**Fires and Feasting: Political Festivity in Behn’s Exclusion Crisis Plays**

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**Abstract:**

This essay situates Aphra Behn’s plays, *The Roundheads* (1681/2) and *The City-Heiress* (1682), in the ongoing contest for physical and ideological control of the City of London during the Exclusion Crisis. In particular, it considers their dramatisation of civic festivals and demonstrations. In 1679–82 the Exclusionists had found success in exploiting the symbolic and memorialising function of traditional festivities, such as processions, bonfires, and banquets, to maintain geographical, ideological, and legal control of the City. Behn’s plays joined a variety of Tory counter spectacles and publications through which these Whig street politics were rivalled, exposed, and subverted. In the process, the plays negotiate debates surrounding the use but also the abuse of political festivity when it is used cynically or in the services of tyranny. In *The Roundheads* the differences between roundhead/Whig political manipulation and royalist/Tory festivity are relatively clear cut: royalist celebrations accompanying the Restoration are generated by the people and facilitated by the generosity of noble characters, a reciprocity that does not characterise the roundhead leaders’ cynical and arbitrary approach to festivity. *The City-Heiress*, however, adopts a more critical response to Tory celebrations, at a time when the court was threatening to remove the London Corporation’s charter.

**Keywords:**

Aphra Behn, Exclusion Crisis, Restoration drama, festivity, spectacle, Restoration London

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It has often been observed that the 1681–2 London theatrical season was “overwhelmingly Tory” and celebrated the “political triumph” achieved as a result of Charles II’s dissolution of the Oxford Parliament on 28 March 1681, through which he hoped to defeat cries for Exclusion from opponents of his Catholic successor, James, Duke of York.[[1]](#endnote-2) Many Tory-leaning plays were staged during this season as part of what some historians have called a “Tory reaction” or “counter-attack”, but characterising these works as celebrations of a foregone political triumph, rather than as responses to continuing political uncertainty, belies their complexity and achievement.[[2]](#endnote-3) As Gary De Krey argues, “the parliamentary opponents of a Catholic succession were even more determined after Oxford to ensure a Protestant succession”, and their subsequent retirement to London ensured that the city remained central to the continuing, now extra-parliamentary crisis.[[3]](#endnote-4) This essay seeks to situate two of the season’s Tory-leaning plays by Aphra Behn in this ongoing and undecided contest for physical and ideological control of the City of London, where Exclusionist concerns now found their most ardent expression. The action of *The Roundheads* (1681, postdated 1682) and *The City-Heiress* (1682) takes place within the city walls of London, a setting which Behn had chosen only twice before for *The Town Fopp* (1676/7) and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), and never for two plays in the same season.[[4]](#endnote-5) Typical for Exclusion Crisis comedies of a Tory stamp, both plays stage sexual contests between virile Tories or cavaliers and foolish Whig aldermen or parliamentarians, where a Tory victory signals “the inherent superiority and right to power of the Stuart dynasty and its ruling elite”.[[5]](#endnote-6) Such victories are depicted as inevitable, returning the women – and their property and wealth which start the play in Whig hands – to Tory control, symbolic of broader political contests for control of the city. What sets these particular plays apart from other Tory comedies in their engagement with the London crisis, however, is their dramatization of civic festivals and demonstrations which had taken on an integral role in these contests. Whereas the Exclusionists exploited the symbolic and memorialising function of traditional civic rituals such as processions, bonfires, and banquets, to maintain geographical, ideological, and legal control of the City, Behn’s two plays employed the resources of the Duke’s Theatre to rival and reappropriate these spectacles for Tory use. In doing so, she encourages her audience to become more critical consumers of political festivity and the ways such celebrations might be abused by both sides. While Al Coppola has argued convincingly that by the late 1680s Behn was interrogating the “ham-fisted, cynical performance of Stuart power” visible in pageants and processions, this essay contends that her scrutiny of political festivity, which necessarily engaged with topical debates over tyranny and consent, began with her response to the partisan street politics of the Exclusion Crisis.[[6]](#endnote-7)

