharp stillatos.”¹³⁶ It would seem that Julian and his wife are about to fulfill the expected paradigms and restore their family’s honor by destroying their daughter. But Julian has something very different in mind. He tells the assembled that he and his wife have decided that they will all die together unless everyone agrees to help avenge this monstrous crime: “[Rodergio has] Barbarously divergenated my incomparable and only daughter even she the sole staffe of our old age, and now our antiant and honorable Family must end in lothed Infamie. and unless wee could see any hope of revengeinge this irepairable Injury wee are all resolved to expire together.”¹³⁷ Count Julian’s gambit works: in answer, “all the companey full of rage, and revenge, drew out their swords and layde them att the feett of the yett bleedinge Florinda crieing out lett that wronged lady live to see a noble revenge of her dishonour.”¹³⁸ Everyone vows “never to sheathe their swords till they had fully revenged this deshonour which as they saide reflected on them all,” and they decide to bring their complaint to “Almanzar who would bee glad to have soe just a cause to invade this nation.”¹³⁹

In this period, however, rape and political theory were inextricably intertwined with each other, and Pulter’s treatment of rape overlaps with her treatment of political theory, as Pulter’s sexually rapacious monarchs justify their actions by explicitly using the language of absolutism, the political ideology for which Charles I lost his head. After Fidelia’s father tells the African king that he will not consent to his daughter becoming the King’s mistress, the King replies — with “eyes Flamming with Lust and rage” — “my Lord I know (and I will make you know) that I am vicegerent

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid., fol. 35A^v.

¹³⁶Ibid., fol. 36A^r.

¹³⁷Ibid., fol. 36A^{r-v}.

¹³⁸Ibid., fol. 36A^v.

¹³⁹Ibid.

to the Immortall Gods, and to them, and them only I am to bee accountable,” thus repeating a commonplace of absolutist thinking.¹⁴⁰ Charles I asserted that he was God’s “vicegerent” on earth, and after his execution an anonymous Royalist tract referred to the “martyr” king as “the most adorned Vicegerent of God.”¹⁴¹ As God’s vicegerent, the reasoning went, the monarch was accountable to God alone. For example, in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598, reprinted twice in 1642 and thus a current text for Pulter), James VI states that the monarch “is a Judge set by God over [the people], having power to judge them, but to be judged onely by GOD.”¹⁴² Charles I refused to enter a plea at his trial for exactly this reason, affirming that “he was to give Answer to no power, but the supream power above.”¹⁴³ Significantly, this is exactly the claim the King in *The Unfortunate Florinda* makes: “to them, [the gods] and them only I am to bee accountable.”¹⁴⁴ Alphonso urges the Spanish king, Roderigo, to force Florinda to acquiesce to his desires in almost identical terms: “what is your priviledg in being King if you must be bound in your desires; never stand supplicating to them, whom by the law of the creation you may comand: had I been as you are, above the reach of humane law, I had not lost one minutes rest, for that scornfull Flurt.” Roderigo vigorously approves: “now I know thou loves me, and all the World shall know I love thee.”¹⁴⁵ The phrase “above the reach of human law” once more repeats a common trope of Royalist discourse. For example, John Cowell, in his controversial legal dictionary, *The Interpreter: or Booke containing the signification of Words* (1607; reprint 1637, 1658), avers that the king “Is above the law by his absolute power” and “to bind the prince to or by these laws, were repugnant to the nature and constitution of an absolute monarchy.”¹⁴⁶ In 1642 the popular poet John Taylor asserted that Charles I is “the Lords anointed,” and his enemies “merit heav’ns hot wrath.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰Ibid., fol. 18^v.

¹⁴¹Sharpe, 183. *Royall Legacies*, sig. E1^v.

¹⁴²James VI/I, 1994, 72. In the “Advertisement to the Reader” of the 1642 edition, the publisher makes explicit that he intends this reprint as an intervention in the Civil War: “when ye shall fall in purpose to any that shall praise or excuse the by-past rebellions, ye shall herewith be armed against their Siren songs”: James VI/I, 1642, sig. A2^v. Given this text’s popularity and Pulter’s engagement with political issues, it is very likely that she had some knowledge of this book.

¹⁴³*Collections of Notes*, sig. A4^v.

