‘Rot it – ’Tis a Woman’s Comedy’: Actresses and the Stage, 1660-1703

by Cora James

School of English
University of Sheffield
2021

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This work was supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/L503848/1) through the White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities

Contents

Acknowledgements 1

Abstract 2

Introduction 3

The Critical Landscape 9

Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle 18

Restoration Stage Practices 22

Who and When? 27

Chapter One: Elizabeth Norris 30

Uncovering Mrs Norris 33

Elizabeth Norris and Aphra Behn 44

Elizabeth Norris as the ‘City-bawd and Puritan’ 61

Chapter Two: Elizabeth Currer 75

Prologues and Epilogues 79

Currer and the Exclusion Crisis 91

Betty Currer as the Whore of Babylon 97

The Widow Ranter 120

Chapter Three: Susanna Verbruggen 136

Verbruggen and the Patent Company 140

Verbruggen in the Plays of Thomas Southerne 152

Verbruggen as the ‘Clownish Hoyden’ 166

Verbruggen, Farquhar, and the Rise of Sentimentalism 179

Conclusion 194

Amanda and the Tragicomic Actress 200

Berinthia and the Mistresses of the Restoration 202

Nurses, Bawds, and Confidantes 205

Hoyden as Heroine 208

Bibliography 214

Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I owe gratitude for the existence of this thesis and whilst I don't have the time or space here to do such an acknowledgement justice, I hope to do my best. I would like to start by thanking Dr Marcus Nevitt for his guidance through every stage of this thesis from its conception to its completion. I am deeply grateful for his generous support as well as his ongoing enthusiasm for this project. Without him, I don't believe I would have given Restoration comedy a second glance and I cannot thank him enough for introducing me to this vibrant, chaotic, challenging period of theatre history. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Tom Rutter for encouraging me to approach my work with the same rigour and excitement with which he faces every facet of early modern literature. The unending generosity of his support has been invaluable to me, the successful completion of this thesis, and my experience at the University of Sheffield.

This thesis would not have been possible were it not for the White Rose College for the Arts and Humanities. Their support both financially and personally is truly appreciated.

I would also like to pay particular thanks to my fellow PhD students in the School of English, especially Molly Murray, for the countless times they have been there to celebrate and commiserate throughout the past three years.

To my family, for everything, always.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this to Robyn. The world needs more brilliant women.

Abstract

The introduction of professional actresses to the stage following the Interregnum coincided with several key advancements in English comedy. Theatre history has remembered the Restoration period for its production of libertine-driven, aristocratic city comedies and the development of the comedy of manners. Whilst there has been an increasing body of work dedicated to several fascinating women who worked for London's theatre companies during this period, very few consider the first English actresses beyond a state of exceptionalism or through an examination of genre.

Through a performance-led analysis this thesis explores the careers of three actresses who worked in London's theatres during the period 1660 – 1703. As women who made their livings primarily playing supporting comic roles, the contributions of Elizabeth Norris, Elizabeth Currer, and Susanna Verbruggen will be used to expand our understanding of how the development of female comic characters occurred in a specifically gendered way following the Restoration of Charles II and into the eighteenth century.

By centring performers who originated several similar roles across a wide number of productions within a collaborative framework of professionals, this thesis explores significations in the development and construction of comic meaning which otherwise have gone unnoticed. By broadening our study of the comedians of Restoration theatre to include lesser-known company members, and not just focusing on the great stars of the time, this thesis examines the theatrical characterisations of age, sexuality, religion, class, and gender through the lens of supporting roles which are not confined by the limitations and standards necessarily imposed onto Restoration comedy's female protagonists.

Introduction

‘Free. To play a faithful wife or an unfaithful wife. A whore, a mistress.
We play at being what we are. Where’s the freedom in that?’[1]

These mournful words, spoken by a fictionalised version of Restoration player, Rebecca Marshall, in April De Angelis’s *Playhouse Creatures* (1994), serve as a bleak commentary on the extremely fragile position of the first English actresses. A frantic but bittersweet reflection on women’s place in Restoration theatre, De Angelis’s play follows a plucky Nell Gwyn as she rises from orange girl to King’s mistress. The Gwyn of De Angelis’s playhouse is a resourceful but naïve young star, so focused on her own success that she fails to see the plight of those around her. Whilst Gwyn’s uneasy ending sees her leave the playhouse to pursue a supposedly better life at court, her fellow actresses are unceremoniously forced from the stage. Mary Betterton, once the greatest Shakespearean actress of her generation, grows old and eccentric whilst her husband replaces her with younger women. Elizabeth Farley, pregnant by a king who has long since lost interest in her, is forced off the stage and onto the streets for fear of bringing scandal to the playhouse. Rebecca Marshall, abused and forsaken by her erstwhile lover, the Earl of Oxford, is chased out of town on accusations of witchcraft. The play presents the lives of these pioneering women as a sordid compromise between notoriety and desolation. Although an affecting piece of theatre, the events of *Playhouse Creatures* can only be described as tangentially connected with the seventeenth-century historical reality with each of the main actresses representing a sort of synecdochical composite of several historical figures. Decidedly ahistorical (De Angelis has the King’s Company producing John Vanbrugh’s *The Provoked Wife* in 1669), *Playhouse Creatures* manages to capture a widely accepted and enduring image of the first women in professional English theatre, that of glamourised but ultimately trapped individuals, women who were nothing more than idolised dependants of a patriarchal industry which used them up and spat them out once they were no longer deemed sexually alluring enough to entice the famously

[1] April De Angelis, *Playhouse Creatures* (London: Samuel French, 1993), p. 51.

bawdy Restoration audience. As this introduction will demonstrate, this view remains pervasive in scholarly criticism surrounding the lives and works of the historical figures on which De Angelis's characters are based. Whilst it is undeniable that the prospect of real women appearing on the English stage was inextricably tied to ideas of evocative, voyeuristic sexuality, the continued insistence that the Restoration actress is only to be recognised within this limited context robs us of the ability to consider these pioneers as active contributors to theatre production.

The King's Company of De Angelis's play is based on one of the only two licenced theatres operating in London following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. Intentionally conceived as a duopoly, the two companies, one named for Charles and the other for his brother, James, the Duke of York, were given over to the management of Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant respectively. The King's Company inherited the majority of classic, pre-Commonwealth plays and a more experienced body of actors. Consequently, they were quicker to open their converted tennis court at Vere Street by the end of 1660. Although the Duke's Company were slower off the mark, not managing to stage a production until the following summer, their renovation of the tennis court at Lincoln's Inn Fields allowed for changeable scenery, an exciting prospect for a seventeenth-century audience and one which both managers would incorporate when erecting their own purpose-built theatres in the following years.[2] This, of course, was not the only innovation of the Restoration stage. Although there is no mention of actresses in the temporary grant given to Killigrew and Davenant on the 21st of August 1660, it did permit them to create companies 'Consistinge respectively of such persons As they shall chuse and appoint' and subsequently the two managers chose to incorporate female performers.[3] Thomas Killigrew was the first to do so, although it remains unclear as to who this might have been or what role she played. The first production which is known to have included an

[2] Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late-Stuart Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 57-60

[3] *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623-1673*, ed. by Joseph Quincy Adams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), p. 87.

actress was *Othello* (c. 1604) performed by the King's Company in December 1660.[4] By the time the companies' patents, which stipulated the inclusion of women in women's parts, were passed in 1662 both theatres had already made notable use of their actresses, building up strong casts of both men and women.[5] Although the two companies continued to compete for audiences, new plays, and royal favour for another twenty years, Judith Milhous succinctly describes the relationship between the two managers in the following terms: 'Davenant led and Killigrew followed'.[6] Davenant's desire for innovation, coupled with the necessity of building up a repertoire with few classic plays or well established actors, led him to greater advancements in stage production. The introduction of moveable scenery and musical set pieces, alongside the active promotion of new plays produced by a disciplined body of professional actors, was the cause of great success for Davenant and his managerial successor, the leading actor Thomas Betterton. Unfortunately for Killigrew, the King's Company fell behind and a reluctance to innovate, coupled with a lack of patronage and poor management, eventually led to their being absorbed by the Duke's Company in 1682 to form the single United Company.[7] This monopoly continued until the Actors' Revolt of 1695 caused a split in the theatrical community and London once again found itself home to two rival companies, the Patent Company under the management of Christopher Rich and Thomas Skipwith and the Players' Company directed by Thomas Betterton.

Through a fresh investigation of some of the more neglected members of these companies, particularly those performers who worked firmly within the comic genre, this thesis will demonstrate that the women of the post-Interregnum theatre were bold and active contributors to the development of comedy during this period. From uncovering previously unknown biographical details of one of the first English actresses to reassessing the unchallenged assumption that progression through the

[4] Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 19.
[5] Judith Milhous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), p. 6.
[6] Milhous, *Thomas Betterton*, p. 15.
[7] David Roberts, *Restoration Plays and Players* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 30.

company's hierarchy equated to more creative control, this thesis will examine the contributions of three comic actresses over a period of forty-three years in order to contest and rectify the current image of these pioneering women as nothing more than manipulated and forsaken victims of a patriarchal institution. The following introduction will provide an examination of how contemporary criticism has reinvigorated an interest in the first English actresses and the different strands of thought concerning their relative contributions, notions of celebrity, and the conditions of their employment, including a tension between their depiction as objectified victims or talented professionals. It will then go on to examine the benefits and necessity of this type of research by demonstrating how modern criticism has aided our understanding of women in seventeenth-century theatre through two of the most celebrated and thoroughly researched actresses of the period, Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle. In order to extend this important work, this introduction will then contextualise the stage practices which necessitated the contributions and collaborations of all members of the company, thereby expanding our understanding beyond the few key figures which have attracted particular scholarly attention. Whilst there has always been a fascination with some of these women due to their primacy and early embodiment of celebrity, scholarly criticism has only recently begun to appreciate the first actresses' wider professional contributions as company members. Even within this criticism, those who have dedicated time to expanding our appreciation of the first actresses' work have not done so in an explicitly genre-oriented way, although there has been a tendency towards placing more emphasis on women's development in tragic roles. Specifically examining stage comedy, this thesis considers early English actresses' contributions to theatre both within and without the highly sexualised roles so recognisable in Restoration and late Stuart theatre. Paying particular attention to the collaborative efforts of these actresses both with one another and with the playwright Aphra Behn, this study explores some of the first examples of artistic female cooperation within England's professional theatrical sphere. By centring the agency of the performer as an active participant in the creation of comic meaning, this thesis provides a new focus for textual readings of Restoration and late-seventeenth century play texts. This serves to highlight the importance of women to the

developments in comic character and plot which occurred following the restoration of Charles II and after the Glorious Revolution.

Not only does modern UK theatre already have a huge problem of gender disparity, the business of comedy both as a written and performed art across all media remains to this day a highly gendered and misogynistic arena in which women are largely underrepresented.[8] According to a 2018 study commissioned by the Writers Guild of Great Britain, only 11% of television comedies over the period 2001 to 2016 were written by women, with this number falling to 9% for 'light entertainment' programming.[9] Similarly, only 9% of comedy feature films produced in Great Britain from 2005 to 2016 had female writers, whilst 6% of all comedy feature films produced during this period had a predominantly female writing staff, despite the fact that predominantly female-written films, of all genres, had higher average UK and worldwide box office revenue than films written by their male counterparts, in five of six studied budget bands.[10] Meanwhile, a study of behind-the-scenes crew on the top 500 grossing films of 2019 found that on average comedy films hired a backstage staff consisting of 25% women, including producers, directors, writers, and technicians.[11] These numbers improve slightly when the focus is shifted to comic performers but still demonstrate a large discrepancy when it comes to gender. Although by no means a comprehensive database and one which only considers the gender binary, the UK comedy website Chortle records 547 female comedians currently working in the UK compared to 1525 male comedians.[12] Stuart Lowe,

[8] The 'Women in Theatre Report' brought together research from The Sphinx Theatre, University Women in the Arts, The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, ERA 50: 50, Black Womxn in Theatre, PIPA (Parents and Carers in Performing Arts), the December Group, and Stage Directors UK to demonstrate that gender inequality in UK theatre urgently needs to be addressed - Jennifer Tuckett, 'Women in Theatre Forum Report' (London: Arts Council England, 2020); Brett Mills and Sarah Ralph, '"I Think Women are Possibly Judged More Harshly with Comedy": Women and British Television Comedy Production', *Critical Studies in Television*, 10.2 (2015) pp. 102-117.
[9] Alexis Kraegar and Stephen Follows, 'Gender Inequality and Screenwriters: A study of the impact of gender on equality of opportunity for screenwriters and key creatives in the UK film and television industries' (London: The Writers Guild of Great Britain / Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society, 2018) p. 57
[10] Ibid., p. 26, pp. 33-36.
[11] Martha M. Lauzen, 'The Celluloid Ceiling, Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2019' (Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, 2020) p. 7.
[12] 'Comedian Database' at https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/ [last accessed 09/09/2021].

meanwhile, who has compiled data reflecting the relative appearances of male and female comedians on UK comedy panel programmes, has found that in the period 1967 to 2016, 1488 radio and television panel shows have had an all-male cast compared to just 1 which starred all women.[13] According to the British Film Institute's Filmography Index of over 10,000 British films, 34% of cast members in comedy films from 1913 to 2017 have been women. Generally, female representation in British films has remained at the same level since the beginning of the index.[14] Although this is only a snapshot of the high gender disparity across broad forms of comedy both within the UK and internationally, these numbers demonstrate that women are still being denied space in the male-dominated world of comedy despite proving their capability and success time and time again.

Given the influential ability of comedy to entertain, satirise, convince, celebrate, and condemn, women's restricted influence in this area remains an extreme detriment to the fight for gender equity. By re-examining and re-imagining some of the earliest women to partake in this endeavour in a professional setting, this thesis will demonstrate that women hold a legitimate place in comedy and theatre history and that today's female comics, actors, playwrights, and creators hold an indisputable claim to an historic and substantial legacy. As with any examination of women's history, the aim is not to devalue the hardships experienced, such as those which are theatricalised in De Angelis's work, but to recognise that these women were more than their struggles and what history has made of them. Within their respective companies and as active agents within a collaborative framework, the first female performers dynamically shaped and contributed to the creation of their comic roles, an influence which often transcended the limits of individual plays and inspired the development of female characterisation beyond the prescription of a male-oriented viewpoint. By no means the first female producers of English theatre, the actresses around which this thesis revolves are an example of the work being done by and the opportunities available to women in the newly

[13] Stuart Lowe, 'UK Panel Show Gender Breakdown' at https://strudel.org.uk/panelshows/index.html [last accessed 09/09/2021].
[14] British Film Institute Filmography Index, 'The Gender Imbalance in UK Film Casts' at https://data-viz.nesta.org.uk/bfi-onscreen/index.html [last accessed 09/09/2021].

legitimised theatrical spaces of the later seventeenth century. As varied in success as one might expect from an industry as capricious as the public stage, the prospects of the first English actresses were a far cry from De Angelis's bleak and wretched depiction.

The Critical Landscape

This image of the first English actresses as oppressed victims of a misogynistic age is the product of a relatively recent shift in scholarly criticism. For a long time after the end of the seventeenth century, the early actresses were framed as willing participants in a bygone era of unbridled revelry. Written in the 1930s, Rosamond Gilder's impression of the first English actresses is one of vain, undisciplined girls flitting about playing make believe, more interested in the fripperies of their costumes than a dedication to their craft. Initially writing that 'the actresses were particularly difficult to control', Gilder goes on to point out that the men of the audience 'looked upon the newly made actresses as little more than public women, an attitude which the ladies themselves were far from discouraging'.[15] This judgment echoes almost verbatim Allardyce Nicoll's brief condemnatory remarks on actresses in *Restoration Drama 1660-1700* (1923) when he wrote, 'from the King down to the fops, the male spectators looked upon these actresses as little better than prostitutes, and they themselves were certainly not slow in encouraging promising lovers' before declaring that 'very few of those actresses lived chaste lives'.[16] Gilder does admit to 'striking exceptions' to this rule, praising Katherine Corey, Elizabeth Boutell, Mrs Kneppe, and Mary Saunderson (later Betterton) as faithful and dutiful servants to the theatre, but for the most part Gilder would have the women of the Restoration stage remembered as 'light-hearted and light-headed ladies'.[17] As recently as 1958 John Harold Wilson's study, *All the King's Ladies,* embellishes in great detail Samuel Pepys's first sight of an actress in the

[15] Rosamond Gilder, *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre*, 1931 (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1961) p. 147, p. 150.
[16] Allardyce Nicoll, *Restoration Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), pp. 71-72.
[17] Gilder, *Enter the Actress,* p. 150.

following bodily terms, 'there was no doubt about it; it was truly a woman, a lusty young wench, very handsome in a flowing gown and laced petticoats, with her bosom and shoulders gleaming in the candlelight […] they were far from being polished performers, but they were women and their physical allure was undeniable'.[18] Aside from being an enormous stretch of the imagination, Wilson's description confirms that even in the historiographical process of centring the actress, the focus has invariably fallen on the sexualised body of the performer, either as playful object or unwilling victim.