After their disappointed return to London following Oxford, opposition grandees and activists soon renewed their efforts to stoke anti-papal feeling in the capital, organising increasingly elaborate civic spectacles that sought to conscript the methods usually employed for bolstering displays of monarchical power in the services of Exclusion. Behn’s prologues to *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681) and *The Roundheads* voice resentment towards the “*City Pope*” – an expensive papal effigy which was processed through London’s streets before being tumbled into a huge bonfire – whose “*show*” rivals (but does not exceed) the novelty offered by her play.[[7]](#endnote-8) Such entertainments, she implies, are employed cynically to “please the fools”, leading to their uncritical acceptance of the existence of a Popish Plot and the threat of Catholic absolutism.[[8]](#endnote-9) Thomas Otway’s prologue to *The City-Heiress* also criticised the Whig appropriation of corporate banquets, usually laid on by councils, guilds, and companies to honour monarchs and dignitaries, as “*Sham-Thanksgivings*”: counterfeit celebrations purporting to remember the nation’s preservation from the Popish Plot (as if that could be a neutral act), but which were actually intended to stoke partisan feeling in favour of the associating Whigs.[[9]](#endnote-10) Behn and Otway clearly recognised the threat of these rival “shows” reappropriating the techniques traditionally utilised by the state. Such events initiated demonstrations of heightened feeling that gave the “illusion of spontaneous celebration” and “universal” approval of the ideologies underpinning their design.[[10]](#endnote-11) However, the anti-papal processions not just encouraged, but actively “depended on the demonstrable participation of the crowd”, unlike many earlier ceremonial processions that “worked to contain or distance” audiences.[[11]](#endnote-12) According to one printed broadsheet interpreting the ritual for a wider audience, the procession of 17 November 1679 – restaged in 1680 and 1681 – was to be accompanied by “150. Flambeaus and Torches by Order; but so many more came in Voluntiers as made them up some Thousands”. That reporter estimated that the spectacle reached an audience of 200,000 people.[[12]](#endnote-13) Anti-papal bonfires became a regular feature of Whig political festivity thereafter: bonfires accompanied larger Whig-sponsored banquets or “treats” and celebrated political victories such as the Earl of Shaftesbury’s acquittal in November 1681. These political spectacles exploited the carnivalesque license granted on such occasions, enveloping parts of the city in raucous demonstrations against popery and the popish successor.[[13]](#endnote-14)

These fires and feasts – which aimed to “usurp and supplant, deform and reform” the highly symbolic civic ceremonies Charles II had re-introduced at the Restoration – were therefore extremely provocative, particularly because they gave the appearance of mass support that could be potentially mobilised for fighting.[[14]](#endnote-15) Until the court gained control of the City’s shrievalty in mid-1682, Charles’s attempts to curb these demonstrations were largely unsuccessful, but in the meantime – this essay contends – *The Roundheads* and *The City-Heiress* joined a variety of Tory counter spectacles and publications through which Whig street politics were exposed and subverted.[[15]](#endnote-16) In both plays, Whig festivity is characterised as cynical and manipulative; it exists to manipulate the credulous rather than to unite a political community in the joyful celebration of sincerely held beliefs. In the prologue to *The Roundheads*, for instance, Captain John Hewson, a member of the Committee of Safety, the group of twenty-three parliamentarians whose control of the government between 26 October and 24 December 1659 is the target of the play’s derision, instructs his Whig successors, “Let Politicians order the Confusion”, “Pay those that Rail”, “Pay Juries”, “Pay Bully Whig”, and “Pay those that burn the Pope” (A3v–A4), associating the organisation of ideological street spectacles with the supposed broader Whig practices of bullying, spreading disinformation, and preventing the pursuit of lawful justice. In both plays, the cynical orchestrations of political festivity leave these events ripe for reappropriation by Tory-leaning merry-makers who restore them to their traditional purpose: to cement and celebrate the King’s authority, lawful justice, and the traditional bonds between City and monarch. *The Roundheads*’ final scene re-dramatizes the conflagrations that accompanied Restoration celebrations as instigated from “below” by London apprentices and representative of a new and generous festive order that can no longer be restrained and manipulated. In a similar fashion, *The City-Heiress* counters opposition banquets and “treats” which had become increasingly contested by the spring of 1682, and dramatizes a Whig feast hosted by Sir Timothy Treat-all, a rich City alderman who is (significantly) withholding his nephew’s inheritance, which is boisterously commandeered by his Tory visitors. Unlike *The Roundheads*, however, which – because of its emphasis on the universal accord accompanying the Restoration – does not invite the audience to question the coercion of the roundheads to participate in pro-royalist festivity, *The City-Heiress* is more ambivalent about enforced participation and links it to some of the more unpalatable aspects of Toryism.[[16]](#endnote-17) At a time when the crown was threatening to remove the London Corporation’s charter – the document which recognised the city’s self-governing status – Behn’s representation of political festivity slipping into tyranny (echoing other more problematic moments in the play) invites her audience not just to reflect on the abuse of street politics by both sides, but on the broader methods employed by the Tories as part of their “counter-attack”.

