

A Manifesto for a Woman Writer: *Letters Written* as Varronian Satire

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Introduction

[Since my first work in eighteenth-century women's writing I have always used the forename Chris to hide the fact that I was a mere man meddling in the business of a woman. Therefore, I could have been no more delighted when Valerie Rumbold resolved my name on my name badge to Christine at my first British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies annual conference at St John's College, Oxford, which led my senior female colleagues loudly to make room for Christine on the back row of all the women's writing panels that I attended. But writing as a man I remain acutely aware that I am meddling in the business of a woman, and the fact that I am the only man, the token male \(I am also the token gay male and the token disabled academic\) in the first ever collection on the work of Delarivier Manley. For this reason, I am also acutely aware that my speculative paper, if taken seriously, rewrites the history of Manley in a way that suggests that earlier academics have missed an important point about her first publication, *Letters Written by Mrs Manley* \(1696\) – that it was an early exercise in Varronian satire, tackling two targets, Thomas Tollemache, the Whig war hero, and King William III in the year after the death of his wife, Mary II, to whom he owed his claim to the English throne. All I can do is take refuge behind Catherine Ingrassia's wise words that '\[n\]arratives... \[about women writers\] change as each successive generation of scholars and](#)

students refines, revises [and]... transforms the understanding of the literary period.’¹ I cannot apologise for being a male writer, but I can apologise for the format of the piece that follows, which resembles more the notes to a scholarly edition of the letters than an academic paper. The excuse for this is that as the reading is so dramatically at odds with the work on *Letters Written* by Ruth Herman and Rachel Carnell in the *Collected Works of Delarivier Manley* that to make any sense at all it needs a wholly new set of scholarly machinery. In offering the reading, I am pleased to note that Rachel Carnell, who is an excellent academic as well as a personal friend, has read this paper and believes that this is a strong reading.

_____ The first three of Delarivier Manley’s known published works—*Letters Written by Mrs. Manley*, *The Lost Lover* and *The Royal Mischief*, all of 1696—make strange and uncomfortable bed-fellows. Ruth Herman² and Rachel Carnell³ both argue that the year before their publication Manley was trying out writing in different styles (epistolary fiction and theatrical comedy in prose, and theatrical tragedy in verse) as ~~ways-a way~~ to demonstrate her talent. Herman and Carnell concur that each was an experiment in technique, which she was practicing while secluded in the West Country, the apparent destination of the journey ~~which-that~~the *Letters Written* recounts. But, as this essay will argue, the Preface to *Letters Written* suggests that there was a political strategy that worked across all three of Manley’s 1696 publications, though this essay will only give details for *Letters Written*. I believe that all three have a political subtext since they were advertised together⁴

¹ Catherine Ingrassia, “Introduction,” *Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

² Ruth Herman, *The Business of a Woman*, (New Haven: Delaware University Press, 2003).

³ Rachel Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008).

⁴ *Post Boy* (1695) (London, England), June 23, 1696—June 25, 1696; Issue 177.

four months after *Letters Written* was first published and after both runs of the plays.⁵ Linking them further was Richard Bentley as publisher.⁶ Together, these coincidences seem to suggest the three texts were a carefully planned strategy rather than singular experiments in style, albeit a strategy ~~which that~~ failed to lead immediately to fame and fortune. Nevertheless, the existence of a combined political strategy ~~gives a more convincing account of~~ could explain Manley's prominent position in *The Female Wits* of October 1696 (pub. 1704) and its attack on her *Royal Mischief* of May 1696. ~~This would be a more convincing explanation than a~~ the play being a theatrical stunt between rival companies, as argued by Lucyle Hook.⁷

Added to this, the eventual success of her writing career as a political satirist suggests that Delarivier Manley might well have had some sort of political intention in her earliest publications. If we agree with Alan Downie and Rachel Carnell that she was not the author of *The Secret History of Queen Zarah* (1705),⁸ Manley's turn to political writing looks abrupt. Furthermore, its appearance as fully formed Varronian Satire in the hugely successful *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, of both Sexes, From The New Atalantis* (1709) is unaccountable. Where are the apprentice works? The power of that book, for which she was first arrested, then fêted, then given applause for bringing about the Tory election victory of 1710, suggests a mature political writer. However, if Manley were, as Herman and Carnell argue, exploring her style of writing at the beginning of her career, it would not seem out of the question to argue that at least

⁵ An advertisement for *Letters Written by Mrs Manley* appears in the *Post Man and the Historical Account* (London, England), February 20, 1696—February 22, 1696; Issue 123.

⁶ Bentley published *Letters Written* alone, and styled himself "R.B." in the earlier advert. Bentley was joined by F. Sanders and J. Knapton for the plays. Carnell notes that *Letters Written* was listed in *The Term Catalogues* as published by R. Butts, but argues that this is probably incorrect. Carnell, *Political Biography*, 105.