Not long after Gilder's work, Montague Summers published his *Restoration Theatre* (1934), a text whose scholarly reputation has since been partially recovered by Robert D. Hume in his essay 'The Uses of Montague Summers: A Pioneer Reconsidered'.[19] *Restoration Theatre* is a comprehensive early twentieth century text which attempts to introduce Restoration stage history and some of its material aspects, including costumes, staging, audience demographics, rehearsal practices, prologues and epilogues, acting styles, and admission systems, as well as containing some cursory anecdotes of a few choice performers. However verbose and imprecise *Restoration Theatre* can be, its production did spark a newly invigorated interest in the practical and material conditions of Restoration stage history in relation to its performers, for example in Summers's connection between an actress's stage persona and the delivery of prologues and epilogues such as the popular actress Sarah Cook being 'celebrated for her pointed delivery of saucy and political epilogues'.[20] Investigations into this history have been extended by scholars such as William Van Lennep in his unparalleled calendar of performances, *The London Stage* (1965-1969), Judith Milhous in *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields 1695-1708* (1979), which continues the work on uncovering company management practices begun by Leslie Hotson in *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (1928), Edward A. Langhan's work on *Restoration Promptbooks* (1981), David Robert's introductory *Restoration Plays and Players* (2014), and Tim Keenan in *Restoration Staging,*

[18] John Harold Wilson, *All the King's Ladies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 2-3.
[19] Robert D. Hume, 'The Uses of Montague Summers: A Pioneer Reconsidered', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 3 (Fall 1979), pp. 59-65.
[20] Montague Summers, *The Restoration Theatre* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 182.

1660-74 (2016).[21] Alongside these important and instructive works, and as part of a decisive movement towards the understanding and exploration of stagecraft through the burgeoning field of performance studies, there has, in the last few decades, been a re-examination into the relationship between playwright, text, and performance which increasingly foregrounds the performer as an active participant in play production. Notable works in this field include Peter Holland's *The Ornament of Action* (1979) and J. L. Styan's *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (1986), both of which prioritise the experience of the male actor, and Tiffany Stern's *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (2000).[22] Stern's work will be particularly beneficial to this study as it emphasises the collaborative nature of Restoration repertory theatre, focusing on the processes of rehearsal and the formations of performances which occurred before opening night. In her chapters on the Restoration and late seventeenth-century stages, Stern pays particular attention to the creative interplay between writer and actor and the production of meaning which arose from this relationship, providing invaluable context for this study's exploration of how actresses responded to and formulated new parts. One of the earliest modern analyses of the contexts and conditions of the first English actresses was produced by Katharine Maus in 1979. Maus explores the circumstances which necessitated the introduction of women to play women's roles and emphasises the specific position of the actress, stressing that at a time when women in most walks of life seemed to be losing autonomy and the ability to survive outside of a man's financial protection, the actress was finding a way to maintain a financial security which was not necessarily directly tied to a husband or benefactor. Maus insists that the 'success of the actress has to be explained in ways which take into account the drastically different experience of women in other professions'.[23] Recognising the importance of this particular industry during this period to the history of women's liberation, further work has been done in unearthing the specific

[21] William Van Lennep et al, *The History of the London Stage 1660-1800,* 5 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965) I; Milhous, *Thomas Betterton*; Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928); Edward A. Langhans, *Restoration Promptbooks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981); Roberts, *Restoration Plays and Players*; Tim Keenan, *Restoration Staging, 1660-1674* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[22] Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[23] Katharine Maus, '"Playhouse Flesh and Blood": Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress', *ELH*, 46.4 (1979) pp. 595-617, p. 601.

contributions of female theatre creators, both on and off stage, by Jacqueline Pearson in *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (1988), Cynthia Lowenthal in *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (2003), Felicity Nussbaum in *Rival Queens* (2010), and Elaine McGirr in her chapter, 'Authorial Performances: Actress, Author, Critic' (2017), among several others.[24] The last few decades have also seen an increase in studies which examine the ways in which womanhood and femininity was represented on the seventeenth-century stage following the introduction of women in women's roles, for example Katherine M. Quinsey's collection of essays, *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama* (1996), Jean Marsden's *Fatal Desire* (2006), and Peggy Thompson's *Coyness and Crime in Restoration Comedy* (2012).[25]

Throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries there has also been a resurgence in scholarly examination on Aphra Behn, a playwright whose reputation lay largely dormant for the two hundred years following her death in 1689. Whilst examining actresses' work in plays by all manner of late seventeenth-century playwrights, this study pays particular attention to the works of Aphra Behn as they include the first examples of women writing female parts for female performers on the English stage. Consequently, the roles created by Behn and the actresses who inhabited them are demonstrative of a wholly novel form of female expression. Montague Summers was the first modern

[24] Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003); Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Elaine McGirr, 'Authorial Performances: Actress, Author, Critic', *Women's Writing: 1660-1830 : Feminisms and Futures,* ed. by Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 97- 115; See also: Joanne Lafler, 'Theatre and the Female Presence', *The Cambridge History of British Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 71-89; Deborah Payne Fisk, 'The Restoration Actress', *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. by Susan J. Owen, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 69-91; Jane Milling, '"For Without Vanity, I'm Better Known": Restoration Actors and Metatheatre on the London Stage', *Theatre Survey*, 53.1 (2011), pp. 59-82; Erin M. Keating, 'Envious Productions: Actresses, Audiences, and Affect in the Restoration Playhouse', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 37.2 (2013), pp. 37-53; Since 2019 Claire McManus and Lucy Munro have been developing their 'Engendering the stage: the records of early modern performance' project which examines the contributions of neglected early modern performers leading up to 1662, including female performers and artists.
[25] *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama,* ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996); Peggy Thompson, *Coyness and Crime in Restoration Comedy* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2012); Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English State, 1660–1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

scholar to reinvigorate Behn's image, editing and publishing the first full collection of her works in 1915.[26] Virginia Woolf famously dedicated enormous import to Aphra Behn in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), writing:

> Mrs Behn was a middle-class woman with all the plebeian virtues of humour, vitality and courage, a woman forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits. She had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on. The importance of that fact outweighs anything that she actually wrote.[27]

Over the following century, however, scholars have slowly recognised that Behn's accomplishment as a writer extends far beyond the mere status of her primacy. The last thirty years have seen an extraordinary resurgence of work on Behn's playwriting from critics such as Heidi Hutner and Janet Todd in their essay collections, *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (1993) and *Aphra Behn Studies* (1996) respectively, Derek Hughes in *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (2001), and Nancy Copeland's *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women's Comedy and the Theatre* (2004).[28] As a poet and playwright Aphra Behn managed to achieve a potent mix of vibrant optimism and detached scepticism in equal measure. Mingled with the fascinating legends born of the still enigmatic periods in which she served as undercover spy and colonial adventurer, Behn's legacy has left more than enough work for modern scholars attempting to examine the life and labour of a particularly intriguing individual. As has been explored by Derek Hughes in his chapter 'Aphra Behn

---

[26] Montague Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, 6 vols. (London: W. Heinemann, 1915).
[27] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2019), p. 76.
[28] *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hutner (London: University Press of Virginia, 1993); *Aphra Behn Studies,* ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Nancy Copeland, *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women's Comedy and the Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); See also: Janet Todd, *Aphra Behn: A Secret Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Elaine Hobby, 'No Stolen Object, But Her Own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6.1 (1999), pp. 113-127; *Aphra Behn (1640-1689) Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity* ed. by Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq, and Guyonne Ludoc (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); Jane Spencer, *Aphra Behn's Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Dawn Lewcock, *Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008); Elaine Hobby, ''The World Was Never Without Some Mad Men': Aphra Behn, Jane Sharp, and the body', *Women's Writing,*19.2 (2012), pp. 177-191.

and the Restoration Theatre', unlike her novellas and poetry Behn's plays were a collaborative effort, the production of which required her to respond to and work within an existing system of professionals.[29] Like most playwrights of the period, Behn relied heavily on the acting skills of the companies' performers to bring her visions to life.

Although the professional skills of Restoration actresses have begun to be appreciated by modern scholars, the same cannot be said of all contemporary critics. Montague Summers's *Restoration Theatre* is notable for including a reprint of Robert Gould's *The Playhouse: A Satyr*, originally published in 1689. *The Playhouse* was a scathing lampoon which satirised the theatre and its occupants and held particular vitriol for its actresses, describing them as having 'All Paint their Out-sides and all Pox within', making several accusations which correlate actresses and sex work.[30] Due to this denunciatory satire Gould is often depicted as a 'spokesman for the age' and his work an insight into the general public's attitudes towards the playhouse, and specifically its actresses.[31] Deborah C. Payne challenges this position in her essay, 'Reified Object or Emergent professional? Retheorising the Restoration Actress', suggesting that by reprinting the satire Summers indirectly propagated the ubiquity of Gould's opinion, and that contemporaneously the attitude towards the first female performers was as complicated and varied as it is today. Although it remains difficult to ascertain the degree to which the late Stuart era saw a united fervour over the scurrilous existence of female performers or if this was an impression left to us by the ardent scribblings of a few, loud-mouthed zealots, modern scholarship has become increasingly preoccupied with an altogether different question when faced with the difficult realties of the first English actresses. As Laura J. Rosenthal points out in her essay, '"Counterfeit Scrubbado": Women Actors in the Restoration', the

[29] Derek Hughes, 'Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 35-37.
[30] Robert Gould, *The Playhouse: A Satyr* (1689) reprinted in Summers, *Restoration Theatre,* p. 311; See also Kirsten Pullen, 'Betty Boutell, ''Whom all the Town Fucks'': Constructing the Actress/Whore', *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 22-54.
[31] Deborah C. Payne, 'Reified Object or Emergent Professional? Retheorizing the Restoration Actress', *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*, ed. by Deborah C. Payne and J. Douglas Canfield (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 13-38, p. 23.

degree to which individual women engaged in sex work offstage or found a livelihood in the households of wealthy men is fairly immaterial compared to an understanding of the broader cultural environment of the playhouses and the impact women had on the stage.[32] Within the recent re-examination of actresses, Payne's essay argues that modern criticism increasingly tends to support one of two supposedly binary narratives, that Restoration actresses were either oppressed, sexually exploited victims or defiantly talented professionals. Payne considers it more appropriate to consider these two assessments in tandem: both objectification and professionalisation, 'far from opposing each other', can actually be considered as two sides of the same coin as both rely on a separation of a tangible value drawn from an individual's complex humanity.[33] According to Payne, whether because of their sexual visibility or in the 'adequate performance of a few prescribed tasks', actresses of the Restoration should be considered in both these terms in order to overcome the polarising approach most critics take when assessing their work.

Despite Payne's assertion that scholars are too prone to this polarisation, of those who have recently explored the roles and lives of Restoration actresses, almost all have fallen somewhere in the middle of this binary. Rosenthal argues that the actress-as-whore trope, promoted through the publicising of actresses' personal lives, was used by playwrights to theatricalise the 'emergent instability of class identity for women'.[34] Rosenthal stops short of transferring the agency of this theatricalization onto the person of the actress, however, referring to the actresses' 'creation of artistic illusion' as their foremost contribution to this process.[35] Thomas A. King also approaches the figure of the actress through terms of class and status, emphasising the 'voyeuristic dynamic' which came from conflating the body of the actress with the incongruous body of a differently born character, but where Rosenthal considers the artistic product as being created by the playwright and theatrical

[32] Laura J. Rosenthal, '"Counterfeit Scrubbado": Women Actors in the Restoration', *Eighteenth Century Theory and Interpretation,* 34 (1993), pp. 3-22, p. 3.
[33] Deborah C. Payne, 'Reified Object or Emergent Professional?', p. 16.
[34] Rosenthal, 'Counterfeit Scrubbado', p. 4.
[35] Ibid.

process as a whole, King specifically examines the actresses' training and use of performance in enacting this disparity and thereby directly contributing to the creation of meaning.[36] In her analysis of the careers of two celebrated actresses which framed the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Nell Gwyn and Susannah Cibber, Elaine McGirr emphasises the actresses' work as displays of 'performative authorship'.[37] In other words, McGirr recognises that the performance of character can have as much influence on the production of meaning as the initial writing and uses a method of textual recovery to prioritise the contributions of the actress. McGirr's contention that 'playwrights are not puppetmasters, and actresses do not passively mouth the lines given them' but rather 'the actress's creation of a role provided a reading of the play, an interpretation of character and significance' is an invaluable approach to recognising the importance of these early pioneers and one which will be extended through this study.[38]

By far the two most comprehensive studies to be done on the rise of the professional English actress in recent times, and two which in many ways represent the two ends of Payne's binary, are Elizabeth Howe's *The First English Actresses* (1992) and Gilli Bush-Bailey's *Treading the Bawds* (2006). It should come as no surprise that April De Angelis dedicated *Playhouse Creatures* to Elizabeth Howe for providing the inspiration for her work, as the overarching narrative of *Creatures* reflects Howe's approach to women in Restoration theatre. Howe largely writes about the sexual exploitation of actresses and how their bodies were used to reinforce gender roles and the patriarchal system, writing 'the first English actresses were used, above all, as sexual objects, confirming, rather than challenging, the attitudes to gender of their society', explaining that as a sexual object the actress 'was no danger to the patriarchal system, but rather its Toy'.[39] Despite this, Howe does recognise the contemporary pre-eminence of the actress as a public figure, writing that 'although the dramatists

---

[36] Thomas A. King, 'As if (she) were made on purpose to put the whole world into good humour: Reconstructing the First English Actresses', *Drama Review,* 36.3 (1992), pp. 78-102, p. 80.
[37] McGirr, 'Authorial Performances', p. 99.
[38] Ibid., p. 98.
[39] Howe, *The First English Actresses*, pp. 36-37.

were the artists whose work lived after them and who are perceived to "have an authority" in literary and academic terms, at the time, in the eyes of the public, it was the player, not the playwright, who held sway'.[40] Howe also admits that some exceptional plays of the period use the actress to enact a 'sexual realism' capable of promoting a 'fresh, sensitive, and even radical consideration of female roles', but even in these instances she insists on highlighting 'how playwrights utilised the sexuality of the female player', rather than giving agency to the player herself.[41] Written as an introduction to non-specialists, Howe's work covers the exploitation of a wide variety of the first English actresses in great detail but only begins to recognise their burgeoning public voice and unique position as female orators in the public sphere.

Gilli Bush-Bailey, meanwhile, attempts to renegotiate our understanding of the actress as a trained performer and an enactor of transgressive stagecraft by focusing on the careers of two of the most prominent Restoration actresses, Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle. *Treading the Bawds* interrogates several unchallenged presumptions in the study of Restoration theatre's women, including the primacy of the text over performance and the emphasis on female playwrights in isolation, as opposed to a recognition of their contributions within a collaborative framework. By focussing on the lives and careers of Barry and Bracegirdle, Bush-Bailey approaches her examination of the Restoration and late-Stuart stages through a performance-led study which broadens into a wider investigation of the conditions of women's employment, notions of celebrity, operations outside of the traditional patent structure, and the connections between female playwrights, performers, and spectators. As well as providing a new transcription of the anonymously authored *Satyr on the Players* (c.1682), Bush-Bailey provides a helpful graph of how each of the female members of the Duke's Company was cast in the plays of Aphra Behn from 1670 to 1682.[42] This graph exemplifies the identification of female collaboration which Bush-Bailey is trying to encourage by presenting

[40] Howe, *First English Actresses,* p. 172.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds*, pp. 40-41.

these actresses within their dynamic as company members and recognising their contributions as a comprehensive body of work, adapted and extended by a single author. The broader impact of Bush-Bailey's study lies in its recognition of not just the collaborative nature of women's theatre history, but also of the necessity of collaboration when determining the process of rewriting a shared feminist history. Acknowledging that a study of the practical and often difficult lives of Restoration actresses does not countermand or contradict a purely literary analysis of their character types, nor that an assessment of the financial benefits of the acting profession diminishes a new reading on the voyeurism inherent in late Stuart she-tragedies, Bush-Bailey's work aims to supplement and enhance an ongoing process of demystifying women's theatre history. Bush-Bailey recognises that 'feminist histories might be seen as palimpsests, multilayered, multivisioned works, with each new writing building on the meanings created by the writing beneath' and that it is the duty of every feminist scholar to engage with and contribute to this work as an ongoing process and not with the brutal finality of other traditionally dominant and monophonic historiographical narratives.[43]

Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle

As the work of Bush-Bailey helps us to recognise, even within the patriarchal and sexually exploitative environs of the playhouses, the Restoration actress had more agency than Elizabeth Howe would allow, and none held more sway than the inimitable Elizabeth Barry. Company star and famed tragedienne, Elizabeth Barry began working for the Duke's Company at the age of seventeen. From the fascinating but most likely apocryphal origin myth in which John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester took the unpromising Barry under his wing and in a matter of months turned her into a once in a generation talent, Barry's career has been viewed as the apex of the Restoration actresses' influence. Appearing in scores of roles over a stage career which spanned thirty-five years, Barry's popularity never wavered and by the later stages of her life she had earned 'a distinction unknown before to any

[43] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds*, p. 206.

comedian, a benefit-night, which she alone enjoyed for several years'.[44] Barry's fascinating life and impressive career have led to her being the inevitable focus of most studies on Restoration actresses, many of which continue the line of questioning into whether the actress should be considered a 'reified object or emergent professional'.[45] In recent years, Helga Drougge has produced a study examining Barry's performance in the plays of Thomas Southerne. Despite her raucous success in the bawdy sex-comedies of the 1670s, Barry's true calling was in the she-tragedies written for her by Southerne and his predecessor Thomas Otway in the late eighties and early nineties. Nicholas Rowe coined the term 'she-tragedies' to refer to the flurry of pathetic, female-centred tragedies which promoted scenes of distressed anguish from an innocent protagonist.[46] In her study, Drougge admits that the she-tragedies of Barry's oeuvre were 'a genre in which the actress is presented as a sexual object and frequently as the victim of sadistically colored male lust'.[47] Conversely, Drougge also refers to Barry as a 'creative collaborator of Otway' and asserts that 'her gift for subsiding into softness informs the character of Southerne's Isabella' in his *Fatal Marriage; or, The Innocent Adultery* (1694).[48] Kate Hamilton, meanwhile, explores the ways in which Barry directly contributed to her onstage persona within the burgeoning cult of celebrity and, manifesting the cross-binary intention of Payne's work, draws the conclusion that 'Barry's success in these roles was connected to her embodiment of physical and emotional victimization'.[49] In her work on eighteenth century character development, Lisa A. Freeman uses Barry as a specific early example of how an audience, when assigning value to a character, 'had to weigh fictional characters represented in words against character represented both in physical gestures and in actual bodies'.[50] It is worth nothing that whilst these critics focus on Barry's work in tragedy, her success in this genre also greatly impacted the

[44] Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies: Consisting of Critical Observations*, 3 vols. (London: Thomas Davies, 1785), II, p. 141.
[45] Payne, 'Reified Object or Emergent Professional', p. 13
[46] Nicholas Rowe, *The Plays and Poems of Nicholas Rowe, Volume III: The Late Plays*, ed. by Stephen Bernard, Claudine van Hensbergen, 5 vols. (London: Routledge, 2017), III, p. 10
[47] Helga Drougge, 'Love, Death and Mrs Barry in Thomas Southerne's Plays', *Comparative Drama*, 27.24 (1994) pp. 408-425, p. 410.
[48] Drougge, 'Love, Death and Mrs Barry', pp. 411-412.
[49] Kate Hamilton, 'The "Famous Mrs Barry": Elizabeth Barry and Restoration Celebrity', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 42 (2013), pp. 291-320. p. 296.
[50] Lisa A. Freeman, *Character's Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 38.

kinds of comic roles written for her as her career progressed. Following her starring role in Otway's *The Orphan; or, The Unhappy Marriage* (1680) Barry was often called upon to play sympathetic, sexually knowing but tragically inclined roles in otherwise comic plays, such as the unfortunately matched Lady Galliard in Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all* (1682) or the unhappily married Mrs Friendall in Thomas Southerne's *The Wives Excuse; or, Cuckolds Make Themselves* (1692).