¹⁴⁴Pulter, fol. 18^v.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., fol. 25^r.

¹⁴⁶Cowell, sig. QQ1a, Aaa3b.

¹⁴⁷Taylor, sig. A4^v.

Furthermore, even though Pulter wrote passionately against the execution of Charles I, she thoroughly approves of Amandus's execution of the "Lascivious King." Abandoning the absolutist tenet that taking arms against a monarch is always forbidden, regardless of circumstances, Pulter has Amandus stab "at the Heart of that Tyrant, which blow soe cooled his Flame, that instantly he expired."¹⁴⁸ To further emphasize the point, Fidelity then reiterates that the deed is not a foul crime, as Pulter herself characterizes the execution of Charles I, but a "peece of justice (for soe certainly I may call it)."¹⁴⁹ After the king's violent death is discovered, the nobles demand to know why Fidelity "would inbrue [her] hands in [her] sovereigns bloud" and Fidelity responds by once more justifying the act: "I only answered, that if it were to doe againe I would doe it, rather then looss my honour, For I thought I might answer it both to Gods and men."¹⁵⁰

To be sure, proposing a connection between absolutism and sexual corruption has a long and distinguished history. Rebecca Bushnell has explored how Stuart tragedy often explores "what happens when a luxurious tyrant is in control," and Marina Hila has shown how John Fletcher's Jacobean play, *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, explicitly connects rape with absolutism, in particular, how Valentinian employs the same assertion that kings are above the law that both James VI/I and Roderigo rely upon: "Know I am far above the faults I doe, / And those I doe I am able to forgive too."¹⁵¹ Accusations of sexual corruption frequently occur in anti-Royalist writing of the 1640s and '50s.¹⁵² In *Eikonoklastes*, for example, Milton describes Charles I as spending the years of personal rule as a politically irresponsible sybarite, immersed in sensual pleasures: "And how voluptuously, how idly reigning in the hands of other men, he either tyrannized or trifled away those seventeen years of peace, without care, or thought, as if to be a king had been nothing else in his apprehension, but to eat and drink, and have his will, and take his pleasure."¹⁵³ In 1652, one Edward Peyton published a history of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties,

¹⁴⁸Pulter, fol. 20^v. James VI/I, 1994, 79, asserts that "a king cannot be imagined to be unruly and tyrannous, but the common-wealth will be kept in better order, notwithstanding thereof, by him, then it can be by his way-taking."

¹⁴⁹Pulter, fol. 20^v.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., fol. 21^r.

¹⁵¹Bushnell, 1583; Hila, 748 (*The Tragedy of Valentinian*, 1.119–20). Intriguingly, when the rapist is poisoned, the person responsible declares that her "deed is justice": Hila, 746 (5.8.107). One wonders if the parallel to Fidelity's calling the anonymous tyrant's death a "peece of justice" at Pulter, fol. 20^v, is more than an accidental parallel.

¹⁵²Burks, 78–83.

¹⁵³Milton, 1957, 800. I owe this quotation to Burks, 79.

Wherein the Most Secret and Chamber-Abominations of the Two Last Kings are Discovered. He revels in James's homosexuality — “the king sold his affections to Sir *George Villiers*, whom he would tumble and kiss as a Mistress”¹⁵⁴ — and notes that when Charles first met his future wife, he “bedded her, without the ordinary religious forme of uniting,” an act that anticipates future debaucheries.¹⁵⁵ “The masques and plays at Whitehal,” for example, “were used only for Incentives to lust: therefore the Courtiers invited the Citizens wives to those shows, on purpose to defile them in such sort. There is not a Lobby nor Chamber (if it could speak) but would verify this.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the overall plot of *The Unfortunate Florinda* — sexual violence leading to regime change — implicitly recalls the legend of Lucretia's rape by Tarquin, an event that resulted in the subsequent banishment of monarchy and the establishment of the Roman Republic. As one might expect, this legend figures prominently in early modern discussions of republicanism,¹⁵⁷ including those by the monarchy's antagonists in the 1640s and '50s, such as John Milton and Marchamont Nedham.¹⁵⁸ Some even called Charles I — whose court was, if anything, sexually restrained — Tarquin.¹⁵⁹

Given the manifest Royalism of the earlier poetry, the question remains as to why Pulter's monarchs would use absolutist rhetoric to justify rape, and why, *contra* her earlier denunciations of Charles's execution, Pulter asserts in her story that rape justifies regicide. It is also unclear why she would echo the rape of Lucretia, a narrative so closely aligned with republicanism, and why she would use the rhetoric of Charles I's and absolutism's enemies to shape her narrative. We need to ask what changed.