⁷ Lucyle Hook, Introduction to Anon., *The Female Wits*, (1704), The Augustan Reprint Society, (William Andrews Clark Memorial Library/UCLA: Los Angeles, 1967)

⁸ J.A. Downie, 'What if Delarivier Manley Did Not Write *The Secret History of Queen Zarah*?' in *The Library*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2004), 247-264.

one of the three publications bore some resemblance to those on which her reputation is based—and the style Manley was practicing in *Letters Written*, this essay will argue, is a disguised Varronian Satiresatire. As such, my argument might be read as an addition to Aaron Santesso's magisterial account of Manley's use of Varronian satire in the *New Atalantis*.⁹ What is important about the discovery of this style in her early works is, as Carnell points out to us, that Manley it was the style in which as an "author [Manley]" signals her Tory values by claiming in her preface to the second volume [of *The New Atalantis*] that her work is Varronian satire, understood in its day as a 'natural Tory vehicle.'¹⁰

The definition of Varronian Satire-satire had recently been explored by John Dryden in the dedication to his 1693 translation of Juvenal and Persius, where he tells of the mix of verse and prose that characterized the work of both Varro and Maenippus. However, as he goes on:

We have nothing remaining of those *Varronian* Satires, excepting some inconsiderable Fragments; and those for the most part are much corrupted. The Titles of many of them are indeed preserv'd, and they are generally double: From whence, at least, we may understand, how many various Subjects were treated by that Author. *Tully*, in his *Academicks*, introduced *Varro* himself giving us some light concerning the Scope and Design of these Works. Wherein, after he had shown his Reasons why he did not *ex professo* write of Philosophy, he adds what follows. Notwithstanding, says he, that those Pieces of mine, wherein I have imitated *Menippus*, though I have not Translated him, are sprinkled with mirth, and gayety: yet many things are there inserted which are drawn from the very intrails of Philosophy, and

⁹ Aaron Santesso, "The New Atalantis and Varronian Satire," *Philological Quarterly* 79:2 (2000), 177-204.

¹⁰ Rachel Carnell, *Slipping from Secret History to Novel* (forthcoming fall 2015 Eighteenth-Century Fiction).

many things severely argu'd: which I have mingled with Pleasantries on purpose, that they may more easily do down with the Common sort of Unlearn'd Readers.¹¹

From Dryden's definition, we can expect what we find: that Manley includes verses amid her prose and that there will be double meanings. From Tully's, that her texts will be funny, but will mask serious arguments dressed up for easier consumption. But Tully goes on (in Dryden's translation): "Thus it appears, that *Varro* was one of those Writers [who was] ..., studious of laughter; and that learned as he was, his business was more to divert his Reader, than to teach him."¹² It is hard to believe that Manley did not know Dryden's account of *Varro*, particularly since she was one of the Nine Muses who wrote verses on his death.¹³ Furthermore, when she proposes to give up writing serious political satire in the semi auto-biographical *Rivella*, she uses an echo of the word "business" (referring to writing) from this second quote in the lesson she claims to have learned, voiced through John Tidcomb:¹⁴ "that Politicks is not the Business of a Woman, especially of one that can so well delight and entertain her Readers with more gentle and pleasing Theams...."¹⁵

Manley's political allegiance in her first three publications has been the subject of some debate, which is summed up by Rachel Carnell in her excellent *Political Biography of Delarivier Manley*.¹⁶ The man who introduced her to Sir Thomas Skipwith, who produced her first play, *The Lost Lover*, may have been the Whig Duke of Devonshire.¹⁷ Skipwith himself, though described as being little more than an "engaging roué," was MP briefly for Malmsbury¹⁸ and was recorded as

¹¹ John Dryden, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis. Translated into English Verse. &c.* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1693), xxvii.

¹² Dryden, *Juvenalis*, xxvii-xxviii.

¹³ *The Nine Muses, or Poems written by Nine several ladies Upon the Death of the late Famous John Dryden, Esq.*, (London: Richard Bassett, 1700).

¹⁴ Named Sir Charles Lovemore, but noted to be Tidcomb in the key attached to the second edition of *Rivella*.

¹⁵ Manley, *Rivella*, 117.

¹⁶ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 3-93.

¹⁷ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 84.

¹⁸ A small town in Wiltshire on the route of the journey described in *Letters Writen*.

being of the Court Party (a Whig).¹⁹ The politics of Thomas Betterton, who produced her *Royal Mischief* at the breakaway Lincoln's Inn Theatre Company, are not discernible; however, Betterton maintained a close relationship with Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset, who as Lord Chamberlain ensured him the patent for the new ~~theatre~~-theater company, and Sackville was a staunch Whig and founder of the Kit Kat club.²⁰ Likewise, John Tidcomb, the possible addressee of *Letters Writen* and narrative voice of *Rivella*, was a Whig and a member of the Kit Kat club.²¹

Albeit surrounded by so many helpful Whigs, Manley maintained in *Rivella* that she was “a perfect Bigot from a long untainted Descent of Loyal Ancestors,” that is she was a Tory. Carnell nuances the claim, arguing that we should “probably view this ‘autobiographical’ detail, one that scholars have hitherto taken as historical fact, as instead an instance of Manley’s sophisticated political manoeuvring at a time of dynastic transition.”²² While I agree with Carnell that Manley is carefully repositioning herself, I would suggest that she did it as a known Tory author at the time when the Whigs were likely to remain in power for a long time. In this same scene, her use of the words of Tully’s definition of Varronian satire reminds us of the “doubleness” of the style, and appears to indicate to readers that Manley’s future productions will be more of the same political scandals. Thus, I would argue that we need not believe that Manley ever wrote in favor of Whig politics, even in her early works, though they were welcomed by Whig sponsors and feature Whig narrators.