For many years of Barry's career, her colleague Anne Bracegirdle served as the cheerfully innocent foil to Barry's increasingly complex and troubled female protagonists. In his *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740), Cibber describes how Bracegirdle's 'Youth and lively Aspect threw out such a Glow of Health and Chearfulness, that on the Stage few Spectators that were not past it could behold her without Desire', a desire which was evidently fortified by its incongruity with her chaste reputation.[51] Born on an unknown date in the late 1660s or early 1670s, Anne Bracegirdle is believed to have been raised completely within the world of theatre. Under the tutelage of Thomas and Mary Betterton, Bracegirdle is said to have appeared as a child on the stage. Although largely remembered as a comic performer, in what Elizabeth Howe refers to as 'young girl' roles, Bracegirdle also triumphed in the tragic genre, performing Semernia in Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter; or, The History of Bacon in Virginia* (1690) and Cleomira in Elkanah Settle's *Distress'd Innocence; or, The Princess of Persia* (1690) amongst many others.[52] Much like Barry, Bracegirdle's life offstage was as intriguing to her audience as her performance on it, despite laying claim to an overtly different sort of reputation. Maus explores how the fascination with Bracegirdle's offstage chastity encouraged her onstage 'portrayal of chaste women in distress'.[53] Bush-Bailey suggests that Bracegirdle was 'perceived as Mary Betterton's natural successor, not least by inheriting her "virtuous" mantle'.[54] Barry and Bracegirdle are perhaps best remembered for being two of the leaders, alongside fellow star

[51] Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (London: John Watts, 1704), p. 101.
[52] Howe, *First English Actresses,* pp. 180-183.
[53] Maus, '"Playhouse Flesh and Blood"', p. 601.
[54] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 80.

Thomas Betterton, of the Actors' Revolt of 1695, an event which is explored in great depth by Judith Milhous in *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields.* The three stage veterans split from the increasingly oppressive management of the United Company's Christopher Rich and, taking the cream of the company's acting talent with them, set up their own rebel troupe to be run for the exclusive interest of its workers. It is no surprise that this action has secured Barry and Bracegirdle's fame beyond their stagecraft, given its place in English theatre history as the first time a woman had been permitted to lay claim to shares in a theatre company directly as opposed to through inheritance.

Bush-Bailey's work demonstrates that the multi-layered aspects of a performer's reputation, stage persona, professional skills, company position, and background, are all factors which inform the characters written for them and the parts they play on stage. By focusing on the careers of these two undoubtedly fascinating women and by prioritising the 'perspective of the actress' in exploring Restoration systems of collaboration, Bush-Bailey begins a process of decentralising power from a few historically remembered playwrights and theatre managers and expands the scope of our understanding of theatrical production into a broader web of influence.[55] Whist this work is imperative in dismantling the still pervasive image encouraged by Howe of the first English actresses as little more than exploited victims, it is self-admittedly limited in scope due to its primary focus on two of the most successful actresses of the period. In focusing on Barry and Bracegirdle, Bush-Bailey's study necessarily follows their careers to the rebel Players' Company following the 1695 Actors' Revolt, in keeping with the trend of Restoration theatre criticism largely ignoring the work of the Patent Company during this period. Furthermore, Bush-Bailey is mostly interested in these actresses' collaborative work with Aphra Behn and her successors, Catherine Trotter, Delarivier Manley, and Mary Pix, as some of the first female playwrights to write roles for women.

[55] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 17.

This study serves to extend the work started by Bush-Bailey by looking into how other actresses, specifically those who were not primary performers, could be enactors of a subversive form of comedy and work to destabilise the overarching limitations of a patriarchally enforced theatrical system. It will do so by delving into the working relationships between these actresses and both female and male playwrights in order to develop an understanding of different gendered dynamics within the theatre. By unearthing the lives of three actresses who are severely underrepresented in performance studies of the period, this thesis will expand our understanding of collaboration as a new context within which we can reconstruct theatre development and include the actresses as active agents within this framework. Using this approach and the work of Tiffany Stern on rehearsal practices as a basis for a performance-studies driven methodology, it will look at a wider range of actresses who have been critically neglected in order to understand how their contributions as comic performers shaped and progressed the Restoration stage.

Restoration Stage Practices

Before setting out the argument of this thesis, it is necessary to clarify two aspects of the casting and rehearsal process of the Restoration stage. Firstly, within the small world of seventeenth-century theatre companies, playwrights predominantly wrote specific parts with specific actors in mind. In the dramatis personae of his comedy, *The Damoiselles à la Mode* (1667), Richard Flecknoe writes, 'Together with the Persons Represented in this Comedy, I have set down the Comedians, whom I intended shou'd Represent them, that the Reader might have half the pleasure of seeing it Acted, and a lively imagination might have the pleasure of it all intire'.[56] This is then followed by a list of the first production's cast under a heading, 'The Representers as they were first design'd'.[57] When the casting fell through or was not achieved in accordance with the playwright's intention, it

[56] Richard Flecknoe, *The Damoiselles a la Mode* (London: R. Flecknoe, 1667) (sig. A7r).
[57] Flecknoe, *Damoiselles* (sig. A8r).

was a notable impediment to the success of the play. In the dedication to the 1690 quarto of Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter,* performed shortly after her death, a supposed friend of Behn's known only as G. J claimed the play received a fairly poor reception due to 'many of the Parts being false Cast, and given to those whose Tallants and Genius's suited not our Authors Intention'.[58] This suggests an expectation of adhering to authorial casting wherever possible. Once parts were given, they were then considered the property and responsibility of that actor to be recast only with the express permission of both the actor and the company or on the actor's departure from the stage. Thomas Betterton's biographer, Robert Lowe, references this phenomenon in an anecdote concerning Barry and Bracegirdle, writing that the latter refused to take the senior actress's roles when they were offered to her by penny-pinching theatre managers, 'for Mrs. Bracegirdle was too wise to interfere with her famous companion's characters, and positively declined to play any part that was the acknowledged property of Mrs. Barry'.[59] Lowe goes on to note that 'no considerations whatever will reconcile the public to accept an inferior actor in a part for which a better representative is still on the stage'.[60] Restoration players had parts written for their specific skills. In the preface to *Woman's Wit; or, The Lady in Fashion* (1697), Colley Cibber laments that having 'of course prepar'd my Characters to the taste of those Actors' in Thomas Betterton's rebel company, he then needed to 'confine the Business of my Persons to the Capacity of different people' after moving it to the other playhouse.[61] This move was not entirely detrimental, however, as Cibber admits that so as 'not to miss the Advantage of Mr. Doggett's Excellent Action; I prepar'd a low Character'.[62] Whilst writing a comic part for a comic actor was by no means a new practice, it did mean that for the first time women were being written for in a comic vein which particularly suited their skills and abilities. Although Bush-Bailey and Kate Hamilton make a great deal out of Elizabeth Barry's parts being specifically created for her skill in tragic acting, it was in fact a universal practice to match a player with a part,

[58] G. J in Aphra Behn, *The Widdow Ranter; or, The History of Bacon in Virginia* (London: James Knapton, 1690) (sig. A2v).
[59] Robert Lowe, *Thomas Betterton* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1891), p. 143.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Colley Cibber, *Woman's Wit; or, The Lady in Fashion* (London: John Surton, 1697) (sig. A2v - A3r).
[62] Cibber, *Woman's Wit* (sig. A3r).

consequently giving them greater authority over their role than may be recognised in theatrical dynamics today.

The second basis of this study lies in the notion that, once cast, the performer held an integral role in developing the character. The composer and theatre historian Charles Dibdin wrote in his *History of the English Stage* (1800) that during this period actors could 'give a force and a truth to a character beyond what the author himself conceived […] Let it not then be credited that an actor is but a mere vehicle, a conveyance'.[63] Payne uses Rochester's Pygmalion-like transformation of Barry to suggest that 'playwrights worked closely with the companies during rehearsal, teaching parts, answering questions, and, in response to suggestions from the players, changing lines. This suggests that, far from functioning as passive objects in a spectacle, actresses shaped plays in rehearsal and performance'.[64] Whilst Payne's basis for this assertion is lacking in concrete evidence, Tiffany Stern helpfully interrogates the issue of Restoration rehearsal practices in her work *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan.* Stern reiterates this idea that, because parts were written for specific players and those players then owned those parts, the performance of characters was largely the purview of individual performers and their version of the character remained the ideal, even if a part were to be inherited by another actor. Stern writes about how 'authors' dependency on their actors gave the actors powerful status in the actor-author struggle; the actors' "right" to parts written for them gave them considerable freedom in the way they manifested those parts on the stage'.[65] This possessive actor/part relationship is not surprising, given the way in which a performer was expected to practise and develop their role. As Stern elucidates, once a play had been accepted by a single reader, usually a manager or senior actor, it was read to the full company by the playwright. For the actors, this was a chance to 'judge' the play and, on some occasions, halt its production, whilst the author was 'more concerned with the reading as a directorial training session'.[66] In many cases, this reading would be

[63] Charles Dibdin, *A History of the English Stage*, 5 vols. (London: Charles Dibdin, 1800), IV, p. 98.
[64] Payne, 'Reified Object or Emergent Professional', p. 32.
[65] Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 151.
[66] Stern, *Rehearsal,* p. 146.

the only chance for a writer to convey how they envisioned the play's performance before each actor was handed their parts, or 'sides', and went off to study in isolation.[67] For many, particularly secondary performers, these readings would be all their instruction until a full company rehearsal before an initial run if they were lucky, meaning the majority of character development would be done by the actors themselves. The more principal actors would benefit from instruction during these periods by fellow actors, company managers, or even interested amateurs, whilst secondary players were expected to muddle through on their own. Contrary to expectation, this enabled secondary performers to develop their characters in line with their own skills and interpretations to a greater degree than the principals. Charles Gildon, ventriloquising Thomas Betterton, writes that this period of solo study was required 'to enter thoroughly into the Nature of the Part, or to consider the Variation of the Voice, Looks, and Gestures', suggesting that the extra-textual development of the performance was in the hands of the actor.[68] Even where the written script was concerned, provided their cues remained recognisable to their fellow performers, an actor had a surprising amount of liberty to influence their speech.[69] Extemporisation was a common 'crime' committed by actors.[70] In his treatise *The Actor,* Sir John Hill claims the 'celebrated' Henry Norris, son of Mrs Norris, one of the earliest English actresses and the focus of this study's first chapter, 'introduc'd a thousand occasional pleasantries into every one of the ridiculous characters he was famous for playing'.[71] Stern discusses the 'enormous power' held by the actors in terms of trust.[72] The audience trusted the small group of reliable and recognisable actors to condemn or promote unknown playwrights or new plays according to their own judgements. A new play often lived or died based on the first night performance and if the actors had little faith in the play, they would simply not bother to rehearse it well, meaning 'the standards of their performances were public comments on the parts they were playing. In order to be successful, therefore, playwrights were under an obligation to accede to performers' wishes'.[73]

---

[67] Stern, *Rehearsal,* p. 148.
[68] Charles Gildon, *The Life of Thomas Betterton* (London: Robert Gosling, 1710), p. 15.
[69] Stern, *Rehearsal,* p. 141.
[70] John Hill, *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing* (London: R. Griffiths, 1750), p. 214.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., p. 149.
[73] Ibid., p. 149.

All this speaks to the importance of the performer in the author/actor dynamic and highlights the significance of their contributions to the formation of character. Writing on Anne Oldfield, one of the great comedians of the early eighteenth century and natural successor to performers such as Anne Bracegirdle, Ben Ross Schneider insists that when scrutinising the development of comedic roles 'the Rule must be to start with the actor and consider the development of the line as an historical process in relation to that actor. The actor precedes the role'.[74] Although writing on a slightly later period, Schneider's rule can be usefully applied to the very first female performers following the Interregnum. From the very early years in which women were legitimised in a theatrical space, they became active participants in the ongoing process of creation and character development. Throughout the forty years following the restoration of Charles II, through the unsettled years of the Exclusion Crisis and Whig ascendency, to the changing theatrical landscape of the 1690s under the newly formed constitutional monarchy, the women of Restoration theatre adapted and contributed to the development of a comedy which shifted and changed in line with the political and social landscape of its creation. By centring the contributions of the actress, this thesis puts forward a performance-based analysis of Restoration and late-Stuart theatre which demonstrates a collaborative approach to the creation of meaning in any given production. By looking at a body of work through the figure of the performer, we can unearth significations which are lost when each production is considered in isolation, or when only considering a playwright's collected works. This thesis attempts to continue the work of other feminist and performance scholars in uncovering these significations and promoting a broader understanding of the company dynamics of the Restoration stage which recognises the advancements made by the first English actresses alongside an appreciation of their struggles.

[74] Ben Ross Schneider, 'The Coquette-Prude as an Actress's Line in Restoration Comedy During the Time of Mrs Oldfield', *Theatre Notebook,* vol. 22, no. 4 (1968), pp. 143-156, p. 79.

The issue for the modern scholar becomes a matter of extracting the player's influence on the performed character from the textual influence of the poet. Using archival sources such as parish records, manuscripts, promptbooks, and contemporary accounts, this thesis will focus on performances enacted by three actresses throughout the years 1660 to 1703 in order to illuminate the specific ways in which these female cast members influenced the development of comedy over a long period of time. The particular performances of an actress can then be used to elucidate the contemporary social attitudes towards specific aspects of the female experience such as the process of ageing, the sexualisation of the body both intentional and unsolicited, and the boundaries and limitations of gender whilst also reflecting on the political, religious, and cultural environment which informed and shaped the theatre of the period. By examining the careers of individual actresses and analysing and comparing the plays in which they performed, this thesis will demonstrate an active and ongoing process of comic development.

Who and When?

The timeframe of this study begins at 1660, the year which saw the introduction of female performers to the professional, public stage following the restoration of Charles II to the English throne. 1660 was also the year in which Mrs Norris, the first actress to be studied in this thesis, took to the stage as one of the performers of William Davenant's company. Using newly discovered archival evidence to elucidate the biographical details of this little-known performer, the first chapter of this study examines the specific line developed by Norris of old women, gullible confidantes, and ageing bawds in opposition to the sexually alluring company stars, most notably the popular Elizabeth Barry until her departure from the stage in the mid-1680s. By investigating the deep-rooted gerontophobia of Restoration theatre, this chapter demonstrates that Norris's particular brand of comedy was used to both typify and challenge the degrading attitudes of late seventeenth-century theatre makers and audiences alike towards mockable elderly women. The second chapter follows the career of the

inimitable bawdy comedian, Elizabeth Currer, who made a great name for herself playing mercantile mistresses, opportunistic courtesans, and all matter of denigrated but wholly charming women from 1675 to 1689. Through an examination of the prologues and epilogues spoken by Currer and the manner in which they informed and extended her onstage persona, this chapter will interrogate some of the assumptions made about the sexually provocative performers of the period. It will also demonstrate how the sexuality of the actress could be enacted to convey meaning beyond the bodily voyeurism of a male-dominated audience, and, with the right performer, allow for a subversive form of commentary on social, political, and religious matters extending far beyond the playhouses. The final chapter of this thesis explores the career of Susanna Verbruggen, a character actress who became a company star following the 1695 Actors' Revolt. Verbruggen's first appearance was in 1681 and she stayed on the stage until her death in 1703. As a comedian who rarely strayed into tragedy, Verbruggen's instinctive talents for mimicry and low humour led to her being cast in several unconventional but fascinating displays of womanhood in the early years of her career. After becoming the primary female performer for the Patent Company, however, Verbruggen was increasingly cast in the conventional, lead roles which would normally have been reserved for Barry and Bracegirdle. This chapter investigates the detrimental effects this ostensible promotion and the shift towards eighteenth century sentimentalism had on Verbruggen's career in comedy.