**“Far exceed[ing] your City Pope for show”: *The Roundheads* (1681)**

Historians have long acknowledged the ideological function of early-modern London’s ceremonial occasions which included coronations, royal entries, Lord Mayors’ Shows (the latter of which celebrated the installation of new civic officers), as well as guild or company pageants and feasts. These were joined by an increasing number of national anniversaries celebrating “English Protestant thankfulness, watchfulness, and commemoration” such as 5 and 17 November, the anniversaries of the Gunpowder Treason and Elizabeth I’s succession (and, similarly, Royal Oak day and the anniversary of the regicide).[[17]](#endnote-18) “Political festivals” such as these, Nicholas Rogers argues, “combined the traditional functions of ceremonialism, the transmission of power through pageantry and benefice, with an explicit didacticism”.[[18]](#endnote-19) These festivals were intended to inspire awe and promote the stability of the political order. According to Kathleen Lynch, ceremonial occasions that involved processions and pageants, such as the royal entry and the annual Lord Mayor’s Show, also worked to reinscribe and negotiate the “symbolic bond of City and monarch”, that “aspired to the highest ideological expression of community”, and celebrated “the authority of the monarch or the Lord Mayor and the merchant elites”.[[19]](#endnote-20) While such ceremonies might “suspend[…] everyday norms”, including potential conflicts between City and crown, Laurence Manley contends that the collaborative aspect of these cultural forms was also “bound to articulate – and perhaps to sharpen – the conflict between different forms of rule, […] different perceptions of time, history, and the place of the city”.[[20]](#endnote-21) Festivals around symbolic anniversaries could prove especially divisive, given that, as David Cressy writes, “history involved disputes, with winners and losers as well as struggles that continued or revived”: by the later seventeenth century, he writes, “it is not surprising to find the calendar operating as an annual mnemonic, occasioning celebration or recrimination”.[[21]](#endnote-22) By 1679–82, memories of the recent past had become highly contested, and the “popular licence and self-assertion” generated by the celebration of certain anniversaries was encouraged and seized upon by an opposition party eager to entrench support for Exclusion in the City.[[22]](#endnote-23)

The anti-papal processions of 1679–81 are the most well-known instance of this co-option of traditional political festivities in the services of Exclusion. Traditionally organised to mark the 5 and 17 November anniversaries, the processions differed in their scale and organisation, as well as their aim to “usurp and supplant, deform and reform (in the sleekest of ways) those modes of cultural production that made manifest the political power and control of the rulers”.[[23]](#endnote-24) Although these processions sought to channel the feelings of the crowd, they were, Cressy states, “on the streets but not of the streets”.[[24]](#endnote-25) By 1680 the procession was being organised and sponsored by members of the Whig Green Ribbon Club, elaborately designed and scripted, including forty full-size effigies, and had reappropriated familiar and authoritative pathways, including royal entry routes through the City and out through Temple Bar in the west, towards Westminster. As Odai Johnson observes, these processions behaved “as if” they were sanctioned civic ceremonies, seizing a cultural form that was traditionally used to “enact command and control of this geo-political space”.[[25]](#endnote-26) They sought to present, instead, a different vision of London authority, where the irrepressible procession’s endpoint communicated what Louis Marin describes as “‘a symbolic victory over those ideas or persons defied by the march’”.[[26]](#endnote-27) In 1679–80, these processions terminated in “a vast *Bonfire*” at Temple Bar, where the pope’s effigy was made to bow to a statue of Elizabeth I who held “a Golden Shield, with this Motto Inscribed, THE PROTESTANT RELIGION, MAGNA CHARTA”. The pope was then “decently *Toppled* from all his Grandeur into the *Impartial Flames*”.[[27]](#endnote-28) These acts of ritual violence were effective in cultivating a City identity defined around opposition to arbitrary rule and the Exclusionists as the true defenders of English liberty.

Over the course of the three years, therefore, it became increasingly clear that these processions were not intended to reaffirm the “symbolic bond” between the City and crown “so quintessentially celebrated by civic ritual”, but to challenge it by promoting the Exclusionist interests of the City and communicate Whig ascendancy.[[28]](#endnote-29) As we have seen, this involved re-screening particular polemical memories including the victory of Elizabeth I, which “impl[ied] a deep criticism of the court as falling short of Elizabethan perfection”,[[29]](#endnote-30) but these were accompanied by other memories of the more recent past. Following Oxford, Tory writers and propagandists were emboldened to respond in kind, countering the Exclusionists’ use of historical parallelism by drawing on their own polemical memories. Often with reference to the revelations of Shaftesbury’s alleged plotting at his trial on 24 November 1681, Tory writers bolstered the “familiar parallel between 1681 and 1641 when Charles I […] was coerced under pressure from the London mobs into making concessions to the Long Parliament that sapped his remaining prerogatives”.[[30]](#endnote-31) Behn, in *The Roundheads*, joined her Tory colleagues in identifying the present threats to the King’s prerogative and the people’s liberty not as emanating from a foreign papal power but from the “good old cause” of revolution pursued in the 1640s and 50s, which gives her play its subtitle. Tory street spectacle aimed to restore such political festivity to its traditional function of cementing bonds between the City and Court. On the 1680 anniversary of Charles II’s accession day, Tory apprentices planned to process effigies of historic parliamentarians through the streets towards a bonfire, reviving celebrations that accompanied the Restoration such as burning the Rump.[[31]](#endnote-32) The spectacle, which was designed to culminate in the destruction of nonconformist meeting houses, was prevented by the Whig authorities. More successfully, and within a couple of months of *The Roundheads*’ first performance, Westminster scholars burnt a “*Jack Presbyter*” resembling a “noted *Protestant* Preacher” holding the Solemn League and Covenant, a seditious pamphlet, and a sign declaring “*Ignoramus*” (the famous verdict of “we do not know” pronounced by an empanelled jury at Shaftsbury’s trial).[[32]](#endnote-33) The Tory-leaning culture of the theatre, however, enabled *The Roundheads* to restore such spectacle to traditional ends, and in a way that did not overtly incite violent action. By collapsing the temporal distance between 1660 and 1681, the play encourages audiences to dismiss present-day Whig concerns as just another manifestation of destructive parliamentarian ambition which deserves to be punished, purged, and its defeat celebrated during the play’s final bonfire celebrations.