It might, of course, be argued that Manley ran with the hare and the hounds, tailoring her texts to fit with the expectations of all members of her potential audience, much as Ellen T. Harris

¹⁹ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/skipwith-sir-thomas-1652-1710>

²⁰ A Whig literary club, which met at the Trumpet Tavern, Serle’s Place, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London and Water Oakley, Bray, Berkshire.

²¹ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 13.

²² Carnell, *Political Biography*, 15.

argues for Handel's Academy Operas of the 1720s.²³ In this way, the plot of *Floridante* (1721) concerns a murdered king and a usurping tyrant, which reflected the Jacobite cause, while the king's daughter marrying a foreign prince and returning just rule to the country reflected William and Mary and the Whigs. The power of Harris's argument lies in her assertion that

the habit of London audiences to read political messages into stage productions meant that there did not need to be an allegory in which individual characters represented specific living persons for a libretto to have political resonance: it sufficed for the libretto to contain situations analogous to current political events.²⁴

However, despite the layering of messages, it would seem odd to argue that Handel, a German composer appointed by George I, might be a Jacobite. But then it might seem just as odd to read Manley, who wrote so vehemently against the Whigs in 1709, to be anything other than a Tory.

~~Remembering the doubleness of Varronian satire allows for~~ This is not to say that Whig readers could find nothing finding things for themselves in her texts, but that would be to forget the doubleness expected of Varronian satire, and as well as the fun of disguising a Tory message in texts that which mocked their Whig sponsors. If this were Manley's strategy—and I shall argue that it was—then the discovery that Sir Thomas Skipwith, the Duke of Devonshire, Thomas Betterton, the Earl of Dorset and John Tidcomb had all been made fools of might just account for the hiatus in Manley's writing career²⁵ between 1696 and *Almyna*, which was accompanied by her second epistolary work, *The Unknown Lady's Pacquet of Letters*, in 1707.

The key to the conundrum of Manley's politics, then, lies in the first three of Manley's known published works and in particular in *Letters Written*, which I will read as an early experiment

²³ Ellen T. Harris, *George Frideric Handel: A Life among Friends* (London: W.W.Norton, 2014)

²⁴ Harris, *Handel*, 17.

²⁵ But for the poem to Dryden.

with Varronian [Satiresatire](#). The *Letters* give a series of cleverly voiced stories of lost love met with rational detachment. On one level this is an important statement about gender expectations. Manley appended to *Letters Writen*, an imitation of Colonel Pack's letters from an abandoned Portuguese nun, full of histrionics and passion, to show how men thought women ought to behave when abandoned. On the contrary, Manley's own stories demonstrate that women are just as capable of rational detachment as men, and just as capable of cool deception and strategy. However, as would be expected of a Varronian satire, there is another level to *Letters Writen*: an attack on the Whig war hero, Thomas Tollemache, who had just been killed in action in Flanders, which is so subtle that it has not been noticed previously. Likewise there is another attack on William III, written the year after the death of his wife Mary II, to whom he owed his claim to the throne of England. As such, *Letters Writen* might be regarded as a manifesto for Manley's later work in attacking John Churchill and other prominent Whig politicians; in *Letters Writen* Manley begins honing her Varronian [Satiresatire](#), the form she would go on to use to such effect in *The New Atalantis*.

Letters Writen—Preface

Carnell has explored in some detail the identity of "J.H." who wrote the preface and claims to have published the letters without Manley's permission. But while there are a number of candidates who share the initials "J.H." — James Hargreaves, John Hughes, or even John Hervey (later Earl of Bristol),²⁶ — the addressee of the letters themselves, if different, remains unidentified. He may be a real person, and the original addressee of the letters. He claims to be a friend of her father, ~~who~~ [and](#) believes "Years of Friendship and Veneration" reason enough that he will not lose "the Relish of

²⁶ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 88.

being esteem'd" by Manley for publishing the letters without her knowledge, ~~albeit that~~ although he "has most Warmly oppose'd [her] Design of Writing Plays; and that of Making them Publick." His reason for publishing the letters, he claims, is ~~because that~~ they contain "more Sublime and Elevated Thoughts" than the plays, although the fact that he is "stealing [her] from the expecting Rivals"²⁷ (that is, Skipwith and Betterton, who were about to produce her plays) suggests he may be trying to make money on the back of her success.

However, he may be a realist device, like the narrator of *Rivella*, Sir Charles Lovemore/Sir John Tidcomb, who has a similar view of her skill in letter writing:

Tho' in her tender Age, she wrote Verses, which considering her Youth were pardonable, since they might be read without Disgust; but there was something surprising in her Letters, so natural, so spirituous, so sprightly, so well turned, that from the first to last I must and will ever maintain, that all her other Productions however successful they have been, come short of her Talent in writing Letters.²⁸

In *Rivella*, a quasi auto-biographical piece, we might expect more than this very brief mention of *Letters Writen*. The more so since the letters published as *Letters Writen* are implied to be the continuation of a correspondence with Lovemore/Tidcomb, who tells us, "I have had a number of them [the letters]; my Servant us'd to wait upon her as if to bring her Books to read, in the Cover of which I had contrived always to send her a Note, which she return'd in the same Manner."²⁹ The narrator of the preface of *Letters Writen* picks up the same lascivious overtone about Manley's letters and continues:

²⁷ Manley, *Letters Writen*, Preface, unpag.