Just as Woolf's recognition of Behn's importance was limited to the writer's primacy, too often our fascination with the first English actresses begins and ends with the unique circumstances of their existence in our cultural history. While their positions as women in a male-dominated industry is important, so anticipatory is it of the same industry today, it is necessary to consider their work beyond the confines of the patriarchal institutions which created them. As active and dynamic contributors to the creative process, the first women to legally and legitimately perform on the public English stage contributed to the development of a female-inclusive comic genre. By emphasising the contributions of the performer as an active agent of play production, this thesis will broaden our

recognition and understanding of how the Restoration and late seventeenth-century stage inspired and encouraged often challenging advancements in female characterisation and comedy.

Chapter One
Elizabeth Norris

Far from achieving the contemporary and historical success of performers such as Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle, the actress cited in cast lists simply as 'Mrs Norris' has been all but forgotten. Listed just underneath the 'Principal Actresses' Davenport, Davies, Saunderson and Long, the name 'Mrs Norris' appears in John Downes' record of the original members of Sir William Davenant's new acting company, formed in 1660.[1] This company would soon become the Duke's Company, making Mrs Norris one of the earliest actresses to appear on the English stage. The first play in which she is known to have performed is a production of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612), thought to have been first acted by the company in 1662 and reprised several times over the successive years with Norris returning to the role of Cariola; but given the tendency of cast lists to omit actors' names in the first year or so following the Restoration coupled with Downes' assertion that she was a member of Davenant's first company, it is likely she appeared in earlier plays.[2] From her time playing Cariola, a serving-woman turned confidante to a noble Duchess who is ultimately punished for their association, the roles of Mrs Norris serve as a sort of character directory for all the relegated, neglected, mistreated but ultimately vital women of the burgeoning Restoration stage. These parts would become particularly important to Norris's contributions to the comedic forms of wit, manners and intrigue which developed during this period. In the explanatory notes to his edition of *The Works of Aphra Behn* (1915) Montague Summers describes Mrs Norris as 'One of those useful and, indeed, indispensable performers who, without ever attaining any prominent position, contribute more essentially than is often realized to the success of a play'.[3] This summary of a single actress epitomises an entire breadth of contributions made by similar 'bit-part' actors who are often neglected

---

[1] John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus,* ed. by Montague Summers (London: Fortune Press, 1928), p. 20.
[2] Van Lennep, *London Stage,* I, p. 56.
[3] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn,* I, p. 445.

by critical studies of the period. The lack of any significant study on the supporting characters created and played by Norris is indicative of a wider disregard for this essential aspect of Restoration theatre. Not only are the characters Norris created, and the many similar roles adopted by those who came after her, fundamental in satisfactorily achieving much of the comic potential inherent in these play-texts but, when they are most deftly handled by a capable and skilled actor, have the potential to reveal varied and challenging characterisations beyond the necessarily restrictive portrayals of gendered romance, sexuality and morality applied to comedy's more conventional leading roles.

As Robert D. Hume discusses at length, the stock nature of the famous comedies of the period required their content to be formulaic in the extreme, providing such recognisable characters as the oblivious fop or the alluring coquette-prude.[4] Rather than this depreciating the need for further study, the specific lines and character portrayals of individual actors, which can be seen arising repeatedly across a range of similarly formatted plays, can be used to re-evaluate the manner in which these formulas were stretched, manipulated and renegotiated. Drawing from Lisa Freeman's work on eighteenth-century theatre which stresses character development as both 'manifold and incongruous', we can examine an individual actress's repertory within this framework of renegotiation to ascertain the delicate progression of their place in the theatrical sphere and form a new appreciation of how each individual performance evokes different, and often daring, challenges to the status quo, not to mention elucidate the subtle diversity of late seventeenth-century plays.[5] As an actress who remained entrenched within her own line, appearing heavily in plays which would come to encompass the contemporary 'sex comedies' of the period, Norris is an ideal figure through which to begin this re-evaluation of certain characters, in her case specifically female characters which exist outside the prominent but limited narratives most often ascribed to the company's leading women. In other words, Norris performed the 'other' women of Restoration comedy. In particular, Norris created a

[4] Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth-Century* (London, Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 128.
[5] Lisa A. Freeman, *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 19.

special line with her ‘capital personations of old women and angry dowagers’ for which Summers claims she became ‘well known’ and ‘won considerable applause’.[6] During her time with the Duke’s Company, Norris originated the roles of at least twenty four characters in a career spanning as many years, predominantly those of old age, low status, and few prospects.[7] The women Norris performed, whether an original role for a short-lived piece or a stock character reprised for many years, both typify and challenge contemporary attitudes towards these plays’ ‘other’ women. Whilst not the most prolific actress of the period, Norris’s career can be used to examine the tumultuous trends of the 1660s and the raucous success of the formulaic sex-comedies of the 1670s.

This chapter will begin by revealing previously unknown biographical facts of Mrs Norris’s life in order to contextualise her position as both a working company member and the matriarch of an acting family which held a stage presence until at least the 1730s. It will then go on to explore the generic conventions of Restoration comedy’s treatment of its elderly figures and the aggressive, even violent, attitudes towards elderly women, particularly those of low birth, through Norris’s characterisations of Lady Dupe in John Dryden’s *Sir Martin Mar-all; or, The Feign’d Innocence* (1668) and Goody Fells in Edward Revet’s *The Town Shifts; or, The Suburb-Justice* (1671).[8] This will be followed by a critical comparison of four examples of Norris’s onstage partnership with company star, Elizabeth Barry, in the works of Aphra Behn, *The Rover; or, The Banish’d Cavaliers* (1677), *The Feign’d Curtizans; or, A Nights Intrigue* (1679), *The Revenge; or, A Match in Newgate* (1680), and *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681). The recognisable partnership of Norris and Barry as old companion and youthful protagonist in these plays exemplifies the manner in which Behn actively complicated her supporting female characters, whilst working in collaboration with their performers,

[6] Summers, *Roscius Anglicanus*, p. 175; Summers, *Works of Aphra Behn*, I, p. 445.
[7] In order to ascertain the number of roles in which Norris performed throughout her career, I drew on and correlated several sources including Van Lennep’s *The London Stage*, J. H. Wilson’s *All the King’s Ladies*, Philip H. Highfill’s A *Biographical Dictionary of actors, actresses, musicians, dancers, managers & other stage personnel in London, 1660-1800,* 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), XI, and Gilli Bush-Bailey’s *Treading the Bawds.*
[8] The 1668 quarto of *Sir Martin Mar-all; or, The Feign’d Innocence* does not include actors’ names but John Downes supplies an original cast list in *Roscius Anglicanus*, p. 28.

to provide a depth and nuance not normally associated with such comic bit-parts. Finally, this chapter will focus on Norris's role as Mrs Clacket in Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress* as a demonstration of a supporting female role which is notable for its narrative agency and moral freedom which is greatly informed by Norris's performance.

Uncovering Mrs Norris

Until now, little has been discovered to account for the life of Mrs Norris, a woman who was to make a living as perennial foil and cheerful comrade to the great stars of the time, lurking at the periphery of the London stage. However, through new archival evidence this study reveals the more elusive facts of her life and provides an understanding of the career of an important contributor to the success of the Duke's Company. Mrs Norris was born Elizabeth Topping in May of 1636 to parents Peter and Elizabeth.[9] At the age of 25 she married the bit-part actor Henry Norris and lived with him in a property on Longacre, a stone's throw from the theatres in which the pair would spend their lives working.[10] Although both Elizabeth's and Henry's names appear consistently in cast lists, the two never reached great levels of fame and were never blessed financially, with Henry managing to pay rates on his property only intermittently between 1658 and 1700. In his *Biographical Dictionary of Actors* (1978-1993), Philip H. Highfill claims Henry Norris 'to have been in financial straits' considering that 'Richard Andrews petitioned against him on 11 August 1669; Hannah Baker went to law against him for a debt on 8 February 1670'.[11] Similarly, in 1671 one 'John Beard', a local butcher, filed a petition against him for repayment of a debt of £3/18/-, suggesting the couple faced great difficulty in feeding their growing family.[12]

---

[9] 'Elizabeth Topping', *Baptism of Elizabeth Topping, 18th May 1636* (St. Martin-In-The-Fields, Westminster, London (UK) Parish Records 1529-1900).
[10] 'Henricus Norris and Elizabathae Topping', *Marriage of Henry Norris and Elizabeth Topping, 20th October 1661* (St-Martin-In-The-Fields, Westminster, London (UK) Parish Records 1529-1900), 'Henry Norris', *Henry Norris, Northside, Longacre, 1658 - 1699* (Wesminster Rate Books, London (UK) 1634-1900).
[11] Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary,* XI, p. 48.
[12] London, National Archives (LC 5/14, p. 69).

One of the few concrete facts to survive about Elizabeth Norris is that she was the mother of the celebrated comic actor, named for his father, Henry, but more widely remembered as ‘Jubilee Dicky’ due to his winning performance in George Farquhar’s *The Constant Couple; or, A Trip to Jubilee* (1700). Before having her son, Elizabeth Norris gave birth to a daughter who was named Mary and was baptised on the 24th of August 1662 at St. Martin-In-The-Fields.[13] Like the rest of her family, Mary would also embark on a career in theatre, albeit a far less successful one than her brother, hence her inclusion in the anonymously authored *Satyr on the Players* (see Introduction, p. 17) which violently criticised the ‘Scandalous’ lives of actors and actresses who made a living publicly parading themselves for money.[14] There is some critical confusion concerning the stanza on Elizabeth Norris and her daughter. Montague Summers’s version reads:

> Then Norris and her Daughter, pleasant are;
>
> One’s very young, the other desperate fair;
>
> A very equal well-proportion’d Pair.
>
> The Girl’s of use, faith, as the matter goes;
>
> For she must ——— to get her Father’s Cloths[15]

However, there has been some dispute over the years about the beginning of the fourth line and its transcription from the original manuscript. There appeared a version of the text in *The Posthumous Works of Mr. Samuel Butler* (1715) erroneously attributing the work to him and claiming to be

---

[13] In the Explanatory Notes to his transcription of ‘Satyr on the Players’, Summers writes, ‘The son of Mrs. Norris, “Jubilee Dicky”, was famous, but I believe her daughter has not been identified. If the younger lady were married she would, of course, appear in the printed casts under her husband's name, and she may have been one of the many minor per formers concerning whom nothing is known save that they played some small roles of trifling importance’ – Montague Summers, *Roscius Anglicanus,* p. 286; ‘Maria Norris’, *Baptism of Mary Norris to Henry and Elizabeth Norris, 24th August 1662* (St-Martin-In-The-Fields, Westminster, London (UK) Parish Records 1529-1900).

[14] Anon, *Satyr on the Players* in *Roscius Anglicanus,* p. 55.

[15] Summers, *Satyr,* pp. 55-59, p. 59.

'Publish'd from Original M.SS and Scarce and Valuable Pieces formerly Printed' which reads much the same as Summers's transcription in the fourth line, although with variations elsewhere in the text.[16] However, there is a transcribed handwritten copy of the satire in a collection of 'Satyrs and Lampoons' held at the British Library which has the line read, 'Yet Hall's of use', supposedly in reference to a minor actress, Elizabeth Hall, who worked for The King's Company.[17] The discovery of Mary Norris's name, however, lends credence to John Harold Wilson's assertion in *All the King's Ladies* (1958) that in the original manuscript the fourth line of the stanza lampooning the mother/daughter pair reads 'Yet Mall's of use'.[18] Regardless, the coupling of the two appearing alongside one another as a mother/daughter pair demonstrates a recognisable professional relationship existing beyond the personal one they possessed. Mary Norris performed in some minor roles in the 1680s and, in contrast to Montague Summers's miscasting of the part to Mrs Price, it was Mary Norris in the 1681 production of *The Second Part of the Rover* playing Lucia, Ariadne's 'Kinswoman' and 'a Girl', whilst her mother took on the role of Petronella Elenora, thereby accounting for the double appearance of the two actresses' shared name in the dramatis personae.[19] Elizabeth Norris was buried on the 17th of May 1682, just a month after she appeared as Mrs Clacket in Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress* in one of her finest roles.[20] The recovery of Norris's death date indicates that the few subsequent mentions of 'Mrs Norris' in cast lists after this date, as Chloris in a 1683 production of Thomas Otway's *The Atheist; or, The Second Part of the Soldier's Fortune* (1684), Amie in the 1684 revival of Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crewe; or, The Merry Beggars* (1652), and as a singer in Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1685), are references to Mary Norris and not her mother, as believed by Highfill.[21] Although Norris died in 1682 and her daughter only played a few small parts, there

[16] *The Posthumous Works of Mr. Samuel Butler, (author of Hudibras) Compleat in One Volume: Written in the Time of the Grand Rebellion, and in the Reign of King Charles II.: Being a Collection of Satires, Speeches, and Reflections Upon Those Times* (1715) third edition (London: R. Reilly, 1730) p. 123.
[17] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 60.
[18] Wilson, *All the King's Ladies,* p. 175.
[19] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn* I, p. 445; Aphra Behn, *The Second Part of the Rover* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1681) (sig. A3r).
[20] 'Elizabeth Norris', *Burial of Elizabeth Norris, 17th May 1682* (St-Martin-In-The-Fields, Westminster, London (UK) Parish Records 1529-1900).
[21] Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary*, XI, p. 50.

remained a Norris on the stage until at least 1737 when Elizabeth Norris, great-granddaughter to the focus of this study, left the stage.[22]

Elizabeth Norris's performance as Petronella Elenora in Behn's *Second Part of the Rover*, an 'out-worn' bawd to the beautiful courtesan La Nuche, is indicative of the character types Norris most often inhabited.[23] Summarising succinctly in his *Biography* Highfield writes that 'Like Henry Norris, Mrs Norris was a utility performer, good at dowagers, old women, nurses, bawds, governesses, and the like. Yet she was later described as quite young'.[24] For even in her relative youth, Norris had a penchant for comic displays of old age which spoke to a fashionable contemporary aversion, often performing peripheral characters who harbour great bitterness and resentment towards the play's central youthful protagonists, or else are formed to be mocked and abused by both characters and audience alike. The discovery of Norris's birth date tells us she would have been in her mid-forties when taking on the role of Petronella Elenora. Within this play, the ageing bawd appears '*Dress'd like a Girl of fifteen*' in order to take a bath which will supposedly make her young and beautiful, transforming her 'Gray Hairs' and 'wither'd limbs'.[25] The comedy of this exhibition relies on the ludicrous incongruity between her dress and her appearance. One can assume Norris was required to physically alter her form, as well as use stage make up, to create a spectacle of age beyond her years in order to exaggerate this incongruity. Due to performances such as this, the trends and patterns of Norris's career can be used to illuminate the disparaging, violent way in which Restoration conventions, particularly in association with the burgeoning style of manners comedy, treated its secondary female characters. This examination of her career will also illustrate the particular skills of Elizabeth Norris in forming deeply comic, complex and often sympathetic portrayals of consistently maligned women.

---

[22] Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary*, XI, p. 47.
[23] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 25.
[24] Highfield, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 49.
[25] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 25.

Throughout the 1660s Norris picked up a variety of small parts, acting as serving women, maids, and companions, such as the aforementioned Cariola in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Mirza in Roger Boyle's *Tragedy of Mustapha* (1668) first performed in 1665. It was not until the 1667 production of the immensely successful John Dryden comedy *Sir Martin Mar-all*, in which Norris performed the part of Lady Dupe, that she was first recognised for her propensity towards playing humorous, readily mockable, older women. It did not take long for other writers to make use of her skills and over the course of her career Norris would accumulate such parts as Goody Fells, the litigious widow in Edward Revet's *The Town Shifts*; Goody Rash, an ageing herb-woman in John Crowne's *The Country Wit* (1676); Nuarcha, an old maid 'almost undone for want of an Husband' in Lewis Maidwell's *The Loving Enemies* (1680) and, in the final years of her career, a variety of conniving, amoral, complex figures at the hands of Aphra Behn.[26] Of all these, however, it was her role as the ageing Lady Dupe that she would most often be called upon to resurrect. This would become the standard for the many characters which would formulate her professional life.

Painting the elderly as mockable, disposable figures was a common Restoration trope. In a section on Restoration comedy in *The English Humourists* (1867), William Makepeace Thackeray writes, 'Money is for youth, love is for youth, away with the old people'.[27] Herein lies the fundamental nature of Restoration comedy's aversion to its elderly figures. Espousing, at least ostensibly, the libertine values and Francophile ideologies of Charles II's court, the comedies which sprung up in the mid-1660s and became prodigiously popular in the following decade were decidedly averse to their elderly characters. This attitude would persist until the encroaching sentimentality of the eighteenth century. The comedies of the 60s, 70s, and 80s are littered with old men who attempt to play the sexual politics of their youthful sons and are roundly mocked and often jilted, such as Sir

[26] Lewis Maidwell, *The Loving Enemies* (London: John Guy, 1680) (sig. A4v).
[27] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Stark Young (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1911), p. 54.