There are no certain answers to these questions — at least, not until further evidence is uncovered. While the narratives and themes of Pulter's romance are clear, the motivations behind them remain less so. However, Pulter's appropriation of the anti-absolutist conflation of tyranny and rape for her narrative more or less coincides with the return of a monarch and

¹⁵⁴Peyton, sig. C8^v.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., sig. D7^r.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., sig. D8^r.

¹⁵⁷See, for example, Jed; Matthes; and Rudolph, 160, which analyzes the connection between “tyranny and violent lust” in the 1680s. For Pulter's relationship with this legend, see the Appendix below at p. 1242.

¹⁵⁸See Milton, 2007c, 1032; Nedham, 1656, sigs. M6^r–M7^v: “For, besides the rape of Lucrece, among the other faults objected against *Tarquin*, this was the most considerable, That he had acted all things after his own Head; and discontinued consultations with the Senate.”

¹⁵⁹Burke, 79.

a court well known for sexual rapacity and moral corruption. While the best-known incidents of Charles II and his courtiers abandoning themselves to lust, such as Charles Sedley's scandalous night on the town, postdate the composition of *The Unfortunate Florinda*, Charles II's proclivities and the behavior of his court were public knowledge well before the Restoration.¹⁶⁰ While the king-to-be attended services regularly and set aside each Friday for prayers in memory of his father, nevertheless "a Cromwellian spy could describe Charles's entourage as full of drunkenness, fornication, and adultery."¹⁶¹ A newsbook from 1660 by the ever-slippery Marchamont Nedham gleefully recounts the adventures of "H," ostensibly one of the king's companions, who "swears he hath horn'd 15 Cuckolds within this 14 days."¹⁶² Charles II happily led these goings-on. He filled his correspondence from before his return to England with the details of his "romantic manoeuvres," in particular "the wooing of a young woman at Brussels known as 'the infanta';" nor was this woman the sole object of Charles's attention, as he fathered fourteen illegitimate children before the Restoration.¹⁶³ According to Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), by 1661 the incidence of syphilis at Charles II's court was scandalous.¹⁶⁴ In short, there was nothing hidden about Charles II's behavior, and no reason to assume that Pulter was blissfully ignorant about the future monarch's reputation as the Restoration approached.

I hypothesize, therefore, that Hester Pulter's political views shifted as political circumstances shifted. As Barbara Donagan puts it in a slightly different context, "initial choice of allegiance was not necessarily a guarantee of permanent loyalty."¹⁶⁵ Not only are there degrees of Royalism, but people switched sides all the time over the course of the Civil War, and some, such as Marchamont Nedham, more than once. A contemporary diarist wrote with disgust of a man who "was first for the Parliament, then for the King, then theirs, then taken prisoner by us, and [with] much ado gott his pardon, and now *pro Rege*, God wott."¹⁶⁶ Consequently, there is nothing unusual or

¹⁶⁰Hutton, 1985, 186, notes that Sir Charles Sedley supposedly preached a mock sermon while stark naked, accompanied "with obscene postures." As the story circulated, the details became more lurid: "fifty miles further, in Oxford, it was said that the entire dinner party had undressed. By the time it got to Flintshire, the dinner itself had been served by six nude women."

¹⁶¹Ibid., 122.

¹⁶²Nedham, sig. A4^r.

¹⁶³Hutton, 1989, 124–25.

¹⁶⁴Hutton, 1985, 186.

¹⁶⁵Donagan, 71; see also Potter, xii–xiii.