²⁸ Manley, *Rivella*, 17.

²⁹ Manley, *Rivella*, 17-18.

Perhaps you may most justly object, These Letters which I expose, were not proper for the Publick; the Droppings of your Pen, fatigu'd with Thought and Travel. But let them who are of that Opinion imagine what Ease and Leisure cou'd produce, when they find them-selves (as they necessarily must) so well entertain'd by these.³⁰

However, although we might agree with Carnell, that considering “this publication without Manley’s permission, it seems more likely that such a claim was intended as a sales pitch, to suggest that there was something more risqué than there actually was in this brief epistolary collection,”³¹ we might look to something other than the sexual as the risqué content. After all, what the preface introduces are relatively dull letters containing conventional love stories, albeit they are published as “entertainment,” but this might be expected of the doubleness of Varronian satire.

~~Nevertheless~~ Thus, toying with lasciviousness could be argued to hide a political subtext since it leaves the suggestion that the narrator, J.H., is a third contender, with “Sir Thomas Skipwith and Mr Betterton, ... as one that honour'd me with your Friendship before you thought of theirs.” ~~However~~ In this way, Manley’s ~~so careful~~ attempt in the Preface to implant in the minds of her readers that the Whigs Skipwith, Betterton, and J.H., and by implication the Duke of Devonshire and the Earl of Dorset, were involved in sexual liaisons with her, that it seems intended that a contemporary reader might wonder whether “the lady doth protest too much.” her readers would likely question such prolific lasciviousness. In such an instance, politics would appear the real subtext when at the end of the Preface, Manley (if indeed writing as J.H.) asks of herself, “Why [have you] thrown your Chance in the Country, who might have adorn'd the Court, and taught a Nation?”³² An eighteenth-century audience in the “habit of ... read[ing] political messages” might

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³⁰ Manley, *Letters Writen*, unpag.

³¹ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 105.

³² Manley, *Letters Writen*, Preface, unpag.

readily understand the references here to “Country” and “Court” as “Tory” and “Whig” respectively. The same audience might pick up on J.H.’s condemnation of her plays as “Trifles” and *Letters Writen* as “more Sublime and Elevated Thoughts,”³³ and take notice of the serious intent behind the stories of the letters. Likewise, it would not seem out of the question to argue that the “courting” Whigs surrounding Manley (pun intended) are all part of the doubleness ~~which-that~~ defines Tory Varronian satire. It might even be that Manley never spent any time at all in the West Country, and that the journey about which *Letters Writen* sends report was no more than a literary device representing the depth of her feeling for the Country/Tory cause soon after the death of the rightful heir, Mary II, when William III, ruled alone with staunchly Whig ministers.

Letters Writen—Letter 1 Egham, June 24 1694.

Nailing her Tory colors to the mast, Manley introduces a quotation in the first letter from an unpublished poem by George Granville, a Jacobite, which repines on his political exile after the Glorious Revolution, asking for “a Life, remote from guilty Court.”³⁴ She, like Granville, feels exiled to the West Country for her Tory beliefs. However, there is more going on in the doubleness of Varronian ~~Satiresatire~~. The quotation of Granville is given in reply to her addressee’s misquote of John Donne’s *The Will*: “All your Beauty [graces] no more Light [use] will have / Than a Sundial in a Grave.”³⁵ An exchange of verses in the letter is evocative of the end of an impossible love affair,³⁶ about which Manley complains that her “Constancy is not Proof against the Thoughts[.] I

³³ Manley, *Letters Writen*, Preface, unpag.

³⁴ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 3.

³⁵ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 2.

³⁶ Both Manley and her correspondent appear still to be in love, but the decision to be apart is the constant Manley’s.

am going to have no Lover but myself for ever ... [whence] ... The green inviting Grass, (upon which I promise to pass many pleasing solitary Hours) seems not at all entertaining:”³⁷ But once again sex leads to politics, since the Donne poem which sets off this reverie also contains the line “My faith I give to Roman Catholics;”³⁸ which may be understood more or less ironically in either context, but here recollects James II’s religion and appears to imply allegiance to him, or at least perhaps to his daughter, Anne.

At this point the letter takes a sudden u-turn into comedy, but maintains its political edge. [Manley includes a](#) description of a “pert Sir in the Company, that will make himself be taken notice by his Dulness” and “Dinner at Ten-a-Clock, upon a great Leg of Mutton,” which meal is alternated with beef, day-in-day-out, and “from which there’s no Remedy but Fasting.”³⁸ Giving verisimilitude to her writing a letter, Manley claims to have “left the Limb of the Sheep to the Mercy of my Companions” since the “Coachman [would] ... not stay dressing a Dinner for the King, (God bless him) shou’d he travel in his Coach.”³⁹ However, whether this is another venture into realist writing in epistolary fiction, a disguise for what has gone before, or an example of the miscellaneous nature of Varronian satire is not, at this point, finally clear. The coachman’s cheerful “God Bless him” addressed parenthetically to the king does not say which king, William or James, that he will not wait for, but the coach is heading in the direction of Brixham, in Devon, where William had landed in September 1688 to take (usurp?) the throne of England.