Feeble Fainwou'd in Aphra Behn's *The Luckey Chance; or, An Alderman's Bargain* (1687).[28] Ageing women, widowed or unmarried, must scheme and trick their way into younger company only to find themselves the oblivious target of the young protagonist's jests, recognisable in Lady Flippant of William Wycherley's *Love in a Wood; or, St James's Park* (1672).[29] As R. C. Sharma highlights, in these characters 'there is nowhere any recognition of the goodness, nobility and wisdom of old age'.[30] Instead, the audience will be met with a constant reminder of the feeble, pathetic debilitation of a creeping infirmity which will never blemish the insurmountable protection of their progeny's youth and vigour. These characters are the antithesis of the Restoration libertine and must be appropriately punished for their continued existence through a cruel but greatly effective ridicule. In his book, *Staging Ageing* (2013), Michael Mangan describes the Restoration attitude as 'youth obsessed', pointing out that whilst 'the upper classes tended to age less early than the lower, in all sectors of society women tended to be defined as "old" earlier than men', suggesting elderly women, particularly those of few prospects, were the most ideal targets for this form of age-averse comedy.[31]

The playwrights of the period did not just use the elderly as points of obstruction or rivals for the 'real' couples to overcome, but rather used old age itself as an intrinsically funny attribute. In the anonymously authored 1682 play *Mr Turbulent; or, The Melanchollicks* the character of the aptly named Lady Medlar, played by Elizabeth Currer, upon being accused of ageing honourably retorts, 'Age is good for nothing, but to spoil good Faces, brisk Wits, and active Bodies; to bring Wrinkles, gray Hairs, moist Eyes, slavering Lips, Aches in the Joynts, and Gouts in the Limbs – Age I say, is a most wicked and abominable thing'.[32] So many aspects of ageing, in the very least at an outward, representative level, translate to cheap and easy comedy on the stage, often entrenched in a particularly aggressive or even violent form of punishment. Perennial victims of cuckolding, jilting,

[28] Aphra Behn, *The Luckey Chance; or, An Alderman's Bargain* (London: W. Canning, 1687).
[29] William Wycherley, *Love in a Wood* (London: H. Herringman, 1672).
[30] R. C. Sharma, *Themes and Conventions in the Comedy of Manners* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p. 126.
[31] Michael Mangan, *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance and the Narrative of Decline* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013), p. 99.
[32] Anon, *Mr Turbulent; or, The Melanchollicks* (London: Simon Neal, 1682), p. 70.

impotence and embarrassment, the men of Restoration comedy are forced to confront their own aggrandised self-importance in a world dominated by a generation who has long since disposed of any need for them. As George Etherege explored in his popular comedy, *The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), for every Young Bellair using cunning and guile to gain the hand of his Emilia, there is an Old Bellair, consistently behind the curve and utterly failing to outwit his handsome, witty and deceptive son.[33] As for the older women, they are consigned to be vain, jealous, conniving and ridiculous in their desperation. Although variations exist, the intergenerational clashes which make up so much of the conflict in Restoration comedy falls largely into two categories: the elderly characters who fear their replacements snapping at their heels and attempt to dominate and control them, such as Mr Pinchwife or Old Lady Squeamish in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675); or the jealous superannuated profligates desperate to retain the youth, beauty and libido they can see so plainly in their young companions, recognisable in Old Fumble of Thomas D'Urfey's *A Fond Husband; or, The Plotting Sisters* (1676).[34] These roles may have been remembered because they are successful in their comic derision of an older generation but in reality only Michael Mohun in the role of Pinchwife, as a veteran actor of the pre-civil war theatres, would have been of an appropriate age to match his character's seniority.[35] Largely these older parts were taken on by relatively young actors lending the roles an imitative form of derisive comedy, but often in these plays there is no middle ground, no middle-age, especially for the female characters. As Elisabeth Mignon points out in her book on the subject, 'they are young; then suddenly they are old'.[36] This was certainly the case for Elizabeth Norris when, at the age of thirty one, she was cast in the role of the Old Lady Dupe.

The character of Dupe is typical of contemporary portrayals of privileged older women who, although wealthy and connected, are often duplicitous in their scheming and immoral in their

[33] George Etherege, *The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (London: Henry Herringman, 1676).
[34] William Wycherley, *The Country Wife* (London: Thomas Dring, 1675); Thomas D'Urfey, *A Fond Husband; or, The Plotting Sisters* (London: James Magnes, 1676).
[35] Highfill suggests Michael Mohun was born in 1616, making him sixty four when he originated the role of Pinchwife - Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary*, X, p. 271.
[36] Elisabeth Mignon, *Crabbed Age and Youth: The Old men and Women in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1947), p. 21.

instruction. Much of *Sir Martin* would not look out of place in a conventional comedy of manners, including the play's subplot in which the aged Lady Dupe trains her niece to take advantage of her wealthy but married suitor, Lord Dartmouth. However, there are elements of Dryden's popular comedy which harken back to the dramatic predilection for gerontophobia employed long before the 1642 closure of the theatres. This particular brand of comic vitriol can be traced back throughout history. From Pliny's assertion that menstrual blood causes wine to sour, makes crops wither, rusts iron and turns dogs mad it was not too big a leap for people from the medieval period onwards to believe that the menopause caused a retention of these foul humours, essentially turning women evil in their dotage. Shulamith Shahar elucidates that 'the old bawd who panders to fornication and crime, who prepares love philtres and deadly potions, is acting out the physiological changes taking place in her organism'.[37] Although the particulars of female anatomical understanding developed, the distaste towards elderly women survived in literary and artistic imagery well through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, translating disgust into mockery and derision. Acted by Elizabeth Norris at the age of thirty one, the character of Lady Dupe is described as 'The old Lady' in the dramatis personae of the 1668 quarto.[38] Aside from the suggestion of tokenism provided by the employment of the definite article, this demarcation of Norris's character in print is indicative of the still appealing penchant for creating an intrinsic 'otherness' between a text's protagonists and its elder characters, a discrimination employed with particular virulence towards women. With qualities that Norris will use in many of her later characters, Lady Dupe is at once a cunning facilitator, cheating jilt and primarily, according to the dramatis personae, an old lady with all the evil humours associated therein. To some, such as Sir Martin and his servant Warner, she is 'the greatest Jill in Nature' who 'loves nothing but herself and draws all lines to that corrupted centre' but to her niece, Mrs Christian, at least in the first instance, she is a teacher and guide to the ways of sexual intrigue.[39] Playing off her age from the start, Dupe says, 'But to our business; Cousin: you are young, but I am old, and have had all the Love-experience that a discreet Lady ought to have; and therefore let me instruct you about the Love this

[37] Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain,* trans. by Yael Lotan (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 44.
[38] John Dryden, *Sir Martin Mar-all; or, The Feign'd Innocence* (London: H. Herringman, 1668) (sig. A2v).
[39] Dryden, *Sir Martin*, p. 39.

rich Lord makes to you'.[40] These themes of immoral instruction, sexual deviance and gendered manipulation were to become a staple of the genre but, more specifically, deeply informed Norris's characterisations of liminal women, hovering as much at the edge of appropriateness, as the scene itself. The aversion to wealthy, older women of means depicted in this play is an audience-pleasing trait Norris freely manipulates and would return to many times in her career. When a part requires her to take on the mantle of those poor and despised like Revet's Goody Fells, however, the jovial disgust turns bitter and a real fear-driven hatred becomes apparent.

The discrimination against the elderly has always been deeply informed by delineations in wealth and class. Richard Steele comments in his *Discourse Concerning Old Age* written in 1688 that 'Old people are commonly despised, especially when they are not supported with good estates'.[41] Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford explore this disparity in their book, *Women in the Early Modern Period* (1998), claiming that while some women might gain authority in old age, this 'depended on a woman's social status, health, wealth, power of patronage, and character', specifying that 'in practice, many old women were scorned and neglected'.[42] The fear of old age and subsequent discrimination against the elderly was not a new phenomenon to the Restoration period, particularly with regards to women and menopause. In the popular Medieval tract, *De secretis mulierum* (n.d), the unknown author writes of menopausal women that they 'being old have almost no natural heat left to consume and control this matter, especially poor women who live on nothing but coarse meat, which greatly contributes to this phenomenon. These women are more venomous than others'.[43] Originally written in 1584, Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) was reprinted in 1665 with nine additional anonymously-authored chapters. *Discoverie* set out to shine a light on both the intentional acts of trickery and the encouragement of superstitions which led to a belief in witchcraft. It served as

[40] Dryden, *Sir Martin*, p. 2.
[41] Richard Steele, *A Discourse Concerning Old Age* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1688), p. 171
[42] Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 193.
[43] Unknown, *De Secretis Mulierum* (U.D) quoted in D. Jacquart and C. Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Adamson (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), p. 75.

a defence for the vulnerable, particularly poor old women, who were unfairly targeted by accusations of witchcraft. Condemning the practice of assuming that the death of livestock was related to witch's poison, Scot wrote, 'We for our parts would have killed five poore women, before we would suspect one Rich butcher'.[44] Even whilst defending this marginalised community, Scot himself perpetuated a harmful image of elderly women claiming that menopausal women were more prone to melancholic 'fantasies' due to the 'stopping of their monethlie melancholike flux or issue of bloud' and 'through their weakness both of body and brain'.[45] The seventeenth century saw the rise and decline of brutal witch-hunts, driven by a waning but still pervasive superstition designed to isolate and abuse a specifically vulnerable sect of society. In his 1665 tract entitled *Daimonomageia*: *a small treatise of sicknesses and diseases from Witchcraft,* William Drage describes of witches that they are 'most Females, most old women, and most poor'.[46] Drage goes on to suggest that if a sickness caused by a witch cannot be transferred to a horse or a dog, then one must threaten and beat the witch to remove it.[47] Providing evidence to support this prejudice, Stevie Davies writes in her book, *Unbridled Spirits* (1998), that 'around 90 per cent of known witches in England during the seventeenth century were women; of these, 45 per cent were widows or spinsters, chiefly elderly and on the vulnerable margins of poor communities'.[48] Stemming from a fear-based superstition and an active process of marginalisation, the seventeenth century saw the simple act of growing old an ample reason to be abused.

Such is the case in Edward Revet's *The Town Shifts.* The adventures of the roguish gallants Lovewell, Friendly and Faithfull as they attempt to cheat their impoverished Landlady should be predictable to anyone even vaguely familiar with the conventions of the Restoration stage. However, it is the particular venom with which Norris's character is treated in this play which best highlights the

[44] Scot, *Discoverie*, p. 120.
[45] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: William Brome, 1584), p. 54.
[46] William Drage, *Diamonomageia: a small treatise of sicknesses and diseases from witchcraft* (London: John Dover, 1665), p. 23
[47] Ibid.
[48] Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London: The Women's press, 1998), p. 44.

depths these playwrights were willing to trudge in order to gain a laugh at the expense of older, vulnerable women. Although Lady Dupe is considered to be an immoral, meddling and tyrannical old lady 'whom Hell confound', she faces nothing like the degree of abusive, degrading language heaped upon Goody Fells.[49] Called at various points, 'Dame damnable', 'old, ugly, abominable', 'Hell-Cat, with your Hoggs face' and 'you pernicious old Whore', a pattern of violent mistreatment becomes clear that goes far beyond the expected approach to even the most corrupt male characters in the Restoration canon.[50] Justice Frump's instruction, 'Woman, woman, let your betters be serv'd before you', Lovewell's avowal to 'kick you, til you curse your own Blaspheming tongue' and Faithfull's threat to 'feague you with this faggot-stick' are just three of numerous examples in which the text insists on threatening, insulting, exploiting and abusing Gammer Fells.[51] Within the performative space of the theatre, this character promotes the audience's aversion for elderly women by emphasising her litigiousness, greed and hypocrisy for comic effect. In the final scene, Norris's character readily takes a bribe to claim ignorance of a prisoner she herself accused. It was not just in their immorality but in the expectation that they could be nothing but immoral that these women, particularly those unmarried or widowed, became a constant source of mirth particularly in relation to their vanity, lewdness, and sexual promiscuity. It was in the embodiment of these women that Norris found great dramatic success. Both Lady Dupe and Goody Fells are demonstrative of the simple types of early roles Norris was called upon to play, presented as old and past their prime, taken to deceit in their majority and mocked by the leading gallants of their texts. Lady Dupe retains some dignity, however. She is an active participant in the machinations and trickery of the play's prime plot, she commands wealth and a title, not to mention a certain distinction which comes from having had all that 'love-experience' she is so eager to share with her impressionable niece. Consequently, Lord Dartmouth's abuse can only be reserved to under the breath mutterings, mild curses, and audience asides. Not so for the greedy, litigious, hypocrite Gammer Fells. Fells is subjected to a tirade of cruelty and real threats of physical violence reserved only for the most abject, the most contemptible,

[49] Dryden, *Sir Martin*, p. 39.
[50] Edward Revet, *The Town Shifts; or, The Suburb-Justice* (London: Thomas Dring, 1671), p. 8, p. 28, p. 29.
[51] Revet, *Town Shifts*, p.30, p. 52, p. 28.

the most downtrodden subject on the Restoration stage: the poor, old, single woman. These subtle and telling differences found in Norris's variety of characters can elucidate the delicate inferences available to contemporary viewers of her work. These characters, although peripheral and most often used to highlight, contrast, or assist the formation of the play's often young, central figures, are fundamental to the successful implementation of the plays' comic potential.

Of all the writers to understand this potential and make use of the binary between the actions of a play's youthful, carefree female characters and the comic labouring of the older woman whose conveyance Norris was particularly adept, it was Aphra Behn who was by far the most successful. From her early appearances as serving women, Norris's career with the Duke's Company would culminate in a string of successful collaborations with Behn. This chapter will go on to examine the ways in which Elizabeth Norris and Aphra Behn created secondary characters which not only challenged the aforementioned conventions forced upon Restoration comedy's forsaken older women but actively used and manipulated these same conventions for great comic success.

Elizabeth Norris and Aphra Behn

By the late 1670s Elizabeth Norris had been a member of the Duke's Company for nearly two decades and her penchant for lewd, conniving old women had become a dependable aspect of the stage at Dorset Garden. It was not until 1677, however, that Norris first inhabited a character written by another woman. In the years following, Norris performed in at least five plays known to have been written by Aphra Behn, more than any other playwright in the entire span of her career. The five roles written by Aphra Behn for Elizabeth Norris are Callis in *The Rover*, Phillipa in *The Feign'd Curtizans*, Mrs Dunwell in *The Revenge*, Petronella Elenora in *The Second Part of The Rover*, and Mrs Clacket in *The City Heiress*. In the first four of these plays Norris is partnered with the theatre's rising star, Elizabeth Barry, resulting in a mindful integration of the old and the new and relying

heavily on the popular libertine-driven trope of intergenerational conflict. At the beginning of this period, the nature of their on-stage relationship insinuated some form of maternal surrogacy as Norris took on the parts of governesses, duennas, and companions. As the partnership developed, and Behn's writing became more invested in an exploration of the denigrated woman, the affiliation between the two actresses evolved to become one of bittersweet portrayals of sexual commodity as the two inhabited the roles of elderly bawd and desirable courtesan. The collaboration between Elizabeth Norris and Elizabeth Barry would have been a recognisable union, enticing customers during periods of company growth and waning attendance alike. The contrasting image of the aged, sexually unappealing matron pitched against Barry's youthful vivacity is a trope repeatedly revisited by Behn, suggesting a conscious attempt to exploit the two actresses' opposing but complementary on-stage personae. The early manifestations of this partnership saw Norris act as custodian and complicit confidante to Barry's 'wild' but naïve ingénue.[52] Of the plays in which Barry, Behn, and Norris collaborated the first, *The Rover*, continues to be the axis around which Behn's reputation revolves whilst *The Feign'd Curtizans,* which sustained the theme of chasing dashing cavaliers beyond the borders of England into an exotic Mediterranean setting, was lauded by Gerard Langbaine in his *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* to be a 'Comedy I take to be one of the best she has written'.[53]

Written just two years apart, the narrative of both *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Curtizans* centres around two young but rebellious women, Hellena and Cornelia, accompanied by their sensible but love-struck sisters, attempting to free themselves from a fate imposed upon them by familial duty and the burdens of their station and gender. The plot of *The Rover* is borrowed heavily from Sir Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso; or, The Wanderer* (1654) and, although *The Feign'd Curtizans* is heralded as a Behn original, it is clear that she was narratively inspired once again by schemes of

[52] Aphra Behn, *The Rover; or, The Banish'd Cavaliers* (London: John Amery, 1677), p. 2.
[53] Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford: George West, 1691), p. 20.

sexual intrigue, deceptive portrayals of rank and status, and the desires of restricted women.[54] Performed by Elizabeth Barry, both Hellena and Cornelia disguise themselves as women who were, by the standards of the day, ignoble but sexually liberated. The former dresses as a 'Gipsie' and the latter a 'Curtizan' in order to delay their being sent to convents by request of their absent but domineering fathers.[55] Masquerading in this manner, Hellena and Cornelia soon draw the attention of Behn's strutting libertines, the titular rover Willmore and the inconstant Galliard. Following a series of increasingly farcical actions embedded within the dependable comic tropes of cross-dressing, mistaken identity, and night-time escapades, the plays' heroines manage to persuade their libertine suitors towards marriage, thereby saving them from the dispassionate reconciliatory matches reserved for some of Behn's more complex female characters, such as the Lady Galliard of her *City Heiress*. Shadowing the two pairs of sisters through both plays is Elizabeth Norris. *The Rover* sees Norris inhabit the sympathetic but unwitting dupe in her role as the girls' duenna, Callis, whilst as Phillipa, companion and accomplice to Cornelia and Euphemia, Norris actively encourages the duplicitous design hatched by her young charges. Considering the proliferation within both plays of jealous brothers, secret trysts, ridiculed Englishmen and the tragedy of unrequited romance, it would be easy to read the plots of the two plays as altogether indistinguishable, but this would ignore the deft subtlety with which Aphra Behn handles her uniquely spirited female characters and the relationships that exist between them.