The first performance of *The Roundheads*, probably in mid-December, followed hot on the heels of Shaftesbury’s release and the Jack Presbyter burnings. Echoing her source, Tatham’s popular Restoration comedy *The Rump* (1660), Behn ends the play with a spectacular and symbolic Rump-roasting bonfire scene. Tatham’s Rump roasting is represented by “*a piece of Wood [...] set forth painted like a pile of Faggots and Fire*”; alongside it an unidentified “boy” is hoisted on a colstaff playing the role of the symbolic Rump (a colstaff was a pole used to display and humiliate cuckolds and others in need of correction).[[33]](#endnote-34) Some members of the Committee of Safety enter by turns bewailing their return to humble origins while the festivities continue, the play fusing symbols of purgation with the punishment of class transgression. The changes Behn makes to Tatham’s scene show her awareness of the growing significance of the visual restaging of polemical memories during Exclusion, and the importance of spectacle. The opening stage directions of the play’s final scene suggest something more visually impressive, drawing on the possibilities for special effects offered by the Dorset Garden Theatre: “*a great Bonfire, with Spits, and Rump rosting, and the Mobile about the Fire, with Pots, Bottles, and Fiddles*” (56). Although no evidence exists for whether this was achieved by a painted scene or an actual conflagration, Dorset Garden had previously staged Nathaniel Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus* (December 1680), which features an impressive burning human sacrifice.[[34]](#endnote-35) Theoretically, a sizeable fire could be produced by using coal, wood, or tow contained in a brazier, and sprinkled with rosin or by blowing powdered rosin through a tube and over the fire, and such spectacle would have been desirable to compete with all the ceremonial innovations the open-air pope-burnings could muster.[[35]](#endnote-36)

Behn’s bonfire might be more spectacular than Tatham’s, but it also becomes a more threatening presence, especially when the most derided “roundhead” characters, Hewson, Wariston, and Ananias, are exposed – having attempted assimilation through adopting humiliating festival disguises that advertise their hypocrisy and cowardice – and then hoisted on colstaffs like so many previous anti-papal effigies. The Scottish Lord Wariston – former chair of the dissolved Committee – is the first to enter “*drest like a Pedlar*” advertising a “guedly Ballad” celebrating General Monck’s march from Scotland to London and his restoration of a free parliament (56). The apprentices, keen to celebrate Monck’s arrival, urge Wariston to perform the ballad (as pedlars did in order to sell their wares), which results in Wariston’s assimilation through participation in the festivities, signalling his own pliability in the process. In a further humiliation, his identity is announced and he and Ananias, the lascivious Presbyterian lay elder, are bound to colstaffs by the apprentices, before the regicide John Hewson enters “*drest like a Country-Fellow*” for “merry making” – as a Morris dancer. Morris dancing and other “Sunday sports” had been actively encouraged by the Stuart kings but were protested against and banned by puritans in 1644, which makes Hewson’s adoption of the disguise particularly effective in showcasing his hypocrisy (Hewson was well known as a puritan).[[36]](#endnote-37) He is urged to dance, presumably leaping and capering in the sexually suggestive manner that was traditional, before the apprentices hoist him up with his comrades. Whereas the play’s cavaliers are shown to stay loyal and faithful to their cause, even in the face of imprisonment, when threatened with punishment the roundheads disguise themselves as promoters of their enemies’ values and thereby reveal the fragility of their convictions. In the face of spontaneous and seemingly irresistible merry making, generated by the people rather than by the cynical machinations of the Committee of Safety, the three roundheads are left unable to control political spectacle for their own purposes. Unable to mount any kind of resistance, verbal or otherwise, they attempt to dissimulate, but such cowardly cynicism is rejected in a celebration of Tory honesty.