Letter 2 Hartley Row, June 22, 1694.

³⁷ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 4.

³⁸ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 5-6.

³⁹ Manley, *Letters Writen*,

The political satire of the book takes its first shot at a living victim in the next letter. Hartley Row is on the road from Bagshot to Basingstoke, and thus the opening line of the second letter. “I am got safe to Hartley Row.”⁴⁰ expresses the satisfaction of having avoided the highwaymen who were synonymous with Bagshot Heath, which would later be made famous by John Gay in *The Beggars’ Opera*.⁴¹ The letter next introduces the Mayoress of Tatness [Totness]⁴² and gives information about the “pert Sir”⁴³ who tells the first tale with something like a Chaucerian desire for self-revelation. Manley is pleased neither by his attention to her, nor his desire to tell his tale. However, by resigning herself to hear what he has to recount, when she says, “I had as good consent, ... With or without my Leave, I see you are resolv’d upon’t,”⁴⁴ she sets up ambiguous expectations of the tale teller. He is at once a humorous realist creation who not only over-dresses for dinner, but asks her of his waistcoat “What the brocade was worth a Yard? How many Ounces of Silver Fringe?”⁴⁵ However, in his tale, he sets himself up as an amoral gallant, chasing a local “Lady Conquest” for a sexual encounter: “her Honour was my Care, and not Marrying my Design.”⁴⁶ However he is thwarted in the attempt when his friend Sly, whom he brings along to help him finesse Lady Conquest, tells him “he must enjoy her or die,” to which the tale teller expostulates to Manley “*Gad Madam, was this not a very odd Turn? I carried him to speak for me; and he comes to make me the Confident of his Designs?*”⁴⁷ The accents of upper-class twit continue, “*Gad! Wou’d you believe, Madam, that Love could make so great an Ass of a Man of my Understanding?*”⁴⁸ drawing the tale

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⁴⁰ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 7.

⁴¹ I include this point because *Letters Writen* was republished as *A Stage-Coach journey to Exeter*, in 1725, and may have been known to Gay when he refers to Walpole’s ministry as Bagshot highwaymen.

⁴² Manley, *Letters Writen*, 11.

⁴³ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 5.

⁴⁴ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 11.

⁴⁵ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 9.

⁴⁶ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 12.

⁴⁷ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 14-15.

⁴⁸ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 15-16.

teller as something of an early-day Bertie Wooster who myopically recounts his story against himself when he hides behind Lady Conquest's bed while she and Sly make love.

If there is a Varronian doubleness underlying the silliness of the tale, it would seem to be Conquest's reasonable explanation for preferring Sly to the tale teller: "You have no Reason, Sir, said she, to complain of me: I could have no Engagements with a Man who never pretended love to me."⁴⁹ While Conquest makes the point that women can be more rational than men, in 1796 the statement might suggest ~~act~~ less as an assertion of feminism than as a reminder to readers that Anne, a woman capable of rationality, rather than William, should rule England after the death of her sister, Mary. After all, William has no designs on England further than a brief encounter for his own gain ("her Honour was my Care, and not Marrying my Design"), while Anne might expect more, being a princess of the blood.

The party-allegiance of the tale-teller, being an upper-class twit from Oxford, which was known as a Jacobite university, at once suggests a satire on Tory buffoonery. However, after his tale, Manley tells us, "He concluded it with telling me his Journey to *London*, and short Stay there, only to accoutre, his Design of visiting a Lady-Sister, marry'd into *Devonshire*."⁵⁰ The suggestion that he must dress well to visit Devonshire suggests that his "Lady-sister" might be married to a member of the family of the Duke of Devonshire, thus turning the story back into a satire on the ~~whigs~~ Whigs.

Letter III Sutton, June 23, 1694.

⁴⁹ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 22.

⁵⁰ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 22.

Continuing the realist account of the tedious journey to the ~~west~~West ~~country~~Country and ~~her~~Manley's abhorrent fellow passengers, the third letter from Sutton dismisses the Mayoress of Totnes, declaring that “now she is acquainted, [she] has all the low, disagreeable Familiarity of People of her Rank.”⁵¹ The mayoress tells the next tale, but Manley declares it “a sorry Love-business about her Second Husband; Stuff so impertinent that I remember nothing of it.”⁵² However, the references to Totnes and Sutton disguise yet another set of political references.

The seat for Totnes was held in the interest of, and sometimes by Edward Seymour, a ~~tory~~Tory anti-Williamite politician, of whom it is recorded

In the new year ... the death of Queen Mary gave some chance of rallying a specifically Tory following. Early in February 1695 he “gave great offence by letting fall an expression that without doors it was made a question whether the Parliament by the death of the Queen was not dissolved”, and queried the propriety of including the word “heirs” in future legislation. He argued that a long-term view was needed because if the King remarried there was a danger that the right of succession would be established in his children, to the exclusion of the more direct claims of Princess Anne; and that even if William had no more children, the word “heirs” still opened the way to his other relations.⁵³

As in the former letter, any ~~whig~~Whig might read the reference to Totnes, and therefore Seymour, the other way around through the reference to the mayoress. In 1692 Seymour applied to the mayor for his friend and supporter Thomas Coulson to be accepted to the vacant seat for Totnes,⁵⁴

⁵¹ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 27.