The Rover opens with the two sisters deep in conversation about their mutually hopeless futures as Hellena gently needles her sister for her blushes and sighs 'over the fine English colonel', Belvile.[56] Florinda quickly admonishes her impish sister with the request, 'Prithee, be not so wild', suggesting 'a maid design'd for a Nun, ought not to be so Curious in a discourse of Love'.[57] The entrance of their officious brother and the watchful governess, Callis, shortly interrupts their free-

[54] Summers, *Works of Aphra Behn*, II, p. 304.
[55] Behn, *The Rover*, p. 10; *The Feign'd Curtizans; or, A Nights Intrigue* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1679), p. 13.
[56] Behn, *The Rover*, p. 1.
[57] Behn, *The Rover*, p. 2.

spoken dialogue. In the second act of *Curtizans,* echoes of this dynamic are later woven by Behn between the careful, love-struck Marcella crying 'prethee mad Cornelia lets be grave and wise, at least enough to think a little' and her carefree, mischievous sister who fears only to be sent to 'St. *Teretia's*, to whistle through a Grate like a Bird in a Cage'.[58] Although indicative of Behn's proclivity for reimagining familiar character types, an examination of these women's differences reveals an insight into how Behn's writing for specific actresses progressed in the two years following 1677. Where Hellena and Florinda take on the guise of gypsies in order to allow them freedom to move about the Carnival unrestricted from fears of censure from their brother Pedro, Cornelia's plan sees them imitate courtesans. This not only gives them a liberty denied to their position as maids of quality but provides them with all the facilities reserved for prostitutes, including lodgings which their conquests may visit and servants to enact their wishes, in keeping with the industry's conventions. With its multiple layers of confused identity and recurrent dependence on signified darkness to facilitate further misunderstandings between the characters, *The Feign'd Curtizans* has to be Behn's most complex work in terms of narrative construction. From the moment in the opening scene in which Laura Lucretia instructs her page to misinform the intrigued Julio that she is '*La Silvianetta* the young Roman Curtizan', not a scene passes in which a character is not deceived by another's misrepresented identity.[59]

Given this play's narrative complexity, it is no surprise that the 1679 quarto is filled with minutely detailed staged directions, far exceeding the thoroughness of those in the 1677 *Rover.* Whilst *The Rover*'s stage directions are reserved almost entirely for entrances, exits, prop use, and the occasional addition of emotional prompts, *The Feign'd Curtizans* sees each gesture studied and meticulously reproduced. For example, at the height of the night's intrigue the knight Sir Signal and his hypocritical governor Tickletext, upon crossing one another in darkness, '*both cautiously start back: And stand a tipto in the posture of fear, then gently feeling for each other, (after listening and*

[58] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 14, p. 15.
[59] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 1.

hearing no noise) draw back their hands at touching each others; and shrinking up their shoulders, make grimases of more fear!'.[60] Whilst this level of precision may allude to the printer's awareness of how the complexity of the scene's action might play out on the page, it also indicates a specific relationship, whether inspired or instructional, between the creators of the text and the actors of the company. In other words, the successful comedy of this play hinges heavily on each actor's specific characterisation and performance. The precisely heightened confusion of these night-time scenes, in contrast to *The Rover*, is made more promising by the presence of additional complicit characters who are actively involved in the clowning, and the use of the courtesan's lodgings as a space reserved entirely for the extended farce occupying the play's central acts.

Jane Spencer explores the abundant similarities between the two plays in her essay on comic plot and female action and chooses to place further significance on the servile character Petro with his penchant for comic trickery and his occupation of numerous roles, including that of pimp to 'La Silvianetta' and 'Euphemia'. Spencer cites Petro's input as being 'crucial to the action' and certainly his contrivances during acts three and four are imperative to the success of the play's riotous absurdity.[61] There is a moment of intense mischief in which he interrupts a scuffle between Galliard and Tickletext to untie the latter's *'Cravat behind, and he slips his head out of the Periwig'* in order to lead him down 'a back pair of stairs through the Garden'.[62] This leaves Galliard grasping at his combatant's trappings and allows Tickletext, along with Petro's hopes for another payoff, free to escape. This is characteristic of how the play relies on its secondary performers and the full use of the imagined space to facilitate the narrative's comic complexity. Although Spencer recognises the addition of the trickster servant as instrumental in advancing the fluidity of the farce from Behn's

---

[60] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 36.

[61] Jane Spencer, '"Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comic Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesans',* in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theatre and Criticism* ed. by Heidi Hunter (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 86-101, p. 97.

[62] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 47.

previous attempt in *The Rover*, she omits any reference to how the girls' other attendant, their woman Phillipa, accommodates the deception as mock-bawd of their parlour.

Before taking on the role of the mischievous Phillipa, Elizabeth Norris was first cast in the recognisable character of responsible but sympathetic guardian, Callis. Inheritor to Juliet's Nurse, Callis is depicted as a simple but heartfelt custodian who agrees to accompany her charges to the Carnival provided, as she says, 'your Brother might not know it, and I might wait on you; for by my troth, I'll not trust Young Girles alone'.[63] It must be noted, however, that even in this earlier play Callis is not entirely blameless for the young girls' escapades. Her reasoning for their clandestine trip stems not merely from a sympathetic desire to provide Hellena with a 'fine farewel to the world' but from, as she expresses in a mischievous aside, 'a Youthful Itch of going myself'.[64] Despite her stalking of Hellena and Florinda through the streets of Naples, it is in this uttered line we see the beginnings of a character Behn and Norris would later develop in Phillipa. This comment not only adds a layer of depth to an otherwise stereotypical character but also emphasises from the start a disparity between the young girls and the older guardian. Attending the titular feigned courtesans from the moment of their introduction in act two, Phillipa assumes the role of 'kinde help-meet' when approached by the inquisitive Galliard. In response to his request she replies, 'Sure, you're a great stranger in Rome that cannot tell her price' and '*flings*' him away, insisting Euphemia 'wants no customers'.[65] In the strength of the direction to '*fling*', we are treated to an insight into the comic physicality of Phillipa's role, pitching Norris's bodily performance against the static elegance of the two young protagonists. The dialogue, meanwhile, serves a dual purpose. In performing the role of bawd, Phillipa is strengthening the girls' authenticity in their fabricated identities whilst simultaneously positioning herself in such a way as to interrogate interested parties thereby protecting her charges from unwanted attention. Where Callis could merely observe and, fearful for both the

[63] Behn, *The Rover*, p. 6.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 19.

girls' reputation and her own job, is reticent to engage too keenly with their scheming, Phillipa enthusiastically participates in the deception, providing her with a position from which she can both abet and protect Cornelia and Marcella.

As an active, even eager, accomplice Norris's Phillipa serves as female counterpart to Petro's devious conniving and slapstick comedy. Throughout act four the two household servants engage in a dance of comic symmetry as they manoeuvre Tickletext and Sir Signal, both desperate to avoid the other, into increasingly more precarious and consequently humorous instances of near exposure. No sooner does Petro enter, '*leading in Mr.* Tickletext*, as by dark*' with the warning to 'Remain here Signior while I step and fetch a light' than 'Philipa *at the door puts in sir* Signal' before leaving to 'fetch a candle'.[66] Shortly after Tickletext manages to artfully extricate himself from this scene of potential embarrassment, he is once more guided by the determined Petro into the increasingly intimate setting of La Silivanetta's bedchamber. Once settled within the scene, Phillipa enters '*with* Galliard *by dark*' leaving the two rivals to grope at one another in the dim light, each believing the other to be their conquest.[67] In his descriptive argument of the play, Montague Summers briefly mentions this scene, 'Tickletext has been placed by Petro in bed to await, as he supposes, Silvianetta, when Galliard in error entering the room in the dark gropes his way to the bed and finding a man, closes with him'.[68] Despite the comprehensive detail informing the rest of this argument, Summers all but eradicates Phillipa's intervention in this scene. This not only diminishes Norris's contribution to the success of the farce but reduces the comic symmetry carefully constructed between Petro and Phillipa in the preceding scenes. The meticulous back and forth of partners is what makes this play so entertaining and for an audience member, to watch Petro and Phillipa dodge through scenes, miss each other, mislead characters, and narrowly avoid disaster is an imperative function in connecting the overtly physical buffoonery of the play's English butts and the witty sparring of the affecting lovers.

---

[66] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 42.
[67] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans*, p. 46.
[68] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn,* II, p. 303.

As Tim Keenan notes in his *Restoration Staging* (2017), very little is known about stage lighting during this period. However, as this comment from a visitor to the first Drury Lane in 1669 suggests, the theatre was 'sufficiently lighted on the stage and on the walls to enable the spectators to see the scenes and the performances' and it can be assumed simulated darkness was portrayed through performance as opposed to lighting effects.[69] This supports J. L. Styan's assertion that 'it is more likely that a handheld light, together with mimed activity on the stage, would have been sufficient to give an impression of darkness'.[70] This means that just as each character's actions are depicted in great detail in the textual stage directions, each entrance and gesture would have been overtly visible to the observing audience, requiring painstakingly precise timing and an exacting performance for the secondary characters responsible for shepherding their unwitting dupes around the stage.

Narratively speaking, Norris's characters are imperative in both *The Rover* and *The Feign'd Curtizans* in permitting the duplicitous scheming by their charges. More importantly, however, they speak directly to the audience's desire to compare the wit and elegance of the young protagonists to the general buffoonery of the supporting roles. Callis' unceremonious incarceration in a chest to be left 'bawling for help' and Phillipa's contribution to the madcap insanity and slapstick within the courtesans' lodging supports the overall comic success of both plays.[71] In both instances, Elizabeth Norris's impact on the production's humour and her complicity in shaping the girls' deception has been omitted from critical studies of the plays. As the sisters' governess, the sensible but mischievous Callis readily agrees to let the girls in her care attend the Carnival whilst remaining just oblivious enough to fulfil the audience expectation of the play's young women thoroughly outwitting the restrictive imposition of their elderly guardian. Similarly, two years on, Norris's Phillipa finds herself not only complicit but instrumental in the success of her wards' farcical machinations. Without Phillipa rushing around in act four, acting as bawd for the counterfeit courtesans and ferrying suitors

[69] Tim Keenan, *Restoration Staging, 1660-74* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 178; Van Lennep, *London Stage,* p. 162.
[70] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance,* p. 37.
[71] Behn, *The Rover*, p. 61.

both wanted and unwanted throughout the scene the façade, perpetually on the brink of crumbling, would surely fall apart. From unwitting accomplice, thrown into a chest for her reluctance to comply in one of Behn's more obvious displays of gerontophobia-induced comic violence, to key instigator, Elizabeth Norris's characters show a development in the expression of Behn's guardian/ heiress paradigm and the use she makes of her as a supporting but crucial character which is only compounded in her later plays, *The Revenge* and *The Second Part of the Rover.*

The prologue to *The Second Part of the Rover* sees William Smith, the titular Willmore, chastise the play's author for attempting to 'Play the old Game o're again' following the success of the original.[72] Steeped in knowing self-deprecation, Behn's politically charged words remind the audience of an obvious but tacit truth of the Restoration stage. In a period of heightened political tension, as the Exclusion Crisis threatened the stability of the nation and ancient tradition vied with growing public resentment, derivation masked as innovation was the order of the day. Just as the 'old Politicks' of statesmen, and indeed the politics of a former generation so despised by these playwrights, gets passed off as new, the intricacies of a play, once successful, must regenerate into a fresh and appealing spectacle in order to both entice and satiate the rabble.[73] Not only does Smith's pre-emptive admission that the author is aware of her blatant reproduction of prior successes and is actively pandering to popular appeal reassure the audience that they will be appropriately entertained over the coming hours, it also undermines any accusations of appropriation similar to those levelled at her following the triumph of *The Rover.*[74] Regardless of Behn's reasons for such tactics, there is an underlying admission in these words that once she is in possession of a winning formula, she will exploit it without restraint. The combination of Elizabeth Barry as empathetic heroine coupled with the ageing Norris as supporting accomplice and comic foil was a persuasive partnership and one Behn

[72] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover* (sig. A2r).
[73] Ibid.
[74] The postscript of the 1677 quarto of *The Rover* reads 'This Play had been sooner in Print, but for a Report about the Town (made by some either very Malitious or very Ignorant) that 'twas *Thomaso* alter'd; which made the Book-sellers fear some trouble from the Proprietor of that Admirable Play'.

intended to develop. That is not to say that Behn's creations or the actresses' characterisations were in danger of becoming stale reproductions of tired stereotypes. Inspired by Barry's on-stage success as the tragic protagonist of Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* (1680), Behn wrote the part of Corina in *The Revenge* for her and thrust her embittered tale of vengeance into an otherwise blithe retelling of John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604).

The development of the Barry/ Norris partnership we begin to see in the late 70s accelerates dramatically when taking into consideration the nature of their on-stage relationship in *The Revenge*. Although it was published anonymously, critics such as Elizabeth Howe, Derek Hughes and Janet Todd all avow the play's connection to Behn citing 'credible contemporary evidence' and 'the internal evidence for Behn's hand', although it is possible this play was a joint effort from Behn and Thomas Betterton.[75] Certainly, the way the dependent but ultimately harmful affiliation between the ageing bawd, Mrs Dunwell and the tragic prostitute Corina plays out in this otherwise light-hearted comedy is prophetic of the jealousy-fuelled actions of Norris's Petronella Elenora, appearing in the sequel to *The Rover* just six months later. The parallels between these two characters are striking, especially when considering their proximity to two of Barry's most famous displays of economised sexuality. In them we can see most clearly Behn's acquiescence to the mockery of older women. Both ageing prostitutes who have taken to instruction in their majority, Mrs Dunwell and Petronella display a lurking resentment towards their youthful, beautiful charges. However, they also understand the necessity of maintaining their authority over the young desirables' income by admonishing their burgeoning affections for inappropriate suitors. Both of Barry's narrative threads, one culminating in tragedy and the other notably conspicuous for its comic success, demonstrate Behn's enduring sympathy for female characters forced, coerced or voluntarily disposed into or towards prostitution. Unlike the supporting characters of Callis and Phillipa, these plots see Elizabeth Norris's bawds supply both the impetus for Barry's participation in the industry as well as the dissenting voice against

[75] Janet Todd and Derek Hughes, 'Tragedy and tragicomedy', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 83-97, p. 91.

following the path of love over financial and professional security. These two relationships, performed by the same women six months apart, express a tangential mirroring effect, indicative of Behn's reprocessing of a successful device. La Nuche's accusation of Petronella in act four that 'from Childhood thou hast trained me up in cunning, read Lectures to me of the use of Man, but kept me from knowledg of the right; taught me to Jilt, to flatter and deceive' is reminiscent of Corina's diatribe against Dunwell in act two of *Revenge* in which she spits ''Twas you, Heaven curse ye for't, that first seduc'd me, swore that [Wellman] lov'd me, wou'd eternally; and when my Vertue had resolv'd me good, damn'd Witch, whose trade is Lying and Confusion, you hard besieg'd it round with tales of *Wellman*'.[76] Although in both instances Barry is using her gift for tragic performance to reprimand her erstwhile custodian for essentially manipulating her into prostitution, it appears the method by which this was achieved alters dramatically. Where Petronella espouses the hatred of men and the art of their dominance, or 'how to couzen a dull Phlegmatick greasy braind *English* man', Dunwell uses Corina's pre-existing affection for Wellman to coax her into surrendering her virginity to him, thereby leaving her with little choice but to remain his remunerated mistress.[77] Ultimately, La Nuche and Corina decide to reject their bawds' advice and embark on their unprofitable journeys of love and revenge, removed from the theatrically compelling but ultimately negative influence of the characters played by Norris. Where Norris's earlier Behn roles tended towards simple but ultimately likeable companions, Dunwell and Petronella exhibit darker traits informed by jealousy, manipulation, and self-preservation.

Despite their differing methods, the comic function of the two bawds operates in similar ways. Ostensibly, Norris's job was to perform comedy characters in comic plays and within these texts her specific contribution can be categorised into two separate but fundamental forms. On one level, Norris procured laughter due to her presence as foil to the beauty and youth of Barry. This

[76] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 60; Anon, *The Revenge; or, A Match in Newgate* (London: W. Cademan, 1680), p. 16.
[77] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 13.

comedy works in an innately physical manner, entrenched in the grotesque Bakhtinian humour of the human body and, for Norris, only requires her on-stage existence as a visual exhibition employed for an often-cruel one-off joke. For example, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, *The Second Part of the Rover* sees Norris's ageing bawd character become a spectacle of mockery not only for the real-world theatrical audience but for the public consumption of the play-world characters. As the crowds gather to view a visiting mountebank, or more accurately Willmore in disguise, Petronella Elenora enters being '*carried in a Chair, Dress'd like a Girl of fifteen*'.[78] Ned Blunt asks who comes before them 'muz'ld by old Gaffer time' and is told that it is Petronella Elenora, 'the famous out-worn Curtezan' who 'may be that of Troy for her Antiquity, tho fitter for God Priapus to ravish than Paris'.[79] The entire mise-en-scene of this interaction, with Petronella physically raised above the crowd in her ridiculous clothing and stage make-up, was designed to highlight not only Norris's character's age, but her impossible desire for youth. Whilst critics are perpetually in disagreement over the extent to which Behn espoused an ideology of libertinism, it is difficult to deny that her plays reinforce certain aspects of a creed which inherently supports the sexual virility and carefree vivacity of youth.[80] It is therefore unsurprising to find a mocking, dismissive rejection of the threatening forces of old age. Despite in many areas demonstrating a sympathy for characters, particularly women, who are rejected wholesale by the theatrical mainstream, Behn consistently relies on the mockery of seniority in order to secure a dependable laugh for her ageing female comic.