In addition to staging a Tory-leaning rival spectacle, where historic characters displaying Whig credentials are satirised and punished, however, the ending of *The Roundheads* also plays up the contrast between festivities which are directed from above (such as the “pious, useful Lyes” (27) peddled by the Committee of Safety) and the instinctual, spontaneous protests and subsequent celebrations taken up by the apprentices. In the final Act, the Captain of the Apprentices asks Loveless, a cavalier whom he addresses as “noble Champion” (54), for “leave to rost the Rump”, to which Loveless agrees and provides money, but the organisation of the festivities is very clearly instigated by ordinary characters. Tatham’s *Rump* similarly harnesses what Susan Owen calls “the radical potential of the City’s anger” to bring about change,[[37]](#endnote-38) but its end focuses more on the return of the roundheads to their supposed origins. By contrast, against a background where the Whigs were focusing on gaining “mass support” from all social classes,[[38]](#endnote-39) *The* *Roundheads* makes characters of the lower sort agents of justice, rather than the butts of the joke. The Captain of the Apprentices, whose men arrest the roundhead characters, is given the final couplet, advising his audience, on and off stage, to pray for those in authority, yoking law and justice with kingly authority and lawful succession:

Then let’s all home, and to the Powers Divine,   
Pray for the King, and all the Sacred Line. (56)

While dramatizing the deaths of these roundheads could have rivalled the spectacle of the pope burnings, burning “live” Protestants – even through dramatization – would only have encouraged the yoking of popery with the Tory cause. Instead, the play shows the royalist/Tory characters behaving with propriety and acting within the law, at a time when the Whigs had received criticism for their reported “misgovernment of the City” and its judicial system, as well as their encouragement of public disorder during pope-burning festivities and other ad hoc celebrations.[[39]](#endnote-40) Unlike the anti-papal processions where “Justice” was meted out by “decently tumbl[ing]” the pope “from all his Grandeur into the Impartial Flames”, without reference to laws or trials, Hewson, Wariston, and Ananias are sent instead “to Prison” (56), ready to be judged by the very people they sought to delude.[[40]](#endnote-41) In contrast with Whig street politics, which find their origins in cynical practices of the corrupt Committee of Safety, the celebrations at the end of *The Roundheads* are presented as a spontaneous outpouring of “natural” feeling, with “all hands” (55) working to make a fire and thereby restore law and justice. The Whigs were intensely proud of their innovative effigies and pageants, undoubtedly intended as a powerful display of consensus: as Joseph Monteyne observes, citing Manley, it was “the ‘inventedness’ of city pageants […] that most differentiated civic from royal ritual”.[[41]](#endnote-42) Although Behn cannot avoid the invention of spectacular politics in her position as a playwright (clearly the actors have not spontaneously produced this play) the ordinary characters’ embracing of popular festivity in opposition to the Committee’s corrupt regime is persuasively presented as part of a natural restoration of order, and the return of stability between City and monarch.

**“Sham-Thanksgivings”: *The City-Heiress* (1682)**

Another area of political festivity that saw a widespread increase and reappropriation by the Exclusionists in this period was traditional London public feasting, which could be “institutional” and accompany specific occasions by guilds or the corporation, or more occasional and ad hoc. As with traditional ceremonial processions, these occasions usually sought, as Newton Key writes, to “replicat[e] social and political hierarchies (with loyal healths drunk, and seating and dishes laid out according to status), while at the same time emphasizing cohesion and unity”.[[42]](#endnote-43) Hospitality and entertainments were channelled towards reinforcing the social order, which included celebrations of the monarch and illustrious patrons – who might be in attendance –, and served to bolster the relationship between the monarch and the City. However, by the early 1680s feasting had become “more divisive and the subject of comment and speculation”.[[43]](#endnote-44) In response to the Duke of York’s return from Scotland in March 1682, where he had resided since October 1679, and the court’s assault on the London Corporation’s charter, the Whigs sought support for their cause through association and conviviality, organising feasts where principal citizens and ordinary ward voters were lavishly treated to food and drink provided by opposition lords such as the Duke of Monmouth and the Earls of Shaftesbury and Essex, and by members of parliament, sheriffs, and aldermen.[[44]](#endnote-45) By late April (just over two weeks before *The City-Heiress* was first performed), politicised feasting had become highly controversial. When York, newly arrived from Scotland, was invited on 20 April 1682 to attend the annual banquet of the Honourable Artillery Company (of which he was captain general), opposition aldermen organised a rival feast honouring Monmouth for the next day in Haberdashers’ and Goldsmiths’ Halls (such was the demand). Tickets cost a guinea and stated that the feast was “*in testimony of Thankfulnesse*” for the nation’s preservation from the Popish Plot, and for “*preserving and improving mutual Love and Charity among such which are sensible thereof*”.[[45]](#endnote-46) Contemporary commentators observed the spatial politics, remembering that during the 1640s and 50s the Sequestration Committee had used Goldsmiths’ Hall as a base to order the confiscation of royalist estates.[[46]](#endnote-47) The direct affront to his heir through the appropriation of legitimate civic ceremony led Charles to prohibit the rival feast.[[47]](#endnote-48)