⁵² Manley, *Letters Writen*, 27.

⁵³ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/seymour-sir-edward-1633-1708>

⁵⁴ In November 1692 Seymour arranged Coulson's election for the vacant seat at Totnes, less than two miles from Seymour's country seat at Berry Pomeroy. He informed the mayor [James Buckley] on the 22nd that Coulson was “a considerable merchant of this city who is qualified with very good abilities and integrity: integrity” whom he was certain would “not only prove a good patriot to his country, but a benefactor to your town”. Seymour's brother Henry Portman, the other Member for Totnes, also commended him as being

Seymour took the seat back after the passing of the triennial act between 1695-1698, whence he returned it to his friend. But Manley's reference to Totnes was a reminder that at the time he was soliciting Whig support for his Tory manoeuvres. As D.W. Hayton tells us:

Seymour's identification with the court [in 1692, when he was re-appointed to the Privy Council] did not last long, for the rise to power of the whig junto made it necessary for him to rebuild former friendships and to restore his credit both with high-church back-benchers and "country-country" whigs. The crisis came in 1694 when his critical speeches on naval failures provoked the chancellor of the exchequer, Charles Montagu, to a savage response, which for once rendered Seymour speechless. Soon afterwards Seymour was dismissed from the treasury. In opposition once more, he did not find it easy to re-establish his former position.⁵⁵

In this description of Seymour we have a picture of yet another upper-class twit, this time one who will stick at nothing to cling on to power, and Seymour's political career was destroyed by his *volte faces*. But a reference to Totnes, which brought Seymour to mind, in a work which seems more and more to carry an anti-Williamite message, written soon after the death of Mary, seems too strong simply to dismiss as coincidental. Is it all part of the fun of Varronian satire?

Likewise, the reference to Sutton—and in England there are above a hundred villages to which "Sutton" might refer—adds to the strength of the interpretation. The Sutton at which Manley

"very much for the Church of ~~England~~ England" and would "always own it as a great obligation . . . to be joined with one that is so deserving." <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/seymour-sir-edward-1633-1708> The letters were used by William Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington, in 1701, to claim electoral malpractice in that year's election, but Seymour and Coulson were, not surprisingly, exonerated. <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/cavendish-william-1672-1729>

⁵⁵ D. W. Hayton, 'Seymour, Sir Edward, fourth baronet (1633–1708)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25162, accessed 15 Dec 2014]

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stayed was almost certainly Sutton Scotney, a tiny village north of Winchester ~~which that~~ is off the beaten track of both what is now the A34 and the A303, the ancient routes north-south and east-west. In realist terms the inn at which they stayed was out of the way⁵⁶ and there is still a service station called Sutton Scotney a number of miles away from the actual village. But read as a political metaphor, the member for Hampshire was Charles Powlett, 1st Marquess of Winchester, a Whig, pro-Williamite, who fought against Seymour about the East India Company⁵⁷ in whose favour Seymour had had Coulson elected with the help of the Mayor of Totness.⁵⁶ Thus Sutton acts as a addition to the attack on Seymour as a foolish Tory who has dallied with the Whigs and helped the pro-Williamites maintain their power.

Letter IV Salisbury, Saturday night

After some realist information about the sights of Salisbury, the Exeter coach being repaired, and some boorish people who had come into the Inn from it, we hear the second long travellers' tale, from Mrs Stanhope of Falmouth, one of those who has just arrived on the incoming coach. The tale, which tells of a woman's happy escape from marrying a deceiving sea captain, because she believes her eyes rather than his words, seems to have little to it. However, a passing reference to the "Dutchess of *Grafton*"⁵⁷ would alert anti-Williamite readers to the possibility of William providing heirs to follow him to the throne. Isabella Bennet was one of the Hampton Court Beauties whose paintings adorn the state-rooms at the new palace, commissioned by Mary II from Sir Godfrey Kneller. The duchess was granddaughter of Louis of Nassau-Beverweerd, a close relation (through

⁵⁶ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/powlett-charles-i-1661-1722>

⁵⁷ Manley, *Letters Written*, 37.

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Commented [CM11]: No. Marquis is a Continental European title. See OED entry 2 for Marquis.

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an illegitimate line) and adviser to William III. She herself was married to Charles II's illegitimate son by Barbara Villiers, Henry Fitzroy, Earl of Euston,⁵⁸ when she was four and he nine. At the time of the story the duchess was a widow of twenty-two with a seven year old son.⁵⁹ ~~The pair~~ Mother and son (?) had recently been painted together by ~~Godfrey~~ Kneller, and the work now hangs at Ickworth, home of John Hervey, Earl of Bristol. It is not out of the question that Manley is going so far as implying that the child was William's. Isabella and he had lived in close proximity at a palace Alexander Pope would soon make synonymous with intrigue.