¹⁶⁶Donagan, 76.

unprecedented in Pulter's changing her mind or narrowing her political sympathies. The question is what sparked the shift, and her earlier poetry affords a possible clue. In her second poem on the execution of Charles I, Pulter expects Charles II to redeem all sorrows: "a voice from Heaven said weep noe more / Nor my Heroick Champions Death Deplore / A second Charles shall all thy Ioyes restore."¹⁶⁷ The restored king did not live up to those hopes, and I suggest that the licentious nature of Charles II and his court so disenchanted Hester Pulter that she decided to revisit in fiction the question of whether resistance and regicide are ever justified. For Charles I, her answer was unambiguously no. But for Charles II — like Pulter's Roderigo, like her unnamed African king — her answer becomes clearly yes. Sexual corruption was apparently her line in the sand, her dealbreaker. Therefore, Hester Pulter created a romance with distinctly republican overtones in which chastity is the highest value, sexual corruption the lowest vice, and rulers who commit such crimes forfeit their right to rule and their right to live.

5. CONCLUSION

We will never know exactly why Pulter never finished *The Unfortunate Florinda*. It may have been that even though she altered the religion of the Moors, she decided that the pressure of the original narrative — in which Florinda and Julian are blamed for the Islamization of Spain — had become too great. It may have been that she could not bear to have Julian tricked into killing his daughter (which is what happens in Rowley); or, following *The Life and Death*, have Florinda commit suicide because she caused "the slaughter of so many Christians, the extinguishing of Religion and the utter subversion of so flourishing a Kingdome," with Julian immediately following suit, "oppressed with grieffe."¹⁶⁸ Alternatively, Pulter may have deliberately left her romance unfinished, so that it followed the example of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*, although the fragments of narrative at the end of the manuscript make this possibility less likely. One also cannot exclude the possibility that she simply lost interest in the project. At this distance, with so little biographical information available on Hester Pulter, we do not and cannot know. But what we have of *The Unfortunate Florinda* — and I hope this essay demonstrates that we have quite a lot — constitutes a substantial achievement that deserves sustained attention for a number of reasons. This romance not only testifies to Hester

¹⁶⁷Ross, 2005, 10–11.

¹⁶⁸*Mahomet*, sig. F12^r, sig. F13^r.

Pulter's omnivorous book consumption, as she ranges from classical literature to contemporary drama to histories of Spain, but also reveals her mind in motion, adjusting and altering sources to create a vehicle for reconsidering the dominant views in early modern England on race, rape, and gender, as well as her earlier views about politics. While we may regret that Pulter never finished this work, this should not prevent us from attending closely to what she did complete. *The Unfortunate Florinda* is a remarkable achievement that deserves recovery, study, and, most of all, reading.

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*Appendix: Hester Pulter and the Lucretia and
Tarquin Legend*

Pulter's relationship with the Lucretia and Tarquin legend is strangely ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems likely that she knew the legend. Roderigo's threat closely resembles Tarquin's threat, in Livy, 1.58, "that he would lay the naked corpse of the slave by her dead body, so that it might be said that she had been slain in foul adultery": see also Shakespeare, 1974, 1728 (*The Rape of Lucrece*, ll. 512–18). And yet, despite the obvious parallels between *The Unfortunate Florinda* and the rape of Lucretia, Pulter's romance never explicitly alludes to either Lucretia or Tarquin. The parallel, while present, remains implicit, unspoken, and I speculate that the Royalist appropriation of this legend might account for Pulter's reticence in naming Tarquin or Lucretia. For example, a 1655 edition of *The Rape of Lucrece* bundled Shakespeare's poem with the Royalist John Quarles's *The Banishment of Tarquin: Or, the Rewards of Lust* (Quarles published an elegy for Charles I, *Regale lectum miseriae*, in 1649; see Horden). Quarles manages to avoid mentioning Tarquin's royal status or that his crime resulted in Rome getting rid of the monarchy. Instead, he depicts Tarquin as driven to madness and death by nightingales, who "encamp about his eares, and send / A party out of notes, which recommend / Themselves unto him, whil'st affrightn'd he / Decayes, and reels into an extasie": (Shakespeare, 1655, sig. T3^v). Filmer, 259, tries to defuse the potency of this legend by attacking Lucretia's character, arguing that her suicide was unnecessary: "it may be said she had a greater desire to be thought chaste than to be chaste. She might have died untouched and unspotted in her body if she had not been afraid to be slandered for in chastity."

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