The Tory press made much of the supposed humiliation of the feast organisers. Otway’s Prologue, for instance, takes pleasure in the opposition’s disappointment, suggesting that the Whig-leaning attendees had been cheated of “*zealous Guinny*” by those at “*Sequestrators Hall*” (ll. 36, 44), in a humorous overturning of the building’s historic use. In reality, the opposition party merely moved the feast to Lord Colchester’s residence and maintained all the features of an official civic engagement. Opposition lords, civic leaders, and some 500 citizens attended; there was a procession of armed apprentices including an elaborate pope-burning; and attendees took oaths to defend the Protestant religion. The event was designed to cement ties between the prominent members of the opposition and display those ties to the apprentices and citizens in attendance. Several young men formally addressed Monmouth, who adopted the role of royal guest and patron.[[48]](#endnote-49) This counter-feast combined the political spectacle of a pope-burning, increasing the impact of the event through armed presence on the streets, with a display of hospitality and munificence which brought together – and appeared to value – opposition voices from all social levels. Although the scale of this feast was not to be repeated after the King reminded the Mayor to prohibit such gatherings, Monmouth and other prominent lords and civic leaders persisted in feasting and treating, though on a smaller scale, in preparation for the London Corporation elections in June.[[49]](#endnote-50)

Given the prevalence and significance of these treats, which the Tories tried their best to disrupt, it is perhaps unsurprising that *The City-Heiress* should target partisan feasting through the figure of Sir Timothy Treat-all, the Whig alderman who provides the play with its subtitle and was played by the leading comic actor, James Nokes. In her dedicatory epistle to Lord Arundel – who, as we will see, was elected as a steward of the Honourable Artillery Company at the Duke’s feast of 20 April –, Behn reported that her play had been “well receiv’d in the Town”, which she chose to interpret as a sign that “Whigism” had by then become “a Jest”: she expressed confidence that as long as Arundel was a patron for the “Royal Cause”, such “seditious Fools and Knaves” as Sir Timothy “will become the business and sport of Comedy”. To aid this endeavour, she writes that the play’s “plain Demonstration” will assist the project of enlightening the people who have “blindly worshipt” the Whig cause and uncritically participated in their political festivities (ll. 63–73). The play certainly seeks to expose Whig feasting for what the Tories believed it to be: a cynical attempt to – as Sir Timothy’s nephew says – flatter and “debauch[…] the Kings Liege-people into Commonwealths-men” (I.1.122). Aside from implying that Whig appetite for feasting was declining, as Sir Timothy bewails the lack of lords and illustrious personages attending the feast he organises in III.1, the play also seeks to highlight the hypocrisy of a party consisting of many puritan nonconformists encouraging regular and excessive indulgence: Wilding accuses his uncle of “cram[ming]”, “gormandizing”, and “guttl[ing]” his “pious City-Gluttons”, even resorting to “pimp[ing]” to gain a “Convert” (I.1.117–23). Engaging in very “un-puritan” behaviour was one thing, but the play also draws attention to the strangeness of organising festivities that by their nature revolve around largesse and celebratory health-drinking when the organiser does not partake on religious grounds. Like the former Whig sheriff Slingsby Bethel, who was repeatedly mocked for his abhorrence of feasting practices while being instrumental in their organisation, Sir Timothy is repeatedly urged to join the festivities but responds: “They know I never sup” (III.1.100) and “I love no Healths” (III.1.205–6). Such moments highlight the Whig appropriation of traditional feasting as cynical and self-serving. Unlike the roistering Tories who join the feast and enthusiastically drink healths to the royal family – a practice that “featured prominently in Royalist behaviour” as a “political gesture”[[50]](#endnote-51) – Sir Timothy’s distaste for rituals integral to political feasting exposes the instrumental function of these celebrations for his party. The Tories may over-indulge, but the play reads this as a sign of loyalty: desire channelled towards an appropriate end. When Whigs indulge, they do so in subversion of their own principles and only to serve their own selfish ends.

The play therefore presents the Tory visitors – the appropriately named Sir Anthony Meriwill and his nephew Sir Charles – restoring the feast to its traditional function, to celebrate the monarch and the royal family. It is significant that Behn chose to claim Henry Howard, Lord Arundel (later seventh duke of Norfolk), as the patron and protector of a play which stages at its mid-point a spectacular feast with singing and dancing. Arundel’s recent appointment as a steward of the Honourable Artillery Company gave him responsibility for organising the company’s annual feasts, which included inviting attendees to declare support for the company’s Captain General, the Duke of York, through health drinking and (for new members) kissing the Duke’s hand.[[51]](#endnote-52) His election, alongside that of other noble peers, was intended to communicate renewed support for the succession and confirm the crown’s control of military resources which in previous years the opposition had tried to disrupt.[[52]](#endnote-53) Arundel’s new status as a director of state-approved festivities makes him an apt dedicatee, and Sir Timothy’s feast in III.1 – counter to his intentions – in many ways comes to resemble the Artillery Company feast: healths are drunk to the Duke of York and a loyal Scottish song is sung (“Ah, Jenny, gen”), which recalls Thomas D’Urfey’s “A Scotch S[o]ng: Sung at the Artillery Feast”.[[53]](#endnote-54) The scene is established by Tory characters entering “*dancing*”, followed by a pastoral song of victory in love by Sir Anthony, thereby ensuring that the Tory characters dominate the space as well as the mood. Sir Charles’s new-found confidence in wooing, urged on by his uncle and bolstered by drinking, emboldens him to mock Sir Timothy and force him to submit to health drinking. Behn’s stage directions show Sir Charles and his uncle repeatedly “*Pulling Sir* Timothy *to kneel*” (III.1.246SD): “*Each […]* *force Sir* Timothy *on his knees*” (261SD), “*They go to force his mouth open to drink*” (263SD). He drinks a health to the king, followed by one to York, declaring respectively, “this is very Arbitrary” (264–5) and “This is meer [i.e. downright] Tyranny” (268). Overwhelmed by Tory festivity, Sir Timothy’s rebelliousness and puritan rigidity are subsumed by loyal celebrations. Given that the audience has seen Sir Timothy comment on his party’s deliberate corruption of the law to serve their own interests – “the Tory Rascals, we always hang. […] I come off hand-smooth with *Ignoramus*” (201–2) – his objections echoing Whig accusations about restrictions to the people’s liberty under a popish successor are ultimately trivialised. The Tories’ control of his feast communicates their natural dominance of festivity and sociability, and, as such feasts were often treated as gauges of public opinion, the ease with which they could restore the City’s loyalty.