~~For once m~~More important to my argument about the target of satire in the book is the realist information given at the end of the letter, and this is of course a feature of the Varronian satire's miscellaneous nature. Among the banter with her addressee, Manley informs us that "General *Talmash*'s Body was brought in here this Evening: His Secretary I am acquainted with, and have sent to desire the Favour of his Company to Morrow to Dinner, and ~~is if~~ any thing in his Relation be Entertaining, you shall not fail of it..."⁶⁰ Thomas Tollemache was an ardent supporter of William III, being part of his invading force, for which he was made governor of Portsmouth in January 1689. In 1691, he led a number of daring, if overly optimistic, adventures during William's war in Ireland. These were followed by more daring feats of war in Flanders as William fought to regain Orange from the French. As MP for Chippenham, Tollemache spoke in the House of Commons for an increase in army spending for 1694. Tollemache was then sent to Brest to destroy the French Atlantic fleet, ~~where in~~ another daring if ill-advised feat, which according to Burnet "the Council and Officers were all against making the attempt; but Talmash had set his heart so

⁵⁸ Henry was killed leading William's forces against Cork in 1690.

⁵⁹ Charles FitzRoy, who became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

⁶⁰ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 43-44.

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much upon it, that he could not be diverted from it,⁶¹ and he was mortally wounded. Tollemache was remembered in his funeral oration as “one of the noblest of our *English Worthies*,”⁶² and was the subject of a number of elegies.⁶³ ~~(see above comment)~~ By ending with the suggestion that the next letter will be a tell-all about Tollemache in a collection of love stories, Manley whets the appetites of her readers, who are doubtless keen to know more about what he was really like from his secretary. In the event, nothing is forthcoming, and Manley’s failure to deliver seems to recollect Tollemache’s. The true account of Tollemach as valiant but unsuccessful in this letter highlights political connections and concerns.

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Letter V Bridgport, June 26, 1694.

Tollemache’s support for William and his being a ~~whig~~ Whig war hero would, with the benefit of hindsight, elicit parallels with John Churchill, whom Manley attacked in *The New Atalantis*. Thus, when we read at the beginning of the next letter that

The Account of so great a Man’s Death as Mr. Talmash (in the middle of all his Enterprises, when Fortune seem’d to promise him much greener Laurels than he had yet gather’d) has so added to my Melancholy, that I will not describe his Misfortune to you, for fear it be contagious; but rather suffer you to expect the public Account; for I am one of those that

⁶¹ Piers Wauchope, ‘Tollemache, Thomas (c.1651–1694)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27500, accessed 16 Dec 2014]

⁶² Nicholas Brady, *A Sermon Preached at Helmingham in Suffolk, June 30 1694. At the Funeral of L. Gen. Tolmach* (London: Rich. Parker, 1694)

⁶³ For example: Edward Ward, *On the Death of the Late Lieutenant General Talmach, a Poem* (London: Blackwell, 1694); Edmund Arwaker, *An Elegy on his Excellency Lieutenant General Tolmach* (London: Francis Saunders, 1694)

esteem you more, than to make you unease; as I think none can be otherwise, that hears the Particulars of his Loss.⁶⁴

We might wonder whether, in 1696, when the letter was published, Manley was drawing attention to the disaster Tollemache had led his troops into at Camaret Bay when he tried to smash the French Atlantic fleet.

As in the first letter, Manley makes an abrupt *volte face* in the Varronian style (and thus hiding the significance of the remarks about Tollemache so well that it has not hitherto been noted) after her refusal to recount Tollemache's secretary's story, and tells of Beaux' sexual encounter with another woman who "treated him (in her Chamber) with *Rosa Solis*, and what he calls *Sucket*."⁶⁵ She refuses to listen to further details of his conquest, and in mock effrontery "recommend[s] Discretion in Ladies Affairs."⁶⁶ The letter concludes with news that "Here's just come into the Inn an Acquaintance of *Beaux*'s, who promises yielding Matter for to Morrow's Letter," before lapsing back into sadness at the news of Tollemache's death. But her refusal to tell the tale of the death of a war hero, which first-hand knowledge one might expect from an intimate letter, becomes less a matter of delicacy than politics when Beaux's acquaintance tells his own story in the next letter.

Letter VI Exeter, June 26 1696.

The Beaux's story allegorizes William's fraught relationship to the country over which he now ruled alone. The teller introduces himself as "... a Foreigner. I had the Glory of following the

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⁶⁴ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 44-45.

⁶⁵ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 46.

⁶⁶ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 46.

Prince of *Orange*, (now our Auspicious King) in his Expedition into *England*.⁶⁷ A little further on we discover he is Swiss, and that he has become the object of the affections of an English woman, with £12,000, who has seen him in Exeter Cathedral. The woman's mother objects to the match, and the pair decide to go to Cornwall to get married, "but for fear her Mother should pursue us, she consented to take me for her Husband before the Parson cou'd be got to make us such."⁶⁸ They are happy for three months, but then the Swiss "began to consider a little [his] Affairs, and propos'd to [his] wife my being Naturalised, that I might look after hers." The reaction was not what might be expected from a happily married woman, who "snatch'd a Bayonet of [his], and wounded her self under the Left Breast, but not much."⁶⁹ When he asks his wife why she has tried to kill herself, he is told the reason was "The Discovery of Interest in me, when she believ'd Love was the only Motive to our Marriage."⁷⁰ The Swiss husband then decides to go to London to be naturalized without his wife knowing, since he wants to be treated "as a Husband, [rather than] ... a Lover."⁷¹ But when he tells her that it has been done, she replies, with all the rationality of the jilted women in the book: "*She only knew how to interpret it; but she was out in her Cunning, if I should find an English Wife at my Service, who knew not the true Value and Use of one.*"⁷² She will not be ruled by a husband, and wants to maintain her ownership of what is hers by keeping him a lover. True to her words, she hides from her husband, and has a common law process of incapability served upon him.⁷³ He finishes the story with the vow that he is going to leave England for ever, bought off with £1500. The common law process of making the Swiss husband incapable was a way to forbid him to enter into legal contracts. Thus, the story of a foreigner seeking naturalization with its negative outcome

⁶⁷ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 49.

