

ABSTRACT

In 1709 Delarivier Manley published her political satire *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, of Both Sexes from the New Atalantis, an Island in the Mediteranean* [sic]. It was a sensation. The second volume sent her to gaol. Her arrest and the confiscation of all copies agitated readers anxiously awaiting its appearance. Published anonymously it attacked Britain's most powerful politicians and Queen Anne's closest confidantes and favourites. They had lately become troublesome to the queen as they attempted to take control. They had forced the removal of Anne's Secretary of State and attempted to remove her new 'favourite' lady of the bedchamber; the two people she had come to rely on. When Manley began writing *New Atalantis* in 1708 she would have known the danger it posed. Outside court circles, however, she could not be sure that if pushed by her barrage of ridicule, old loyalties would not prevail. *New Atalantis* helped to undermine the Whig government's hold on power. It is credited with influencing the outcome of the 1710 election to a Tory victory. As a little-known writer, of gentlewoman birth, with a dubious reputation, Manley risked gaol and the pillory. What could have brought her to take this dangerous step? Why would a penniless, powerless female author with a compromised reputation write a scandalous secret history that ridiculed those who held the greatest power in the nation and influence over its Queen? The improbability of Manley's decision and the danger it posed suggests that powerful others could have been behind her decision. Or did she write entirely alone, as she claimed at her trial, to earn a few pounds writing Tory propaganda and show her usefulness in the intensifying partisan debate. From her marginalised position Manley amassed associates and friends as powerful as those she ridiculed. I have set out to answer the question Manley posed, rhetorically, provocatively and laced with irony: who 'bid her write?' There is no single 'smoking gun' answer, but rather a rich web of agency and influence with Delarivier Manley at its centre.