On the one hand, then, *The City-Heiress*’s treatment of festivity seems firmly Tory, highlighting the Whigs’ cynical use of festivities to serve their own political and social aspirations. In the context of a play where Behn displays ambivalence towards certain aspects of Toryism, however, Sir Timothy’s treatment warrants further examination. *The City-Heiress* depicts various instances where the Tory characters are involved in what Hero Chalmers calls “illegitimate pillage” when describing the behaviour of Sir Timothy’s nephew, Wilding.[[54]](#endnote-55) Tory characters repeatedly force themselves into the inner chambers of the Whig City, often uninvited, Wilding leading a burglary to restore the papers ensuring his inheritance in the possession of his uncle (binding and gagging Sir Timothy and his pregnant mistress in the process). Less comical in tone is Sir Charles’s rough wooing – established in the play as typical manly (Tory) behaviour – of a rich City widow. Lady Galliard, who is in love with Wilding and has spent the night with him, is placed in an impossible situation by Sir Charles, asked to “choose” whether to be raped (with no witnesses to prove her non-consent) or to agree to marry him. While Sir Charles is fumbling to undo his breeches, Lady Galliard chooses the second option, hoping to deny her promise later, but is caught out by Sir Anthony who has been secretly watching. In a show of tyranny that rivals anything advocated by Sir Timothy, Sir Charles removes his betrothed’s authority over her servants, prevents her appeal to the City Mayor for justice, and imagines that he will sway a jury of her female neighbours gathered to judge him as a rapist, therefore resulting in what he humorously calls an “*ignoramus*” verdict. She ends the play sadly resigning herself to the marriage, declaring “unwearied Love at last has vanquisht me” (V.5.237). The play therefore suggests that both sides are capable of illegitimate force and the corruption of judicial processes, each leading to tyranny, political festivity providing just one method through which this could be accomplished.

This essay has sought to demonstrate the ways in which *The Roundheads* and *The City-Heiress* engaged in the contest over political spectacle and festivity which had reached a crisis point by the time of the 1681–2 theatrical season. Joining a variety of Tory counter spectacles, such as rival bonfires, processions, and feasts, Behn sought to contest or even supplant Whig-sponsored festivities in their use of spectacle and symbolism, reclaiming these traditional means of negotiating and cementing the relationship between City and monarch in a way that promoted Tory values. In the process, however, her plays negotiate interesting debates surrounding the use but also the abuse of political festivity when it is used cynically or in the services of tyranny. In *The Roundheads* the differences between roundhead/Whig political manipulation and royalist/Tory festivity are relatively clear cut, and no doubt reflect the close proximity of the play’s first performance to the 1681 pope-burning procession: the play represents the royalist celebrations accompanying the Restoration as generated by the people and facilitated by the generosity of the more noble characters, a reciprocity that does not characterise the roundhead leaders’ cynical and arbitrary approach to keeping their citizens obedient. *The City-Heiress*, however, adopts a more critical response to Tory coercive practices. At a time when the court was threatening to remove the London Corporation’s charter, *The City-Heiress* suggests ways in which Tory bombast could easily slip into absolutist force, an anxiety that had provided the catalyst for much Whig political campaigning. Through employing a dialectical form that introduces more nuance than contemporary political festivals, both plays encourage audiences of all political persuasions to approach street politics more critically – with a mind to the ways in which they might be abused by both sides – but also provide further ways to scrutinise extreme versions of Toryism.

1. \*I would like to thank Margarete Rubik and Rebecca Yearling for their helpful comments on this essay.

   Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 133; Anita Pacheco, “Reading Toryism in Behn’s Cit-Cuckolding Comedies,” *The Review of English Studies* 55, no. 222 (2004): 697. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Michael Cordner makes this argument briefly in “Sleeping with the Enemy: Aphra Behn’s *The Roundheads* and the Political Comedy of Adultery,” in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800*, ed. Cordner and Peter Holland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 47. See also Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 43; Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 130–55. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Gary S. De Krey, *London and the Restoration, 1659–1689* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. William van Lennep, ed., *The London Stage, Part 1: 1660–1700* suggests a premiere for *The Roundheads* of December 1681 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 303. *The City-Heiress* likely premiered on either 13 or 15 May 1682: Rachel Adcock, ed., “The City-Heiress,” in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn, Vol. IV, The Plays, 1682–1696*, ed. Claire Bowditch, Mel Evans, Elaine Hobby, and Gillian Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Pacheco, “Reading Toryism,” 690. See also Robert Markley, “‘Be impudent, be saucy, forward, bold, touzing, and leud’: The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn’s Tory Comedies,” in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 114–40. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Al Coppola, “Retraining the Virtuoso’s Gaze: Behn’s *Emperor of the Moon*, the Royal Society, and the Spectacles of Science and Politics”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41 (2008): 482. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Behn, *The Second Part of the Rover* (London: For Jacob Tonson, 1681), A2. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Behn, *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause* (London: For D. Brown, T. Benskin, and H. Rhodes, 1682), A3v. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses following the quotation. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Behn, *The City-Heiress*, ed. Rachel Adcock, 42, l. 40. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses following the quotation. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Paula R. Backsheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Kathleen Lynch, “‘We Protestants in Masquerade’: Burning the Pope in London,” *The London Journal* 47, no. 1 (2022): 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Anon., *The Solemn Mock Procession […] through ye City of London, November ye 17th 1679* (London: for Jonathan Wilkins, 1680). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. De Krey, *London*, 252–4. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Lynch, “‘We Protestants’”, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. On preventing opposition feasting, see De Krey, *London*, 252. On banning the 17 November pope burnings, see Odai Johnson, *Rehearsing the Revolution: Radical Performance, Radical Politics in the English Restoration* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 80–2; Joseph Monteyne, *The Printed Image in Early Modern London: Urban Space, Visual Representation, and Social Exchange* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 156. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. For Behn’s Tory ambivalence, see Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650–1689* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 163–76; Pacheco, “Reading Toryism”; Markley, “‘Be Impudent’”. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), xii. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 358. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Lynch, “‘We Protestants,’” 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 214, 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Cressy, *Bonfires*, xiii. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. Rogers, *Whigs*, 361. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Lynch, “‘We Protestants,’” 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Cressy, *Bonfires*, 180. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. Johnson, *Rehearsing the Revolution*, 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Louis Marin, “Notes on a Semiotic Approach to *Parade*, *Cortege*, and *Procession*,” in *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, ed. Alessandro Falassi (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 224. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Anon., *Solemn Mock Procession* (1680); Anon., *Londons Defiance to Rome* (London: s.n., 1679), 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. Lynch, “‘We Protestants,’” 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 183. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Phillip Harth, *Pen for a Party: Dryden’s Tory Propaganda in its Contexts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 145; De Krey, *London*, 244. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. Harris, *Restoration*, 265. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. Anon., *A Dialogue upon the Burning of the Pope and Presbyter* (London: For Richard Janeway, 1682), 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. John Tatham, *The Rump, or, The Mirrour of the Late Times* (London: For R. Bloome, 1660), 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. Nathaniel Lee, *Lucius Junius Brutus* (London: For Richard Tonson and Jacob Tonson, 1680), 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. Philip Butterworth, *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in Early English and Scottish Theatre* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1998), 84–6. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. Bernard Capp, *England’s Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7–8. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. Owen, *Drama*, 188. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. Harris, *London Crowds*, 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. De Krey, *London*, 237. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. Anon., *Solemn Mock Procession* (1680). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. Monteyne, *Printed Image*, 166, citing Manley, *Literature*, 252, 268. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. Newton E. Key, “‘High feeding and smart Drinking’: Associating Hedge-Lane Lords in Exclusion Crisis London,” in *Fear, Exclusion and Revolution: Roger Morrice and Britain in the 1680s*, ed. Jason McElligott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 163. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Key, “‘High feeding,’” 163. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. De Krey, *London*, 250–4; Key, “‘High feeding,’” 161–73. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. *Loyal Protestant* (20 April 1682). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. Anon., *The* *Charge Given by Sr William Smith* (London: by Tho. Hodgkin, 1682), 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. De Krey, *London*, 252–3. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
48. Key, “‘High feeding,’” 168–9. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
49. Ibid., 170. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
50. Capp, *England’s Culture Wars*, 163. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
51. Key, “‘High feeding,’” 167. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. De Krey, *London*, 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. Thomas D’Urfey, *A New Collection of Songs and Poems* (London: For Joseph Hindmarsh, 1683), 74–8. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. Chalmers, *Royalist Women*, 170.

    **Notes on contributor**

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