Thirteen years had passed since Elizabeth Norris had inhabited 'The old Lady' Dupe in John Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-all* at thirty-one years of age and in 1682, at forty-six with two nearly full-grown children, she was never a more appropriate target for age-related ridicule.[81] As has been explored, Norris's frequent appearances in the same character type suggests an audience awareness of

[78] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 25.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ros Ballaster, 'Taking Liberties: Revisiting Behn's Libertinism', *Women's Writing*, 19 (2012), pp. 165-167; Jeremy W. Webster, 'In and Out of the Bed-chamber: Staging Libertine Desire in Restoration Comedy', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 12. 2 (2012), pp. 77-96.
[81] Dryden, *Sir Martin* (sig. A2v); Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, I, p. 441; William Rufus Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage* (London: W. Owen, 1749), p. 196.

her penchant for comically exaggerated older characters. In order to present old age as physically grotesque so as to buy into the popular activity of deriving humour from the degradation of the elderly, Behn would often place Norris in visually comic, instantaneously gratifying situations in order to make use of the immediate audience recognition of her as 'old' and therefore, dependably mockable. Her entrance, or more appropriately her discovery, in *The Revenge* is a comic moment deriving from nothing more than her physical occupation of a space on the stage. Prior to her entrance, Friendly stands on the forestage across from Wellman, discussing the notion of accompanying him to a 'Bawdy-house, to visit an impudent prostitute', before asserting that 'The worst Object the world can shew me, is an immodest vulgar woman'.[82] No sooner does Friendly reluctantly agree to follow his companion than the *'SCENE draws to a House*' and '*Enter Mrs Dunwell*'.[83] Before Norris has had a chance to speak or even gesture, the timeliness of her reveal combined with her occupancy of the available space have exposed her to be the immodest and vulgar figure of Friendly's nightmares which, combined with her identifiable performance of age and infirmity, sets her up to be the perfect butt for comic derision. In both *The Revenge* and *The Rover*, Behn is depending on Norris, as perennial bawd and aged undesirable, to provoke laughter based on the visual disparity between her and the company's star, Elizabeth Barry.

By feeding into the deep-rooted gerontophobia of a Restoration audience, Behn is aiding a particular, age-dependent, form of misogyny which attacks and ostracises the older woman. Despite this, Behn's use of Elizabeth Norris's skill and reputation is not wholeheartedly dependent on entrenched systems of prejudice and to ignore the particular talents of both Norris and Barry, particularly as a team, is to do a disservice to the collaborative efforts of the two performers and the overall manner in which Behn challenges the use of her secondary characters. The shift between the first and second parts of *The Rover* sees the decidedly unreformed Willmore bewail '*With a Sham*

[82] Anon, *The Revenge*, p. 4.
[83] Anon, *The Revenge*, p. 5.

sadness' the death of his wife Hellena.[84] Within the play-world this callous, but not entirely out of character, lack of sentiment appears to be indicative of a lack of imagination on Behn's part. By simply killing off Hellena, Behn is clearing the way for Willmore to embark on a fresh conquest and using what scraps of plot were left of Killigrew's *Thomaso*. When taking into account the casting of *The Second Part of the Rover,* however, one is able to see a pattern which transcends the material components of the plot and addresses Behn's broader approach to her female characters, both major and minor. As the only characters to appear in both parts, it is natural that William Smith and Cave Underhill should reanimate their roles as Willmore and Blunt. The only other male actor to appear in both the 1677 and 1681 productions was John Richards, who performed in the minor roles of Don Pedro's servant, Stephano and later Willmore's companion, Hunt. As for the women, only Elizabeth Barry and Elizabeth Norris were re-cast in the sequel. Having Elizabeth Barry span both productions demonstrates that Behn is providing a tangible link between the witty, innocent heroine of part one and the desirable, but necessarily flawed, figure of La Nuche in part two. Rather than having Barry play Ariadne, a character far closer to Hellena in terms of position and literary archetype, the star is instead cast in the more provocative, controversial role of the denigrated woman. Conversely, Behn has Elizabeth Currer, an actress famous for such licentious roles, play Ariadne, in a compelling inversion of audience expectation. By casting Barry as Hellena and as La Nuche, Behn is repositioning her text to insist on reimagining both characters as the sympathetic central figure, and the ultimate desire of Willmore, on equal terms. Through this consolidation of a single feminine identity spanning separate female characters, Barry is constructing a personality beyond the confines of the plays' texts and insisting on a fair judgement of each of the roles she inhabits. Equally deliberate is the parallel assimilation which occurs with Norris's characters over the span of the two plays and into the later productions of *The Revenge* and *The City Heiress*. Just as Barry's career sees her turn from girlish wit to alluring courtesan, so too does Norris evolve from liberal guardian, living in fear of the remonstrations of the plays' dominant male characters, to an unapologetically licentious bawd capable of commanding the scene and her own narrative agency.

[84] Behn, *Second Part of the* Rover, p. 5.

The entrenched nature of the actresses' teamwork is not only displayed but softly satirised in a brief moment between the pair in the first act of *The Second Part of the Rover*. Upon spying an appropriate gull in the form of the affected Fetherfool, Petronella turns to her young courtesan and, in a manner that suggests the steadfast repetition of schoolroom drills, forces her to clarify a plan to cozen the '*English* rich fool'.[85] Attempting to tease out a response from the distracted La Nuche, Petronella prompts, 'And accosting him thus – Tell him --', to which La Nuche finally snaps back with the expected answer whilst '*Speaking so fast,* [Petronella] *offering to put in her word, is still prevented by tothers running on*'.[86] This comic moment perfectly highlights the gaping difference between La Nuche's spirited youth and Petronella's creeping, aged wisdom whilst gently emphasising the deeper performative connection between the two actresses. So rehearsed are they in their respective roles that whilst the fiery youth becomes quite impatient with her matronly instruction and yearns to test her skills elsewhere, Petronella sarcastically bemoans the fact that 'I have taught ye your Trade to become my instructer'.[87] This interaction is deeply informed by the relationship between its animators. Barry and Norris play up to the image of the young and celebrated star shrugging off advice from the ageing comic past her prime. By viewing this interaction through the lens of the performers as opposed to the text, a meta-theatricality becomes clear which promotes the significance of the two actresses. Behn highlights the ongoing collaboration between Norris and Barry as performers and gives primacy to their onstage relationship, thereby creating significations and instilling meaning in her characters which transcends the boundaries of a single production and contributes to the ongoing development of female characterisation in comedy. Due to their established connection and the intentional evocation of past performances, the audience are invited to see beyond the individual portrayals into the broader system of representations set up by Behn and enacted by the pair, including the mock-jealousy of the elder towards her attractive companion, the delicate performance of which reinforces Elizabeth Norris's particular skills. The affectation of sincere

---

[85] Behn, *Second Part of the* Rover, p. 12.
[86] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 13.
[87] Ibid.

indignation is a trope perpetually employed by Norris to great comic effect. Having done everything she could to secure Corina scores of wealthy suitors, Mrs Dunwell's lamentation to herself as she '*weeps*' to 'go thy ways; *Mary Dunwell*, thy kinde heart will bring thee to the Hospital', is painfully reminiscent of Petronella's self-pitying statement that 'I'm an old fool still – well, *Petronella,* hadst thou been as industrious in thy Youth as in thy Age – thou hadst not come to this- *Weeps*'.[88] The weeping of Elizabeth Norris's characters occurs repeatedly in moments where she is conceivably attempting to emotionally manipulate her companions. Whilst the audience is being invited to laugh at the artificial, or at least self-indulging, nature of Norris's anguish, this action takes on a secondary layer of humour when considering Barry's fame for tragic roles, as Norris is mocking the tragic lamentations of her colleague. The correlation between stage directions to '*Weep*' and characters played by Elizabeth Norris acting across from characters played by Elizabeth Barry certainly suggests the conscious employment of this referential humour.

In her discussion of where and how *The Revenge* differs from its source text, *The Dutch Courtesan,* Elizabeth Howe specifically refers to Behn's alteration of the leading character Corina into a sympathetic victim as opposed to a bloodthirsty, jilted villain. Howe remarks that 'In act II, not surprisingly, Behn extended the "whore's" attack on her bawd, making the other woman more responsible for Corina's seduction. We hear how the corrupt Mrs Dunwell emphasised Corina's charm to Wellman and showed him the best way to persuade her to submit'.[89] Although Howe is attempting to emphasise the ways in which Behn's intercession affects Barry's role, the alteration necessarily reanimates the character of Dunwell as being far more proactive in the manipulation and control of Corina. This further highlights the importance of Elizabeth Norris's character because Dunwell, and in a similar fashion, Petronella, provides a necessary function in the process of humanising and thereby manifesting audience sympathy with Barry's prostitutes. Unlike her roles in *The Feign'd Curtizans* and the first part of *The Rover,* Elizabeth Norris's later characterisations are

[88] Anon, *The Revenge*, p. 16; Behn, *Second Part of the* Rover, p. 60.
[89] Howe, *The First English Actresses,* p. 131.

not wholly likeable, but there is a degree to which they may be seen as pitiable. Rather than being disregarded as simply villainous, there is a complexity to Mrs Dunwell and Petronella which can only be strengthened by Norris's longstanding reputation as the company's comedian. Just as Barry garners sympathy from her multi-rolling, teasing inspiration from her previous tragic performances and instilling facets of her earlier, more traditionally virtuous parts, in order to create understandable figures of her fallen women, Norris's former characters bleed life into her later roles. Although Behn is not entirely innocent of the same traps of on-stage abuse towards her elderly figures as were deployed by the many male writers who came before her, she does not wholly resort to discarding her older female characters to be punished. Whilst Behn's writing and Barry's acting make it easy to appreciate the plight of La Nuche and Corina, it is infinitely harder to procure sentiment for an ugly, ageing bawd, 'the sad Memento of decay'd poor old forsaken Whore', who resorts to immoral deeds and superstition in order to claw back some semblance of youth and glory.[90] They are not, however, wholly negative characters. The care they take over their young charges is not dissimilar to the protection at the hands of Chloris and Phillipa. Although self-serving, Petronella's desire to see La Nuche financially protected comes from a very real place. When Petronella asks, 'who will give you [love] when you are poor? when you are wretchedly despis'd and poor—', she is speaking from a place of knowledge, and cannot be blamed for her cynicism.[91] The characters of Petronella and Dunwell demonstrate Behn's understanding of the bleaker realities of the female experience. Whilst not as dramatic as the histrionics of Corina's tragic fate, quiet moments like these demonstrate that Behn's consideration for these women extends beyond their performative function as antagonist, and this consideration is reinforced through their casting by a single, unified performer. Whilst it cannot be suggested that Behn manages to completely subvert the expected mockery of these women, it is not for nothing that she is able to satisfyingly redeem these characters' story arcs from complete damnation whilst still allowing Elizabeth Norris, as a comic actress, to retain her recognisable on-stage disposition of ageing buffoonery. Where Petronella might be punished for stealing La Nuche's

---

[90] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 9.
[91] Behn, *Second Part of the Rover*, p. 60.

jewels, she is instead married off to the dunderheaded spark, Ned Blunt, as a final devastating blow for him in front of his friends. Dunwell is similarly paired off to Trickwell. Dunwell and Petronella are important supporting characters in both *The Revenge* and *The Second Part of the Rover* not because they are likeable, or charitable depictions of older women but precisely because they are not. Not only do their positions greatly inform and shape their younger partners but they demonstrate a moral complexity which is usually denied to any women on the Restoration stage, let alone secondary characters such as the parts acted by Elizabeth Norris earlier in her career such as Lady Dupe and Goody Fells. The final section of this chapter will examine one such role which is noticeable for the degree to which her moral ambiguity and narrative liberty lends strength and agency to her as an individual, female character: Mrs Clacket in Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress*.

Elizabeth Norris as the 'City-bawd and Puritan'

Aphra Behn's *The City Heiress*, first performed in 1682, is most often regarded as an anti-Whig polemic, remembered for its unabashed abuse of the senile hypocrite, Sir Timothy Treat-all, the 'old seditious Knight that keeps open house for Commonwealthsmen and true blue Protestants'.[92] This play is rarely discussed for its careful use of narrative symmetry, the complex treatment of its female characters, and the tenacious creation of an independent, morally unrestricted comic role in the figure of Mrs Clacket. When Clacket is discussed by critics such as Derek Hughes and Susan J. Owen it is to highlight her puritanism and hypocrisy.[93] As a creature of contradictions, Clacket's comic potential is partially derived from her hypocritical claim for religious veneration being humorously at odds with her well-known reputation for bawdry, a vice commonly satirised on the Restoration stage, making her a figure largely in keeping with Norris's 'special line'. An anonymously authored essay first

---

[92] Aphra Behn, *The City Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all* (London: D. Brown, 1682) (sig. A4v); Susan J. Owen, 'Response to Restoration Politics', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 68-82, p. 75; Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Baskingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 147-57.

[93] Hughes, *Theatre of Aphra Behn,* p.149; Susan J. Owen, 'Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83', *Aphra Behn Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 15-29, p. 23.

published in the 1853 *Retrospective Review* writes of Aphra Behn's female characters that most of them 'are vain, selfish, and intriguing' and concludes that Behn's estimation of her own sex was 'not a high one'.[94] Clacket, whilst wonderfully fulfilling of these criteria, demonstrates that this anonymous critic's deduction is far from comprehensive. It is precisely Clacket's moral incongruity which provides her with the particular skills and theatrical agency, necessarily denied to the play's other women, to enact a subversive action contrary to the treatment of the play's other female characters, who are largely subjugated by the men in their lives. Thought to have been first performed just a month before Elizabeth Norris's death in May 1682, Aphra Behn's *City Heiress* makes special use of Norris's ability and reputation to allow her character to greatly influence the dramatic action of the play without limitation from the usual restrictions which demand secondary female characters be accountable to a specific, denigrating form of ridicule. As an actress who had built her career playing liminal, comic roles entrenched in the murky grey areas of moral inertia, in her last play Elizabeth Norris was able to develop Mrs Clacket as a perfect vehicle for the subtle transgression of the play-world's stringent moral codes and a theatrical need for her vilification.

The *Retrospective Review* continues in its judgement of Behn, that 'in her coarse licentiousness, she, perhaps, rather pandered to the depraved state of the town than obeyed her own feelings'.[95] This statement is surprising only in its generosity of understanding. To assert that the works produced by Behn, in print or performance, are not merely indistinguishable reproductions of her artistic aspirations but a product of compromise between author and audience is sympathetic towards the limitations inherent to Behn's literary position. Alongside all her contemporaries who were obliged to balance the equally demanding pressures of profit and ingenuity, Behn has often been accused of artistic exploitation. Whether this is as a result of a corruption of moral integrity or, as many modern scholars have claimed, in response to the patriarchal structures which are under attack in the play, it remains an enduring aspersion on the playwright's work. Denys Van Renen, in

[94] Anon. 'Mrs Behn's Dramatic Writings', *The Retrospective Review* (London: John Russel Smith, 1853), p. 9.
[95] Anon., 'Mrs Behn's Dramatic Writings', p. 17.

agreement with Annette Kreis-Schnick and Derek Hughes, has remarked that Behn's endings 'usually result in an equilibrium that reinforces male (and European) cultural hegemony'.[96] In other words, although sympathetic to her reasoning, there has been an abundance of scholarly agreement concerning Behn's submission to the petty cravings of social trends or what Hughes describes as 'the constantly moving target of audience taste'.[97] At the time, this amounted largely to the subjugation, humiliation and punishment of the socially vulnerable, as we have seen with the condemnation of Elizabeth Norris's elderly women at the hands of Behn, coupled with the arbitrary gratification of stylish and, most importantly, male libertine figures. Kreis-Schnick goes so far as to ask of *The City Heiress,* 'Why does Aphra Behn here, and here only, construct plot and subplots that do not leave one inch of space to her female characters? Why does the play's end offer nothing but complaint, fear, and weeping?'[98] Certainly, the three central female characters in *The City Heiress*, tied as they are to the unifying male figure of Wilding, represent a struggle in which Behn attempts to highlight and admonish the inescapable fortunes of women in a patriarchal society whilst producing a light-hearted, politically motivated piece guaranteed to entertain. Although it is not the aim of this study to explore how Behn's treatment of her female protagonists ultimately necessitates their oppression within the narrative folds of Wilding's libertine victory, an appreciation of Behn's characterisation of the widow, Lady Galliard, the young heiress, Charlot, and the brazen mistress, Diana, as the three primary figures of the text will inform the particularly unusual development of the play's 'City-Bawd'. Before addressing the secondary performance of Norris as Clacket and how Behn dismantles the comic restrictions of her secondary character thereby allowing for a subversive female presence within the play, it is important to first understand how each emergent plot differently reveals the potential for, and subsequent denial of, female liberation.

---

[96] Denys Van Renen, *The Other Exchange: Women, Servants, and the Urban Underclass in Early Modern English Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); Annette Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theatre in the Early Modern Period: The Plays of Aphra Behn and Susannah Centlivre* (London: Associated University Press, 2001); Derek Hughes, 'Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 29-45.
[97] Derek Hughes, 'Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre', p. 34.
[98] Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theatre,* p. 119.