⁶⁸ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 52.

⁶⁹ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 53.

⁷⁰ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 54.

⁷¹ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 54.

⁷² Manley, *Letters Writen*, 55.

⁷³ Manley, *Letters Writen*, 57.

highlights the book's anti-Williamite view; that ~~the~~ he no longer held a legitimate claim to rule the country (after the death of his wife, Mary II) and should go back to Orange.

Such views did not appear clearly stated in print until the accession of Anne, when, for example, a person who describes himself as a “High Flyer,” that is a High Church Anglican, wrote:

'Tis true, K. William Deliver'd us all from Popery and Slavery and was the first King on the English Throne that promoted a Reformation of Manners. But tho' King William signally Retriev'd the Ancient Honour and Glory of the English Nation; yet his Death made way for a Queen whose Heart is Entirely English and in a most particular manner a morning Mother to the Church of England, we may (with a good Conscience) Rejoice in it, and wish he had died sooner.⁷⁴

Furthermore, the Swiss nationality of the lover in the story reflects the mercenary army that came with William as he swept to power,⁷⁵ as well as an English fear that as king he did not trust his subjects, as William Roosen suggests:

Under Charles II and James II most English diplomats were native Englishmen. After the Glorious Revolution, William often chose Dutchmen, refugee Huguenots, and Swiss Protestants. . . . It has been argued that William hesitated to use Englishmen because he could not trust them, and also because he is supposed to have believed “that no Englishman could keep a secret.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Anon., *A satyr upon King William, being the secret history of his life and reign. Written by a Gentleman that was near his person for many years* (London, 1703), Preface, unpag.

⁷⁵ William tried to keep up a Swiss mercenary army in Ireland, but in 1689, the Swiss government demanded that their troops acted only in a defensive role.

⁷⁶ William Roosen, *The Age of Louis XIV: The Rise of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge MA: Schenkman, 1976), 65.

Letter VII July 10, 1694.

Returning to the verisimilitude of letter writing, Manley tells of her move into her new house and apologizes for not replying to her correspondent's last three letters. She asks him the favor of sending her chocolate and a few lines of verse, all true to the Varronian miscellaneous style. Adding to the miscellaneous style, two further letters are added dated the following year, which mimic the histrionic style of Colonel Pack's Letters from a Portuguese nun, and the book closes.

Conclusion

Thus, we can see that *Letters Written* is an early Varronian Satire, [the same style she employed in *The New Atalantis*](#), by which, as Carnell argues, “[Manley] signals her Tory values by claiming in her preface to the second volume [of *The New Atalantis*] that her work is Varronian satire, understood in its day as a ‘natural Tory vehicle’.”⁷⁷ It is miscellaneous; ~~to explore~~ [exploring](#) a number of irrelevant topics among [others that are](#) political dynamite. It is double in its intentions; ~~to~~ with a depth of satire that is so well disguised that it has not been noted hitherto. It hides a serious core within entertaining material.

There is no space in the present essay to explore in detail the other two of Manley's publications of 1696. Carnell helps us with *The Royal Mischief*, which she describes as “in some sense a Tory reworking of Elkannah Settle's Exclusionist (Whig) tragedy *The Female Prelate: Being the History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan* (1680).”⁷⁸ This is not to say that the play is a Varronian Satire, but it does give weight to the anti-Williamite and pro-~~tory-Tory~~ [Tory](#) readings I have given above. About *The Lost Lover*, Carnell is less clear that Manley is writing a pro-~~tory-Tory~~ [Tory](#)

⁷⁷ Rachel Carnell, *Slipping from Secret History to Novel* (forthcoming fall 2015 Eighteenth-Century Fiction).

⁷⁸ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 103.

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political piece, but where we might agree with Carnell's suggestion that "Manley's Wilmore is sometimes simply unpleasant,"⁷⁹ he is outwitted by Belira, a calm and rational heroine who, like a *deus ex machina*, sorts out the lovers problems: rather like the heroines of *Letters Written*.

I have, therefore, no compunction in reiterating the idea that Manley's first three compositions of 1696 were designed as a tripartite attack written against King William III after the death of his wife Mary II, in whose right lay their legitimate claim to the throne of Britain. If I had yet further space, I would make an argument that the works were meant as a warning to ~~tories~~ Tories at the rise of the ~~whig-Whig~~ Whig-Whig Junto, which would dominate British politics until 1705, and on the edge of which, at its start, was none other than Thomas Tollemache. Thus the political allegories outlined here make a strong case for Manley's apprenticeship in political satire long-nearly twenty years before the publication of *The New Atalantis*.

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⁷⁹ Carnell, *Political Biography*, 96.