It is hardly surprising that Elizabeth Barry was cast as the well-respected but tragically unhappy Lady Galliard 'fam'd for Beauty, Wit and Fortune', and even less so that she should be placed across from Thomas Betterton as the penniless rake, Wilding.[99] Ostensibly, these two would appear to be the perfect match, reviving the successful combination they enjoyed with Cornelia and the Lady's namesake, Mr. Galliard in *The Feign'd Curtizans* three years before. The fact that these two do not wind up joined in marriage is the first of many indications that this play deviates from the conventional design of Behn's earlier comedies. It is Behn's use of provocative language and the espousing of dangerous yet tantalising ideals of truly liberal love which causes Ann Marie Stewart to describe the relationship between Wilding and Lady Galliard as 'the most fully developed chastity/desire debate' in Behn's work.[100] Certainly, to watch the emotional scene in act four which sees an initially defiant Lady Galliard spit with bitter vitriol the very name of 'Whore!' as 'A man's convenience, his leisure hours, his Bed of Ease' only to acquiesce with pitiable meekness under the threat of Wilding's departure, is to be fully confronted with Behn's adherence to the potential, but ultimate impossibility, of female equality in gendered power dynamics.[101] Charlot, meanwhile, is an innocent ingénue lately stolen from the country seat of her recently deceased father, Sir Nicholas Gettall, under the promise of marriage to the heir of a prominent London lord. Played by her namesake Charlotte Butler, *The City Heiress's* second female lead is typical of the Restoration stage and hers is a plot most recognisable from Wycherley's *Country Wife*. Robert Markley writes that 'such heroines embody the ultimate masculinist fantasy of female sexuality: their wit functions as a marker of their capacity for satisfying male sexual desire, even as their virginity guarantees the integrity of the estates that they will convey to their future husbands'.[102] Markley's criticism of virginal, witty heiresses being inherently complicit in the 'masculine business of securing,

---

[99] Behn, *City Heiress*, p. 11.
[100] Ann Marie Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration: Aphra Behn, Violence, and Comedy* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), p. 79.
[101] Behn, *City Heiress*, p. 41.
[102] Robert Markley, 'Behn and the Unstable Traditions of Social Comedy', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 98-117, p. 99.

transferring, and managing estates' is not unlike the accusations hurled at Behn for engaging in the same oppressive tendencies as her male contemporaries in writing culturally hegemonic and audience-pleasing endings for her female protagonists.[103] Both writer and character alike are trapped by their own patriarchal formation in a system which allows for female wit provided it abides by the limitations of contemporary morality and cultural values. Like her antecedents before her, Etherege's Harriet in *The Man of Mode* and Behn's Hellena in *The Rover,* Charlot is allowed, even encouraged, to stoop to trickery and disguise in order to win her love but only in so much as her principal economic and social value, her chastity, remains intact. Behn's recognition and reproduction of this intolerable ultimatum, compounded by Charlot's final appearance on stage as a figure, 'Mad as the Seas when all the Winds are raging', reveal at least an attempt on her part to fairly illustrate the restrictions forced upon such women.[104] Although within the constraints of contemporary narrative conventions Charlot is presented as the only viable option for Wilding, she remains, as with so many young women who have tethered themselves to a libertine rake, an uneasy and pitiable character.

After the atypical representations of the courtesans, Angellica Bianca and La Nuche, in both parts of *The Rover* respectively, the third female protagonist of *City Heiress,* Diana, exhibits Behn's attempts to once again construct, and even extend, a multidimensional portrayal of women who understand the economic value of their sexuality and actively engage with its exchange. Diana was originally played by Elizabeth Currer, an actress who by 1682 had established a very successful line in clever, mercenary, women in a career which will be looked at in greater detail in the next chapter. Diana is motivated more by the security which money provides than upper class notions of love, honour and reputation, as demonstrated by her employment of mercantile language as she responds to Wilding, 'Love me! what if you do? how far will that go at the Exchange for Poynt?'[105] Sharp jibes such as this are used to establish Diana's pragmatic understanding of her position in the socio-

[103] Markley, 'Behn and the Unstable Traditions', p. 100.
[104] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 60.
[105] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 17.

economic sexual power struggles which inform the play's narrative. Diana's arc, slightly more so than Lady Galliard's or Charlot's, agrees with Kreis-Schnick's claim that Behn 'moves between adapting herself to the aesthetic, social, and moral standard of her day while subtly subverting these same standards wherever possible'.[106] In Susan Staves' description of *The City Heiress*, she writes only briefly of Diana explaining that 'Wilding, the nephew, palms off his discarded mistress on Sir Timothy'.[107] Whilst this theory corresponds with Staves' overarching argument that Behn is attempting to ridicule her Whig knight by having him duped into marrying a less desirable woman, it is Diana who uses her famed skill for dissembling to ensnare the gullible Sir Timothy into promising marriage, even going so far as to admit that if she were to marry someone other than Galliard, ''twou'd be a most wicked Revenge for past Kindnesses'.[108] She is not, as Staves assumes, a pawn to be sacrificed by Wilding but a concerted player in her own destiny. Diana's fate is emblematic of the precarious conflict between Behn's desire for subverting convention, by awarding agency to an unchaste, unmarried woman, whilst ultimately acquiescing to audience taste. Although Diana's core desire for financial and social security is eventually realised through her own volition, Behn is reticent to portray the mistress's ending as wholly satisfactory. In the final act, the audience is treated to a somewhat despondent Diana depicting her future of kissing Sir Timothy's 'thin blue wither'd Lips, Trembling with Palsie, stinking with Disease', whilst ruminating that 'Marriage is a sort of hanging'.[109] By connecting the specific, visceral imagery looming in her future with a universal reflection upon all marriage, Diana's language conveys the limited options for most women in Behn's plays, regardless of their desire for or culpability in contravening traditional sexual standards, whilst simultaneously providing the audience with an appropriate chastisement for the licentious, mercantile character.

[106] Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theatre,* pp. 119-120.
[107] Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 61.
[108] Behn, *The City* Heiress, p. 26.
[109] Behn, *The City* Heiress, p. 53, p. 54.

Considering the three female characters examined here, Annette Kreis-Schnick goes on to answer her own question concerning this play's refusal to 'leave one inch of space to her female characters'.[110] Kreis-Schnick suggests that it is the timing of this politically charged play, during a period of tumultuous economic pressure for the newly formed United Company, which caused *The City Heiress* to err on the side of audience-pleasing male hegemony. Whilst the fates of Lady Galliard, Charlot, and Diana fulfil the expectations of an audience satiated by the victory of male libertinism through economic security and the condemnation of sexual proclivity in autonomous women or the self-facilitated exchange of sex and money, Behn's *City Heiress* does not fully relinquish the subversive potential of female empowerment. Kreis-Schnick insists on a binary between the play's masculine scenes of witty, political farce and those of sombre reflection, informed by gender dynamics, which compound the repression and entrapment of both vulnerable and ostensibly autonomous women alike. However, this binary does not give due credence to the crucial, albeit marginal, acts of transgressive comedy designated to Behn's minor female character, the ambiguous Mrs Clacket. The surprising facilitator at the centre of this play of farcical intrigue and dubious alliances is the 'City-Bawd and Puritan' first played by Elizabeth Norris in her final, and finest, role.[111] Returning to Montague Summers's depiction of Norris as 'one of those useful and, indeed, indispensable performers who, without ever attaining any prominent position, contribute more essentially than is often realized' to the success of a play, Clacket is perhaps best viewed as a cumulative result of all her previous theatrical experience.[112] This dual occupancy of an integral yet peripheral space is precisely what renders the character of Mrs Clacket as a fascinating comic addition to Behn's political drama. Clacket's hypocritical nature, in-keeping with the play's overarching lampooning of whiggery, is complicated by her sympathetic protection of Charlot, her years of loyal and discreet service as Wilding's bawd, and her intimate engagement with the theatrical audience as both the character Clacket and the recognisable actress Norris. A character which might be played off as a lazy, one-dimensional joke, a Puritanical hypocrite without decency or consideration like so

[110] Kreis-Schnick, *Women, Writing, and the Theatre,* p. 119.
[111] Behn, *The City Heiress* (sig. A4v).
[112] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn,* I, p. 445.

many who have come before her, Clacket is instead a complex figure whose varied relationships provide ample opportunity for her to exert considerable agency over the play's events. Act two, scene one sets up the multi-layered intricacies of Clacket's fidelities whilst presenting her as a comic mastermind of deception and performative beguilement. The influence and power of manipulation of Norris's character is best demonstrated when, upon being accused by Wilding of tarnishing his name, quite correctly, to the young heiress, she embarks on a tirade of artificial indignation, reminiscent of Norris's feigned weeping in *Revenge* and *The Second Part of the Rover*. As Clacket lists the services she has performed for Wilding, having been 'Confident to all your secrets this three years, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer; concealed the nature of your wicked Diseases, under the honest name of Surfeits; call'd your filthy surgeons, Mr. Doctor, to keep up your Reputation', Norris's character is exercising a remarkable proficiency for exploitation.[113] She is not only reminding Wilding of her loyalty by employing marital language to consolidate their bond whilst simultaneously threatening him with the extent of her knowledge, but as she dramatically signs off her diatribe with the tear-laden statement of disbelief that 'I shoul'd be charg'd with speaking ill of you, so honest, so civil a Gentleman---', Clacket's theatrics have completely disarmed Wilding, leaving her free, at least for the time being, from further accusation.[114] This gives her a chance to both physically and emotionally remove herself from the scene's central action and, moments after Norris dramatically '*Weeps*', she is delivering biting remarks to the audience, admonishing Charlot for her emotional innocence.

Elizabeth Norris's employment of heightened, deeply staged emotion has the effect of alienating Wilding and securing Clacket's safety from admonition only for her true, calculating self to be revealed to the audience in her sarcastic asides. Norris's interactions with the audience, embedded within an unofficial commentary in the metatheatrical space that transcends the specific values of the play-world, momentarily provide a strong female voice free from the restrictions of the play's

[113] Behn, The *City* Heiress, pp. 12-13.
[114] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 13.

propriety. In act two, as the emotionally charged confrontation between Charlot and Wilding oscillates between '*Angry*' accusations of Wilding's perfidious nature and '*soft*' utterances avowing a love impervious to poverty and destitution, Norris maintains an aloof presence, lurking amongst the scene and intermittently interjecting with her satirical observations.[115] In a manner contrastingly reminiscent of the shameless Sir Anthony as he attempts to coach his nephew in the proper, virile method of courtship with his sotto voce advice to 'be impudent, be sawcy, forward, bold, towzing, and lewd', Norris's character attempts to convey to Charlot the folly of her all too indulgent behaviour.[116] Whenever Charlot strays into a more forgiving humour and the scene's mood inclines towards the overtly saccharine, Clacket chimes in with a diverting reprimand, 'You cannot hold from being kind to him', or 'There you've dasht all again!'.[117] In an attempt to curb an action which can only encourage Wilding's all too blatant manipulation of Charlot's emotional naivety Clacket is simultaneously grounding the scene in a comic rationalism. Although comparable in their instigation of humorous asides, where Sir Anthony preaches masculine aggression in the face of female hostility, Clacket uses her comic moments of disruption to advise caution against the same submissive behaviour which ultimately condemns Lady Galliard. For all her heightened theatrics and genuinely comic moments of ludicrous hypocrisy, Norris's performance of Mrs Clacket offers the only rational defence against the overwhelming masculine superiority which dominates the play. Upon informing Charlot of not only Wilding's indiscretion but his relative poverty at the hands of his uncle, Clacket opines, ''Slife, if you must marry a Man to buy him Breeches, marry an honest man, a religious man, a man that bears a Conscience, and will do a woman some Reason'.[118] Amongst the amoral machinations of this emotionally manipulative and ultimately self-serving character lies a voice of sympathetic tenacity and a knowing wisdom which attempts to offer some solution to the limited positions of Behn's female characters.

[115] Behn, *The City Heiress*, pp. 12-13.
[116] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 21.
[117] Behn, *The City Heiress*, pp. 13-14.
[118] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 11.

Mrs Clacket's role in aiding Charlot is not merely advisory. In J. Douglas Canfield's discussion of the somewhat anomalous ending of *The City Heiress* he argues that as Lady Galliard is presented as the play's primary female wit, the pairing of Wilding and Charlot seems unconventional. Looking back at Aphra Behn's previous couplings, as with Hellena and Willmore of *The Rover*, or Cornelia and Galliard of *The Feign'd Curtizans*, it is clear that Behn readily chose to couple off her witty, liberal heroes and one might expect Lady Galliard to be the most appropriate choice. Canfield goes on to assert that in *The City Heiress,* however, that whilst Lady Galliard 'yields to Wilding', thereby becoming 'merchandise untradeable among the Town Wits', Charlot reveals herself to have capabilities unknown to Wilding, including the ability to dissemble.[119] Not only can she sing and dance beautifully but Butler also possesses the no doubt humorous 'ability to masquerade behind a northern dialect'.[120] As the play progresses the two rivals for Wilding's affection find themselves transmuted by events into more perfect matches for their eventual partners. Canfield summarises by commenting on the order which is restored by the union of Wilding with the wealthy virgin, Charlot, as opposed to the now-sullied character of Lady Galliard who ends up forced into a marriage to Sir Charles Meriwell in order to save her reputation. Whilst Canfield demonstrates perceptive insight into the subtlety of Behn's unconventional matchmaking, he does not discuss the stimulus behind Charlot's transformation from sexual innocent to mischievous dissembler, fit to marry the play's witty male protagonist. Clacket is the impetus for this change. As early as act one, scene two, Charlot expresses the desire to see her love-rival, Galliard, in person and be 'resolv'd how affairs stand between the old Gentleman' and Wilding, inspiring Mrs Clacket to embark upon a fully formed strategy of infiltration, concealment and disguise.[121] By suggestively proposing that, 'If you're bent upon 't, I'll tell you what we'll do, Madam; There's every Day mighty Feasting here at his Uncles hard by, and you shall disguise your self as well as you can, and go for a Niece of mine I have coming out of Scotland', Clacket is inviting Charlot into the shared knowledge of duplicitous intrigues, which

[119] J. Douglas Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), p. 61.
[120] Cranfield, *Tricksters,* p. 62.
[121] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 15.

constitute the majority of interactions enacted within Restoration comedies.[122] In other words, Clacket is teaching Charlot how to play the game, and more importantly, how to win.

As a character, Clacket's penchant for trickery and her ability to manipulate the events around her for her own or others gain demonstrates how her moral ambiguity is used by Behn to push a subversive agenda of female empowerment. Clacket's pragmatism is a testament to the independent self-preservation of her character, fully realised in the final act when she abandons Foppington by stating, 'we're all undone now: For my part, I'll en'e after her, and deny to have had any hand in the business'.[123] Unlike every other woman in the play, Clacket practises neither reliance nor subservience and as such is free to remove herself from the complicated dynamics within the text. Unlike many of Norris's previous characters who are still largely informed by the patriarchally enforced environments in which they find themselves, Clacket is a comic force capable of the independent movement and freedom of choice normally reserved for a play's male characters. Her origin is unknown, her ending is ambiguous and her social standing unclear. She is repeatedly referred to as 'Clacket' by Wilding and the other young members of the company, and spoken to roughly as an equal, or even a servant, with little consideration for titles or respect and yet she can wander freely through the house of Sir Timothy Treat-all, mingling with his guests and being called his 'Neighbour'.[124] Her ambiguity is her power. In creating a character such as Mrs Clacket, Behn is not only instilling agency and narrative potential in a figure outside the necessarily constricted trio previously discussed in this study but is questioning the moral limitations of women in comic roles. At the beginning of act four, when Lady Galliard's woman, Mrs Closet, attempts to defend her assertion of Wilding's infidelity with the claim that 'all the world knows Mrs Clacket to be a person ---' she is prematurely cut off by Lady Galliard's own opinion of the city-bawd. Lady Galliard continues by highlighting Clacket's duplicitous and hypocritical nature by describing her as one 'who

[122] Ibid.
[123] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 56.
[124] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 35.

is a most devout Bawd, a precise Procurer; Saint in the spirit, and whore in the Flesh; A doer of the Devils work in Gods name' before insisting that if she is Closet's informer, then the 'Lye's undoubted'.[125] Ostensibly, Lady Galliard's tirade would appear to be an admonition of Clacket's character but the wider context and staging of this exchange reveals the impetus for comic imprudence to be placed back on Lady Galliard. Her unreasonable treatment of Closet, whom the audience know to be telling the truth, throughout the opening of this scene, denies her credibility when she comes to disgrace Clacket. By interrupting Closet before she could finish her description, Behn is leaving Clacket's character ambiguously powerful. In accordance with Closet's defence of her mistrust towards Wilding, she was presumably about to champion Mrs Clacket's, albeit somewhat nefarious, social awareness and insight, but by refusing to hear Closet, Lady Galliard is rejecting the assistance of a woman on the grounds of her moral corruptness but whom the audience know to be well informed. This consequently brings into doubt the already murky binary between morality and comic value Behn is attempting to dismantle.

It is not only Behn's writing which makes the character of Clacket such an important contribution to the development of ethically liberated female characters, but the role of the actress Elizabeth Norris in bringing her to life. Perhaps the reason this part has been largely left out of critical study is due to its being viewed in a vacuum. When taking into account the progression of Norris's career and her collaborative history with Behn, however, the character takes on significations beyond the transitory comic moments readily appreciable in the text. From a fairly young age, Norris played characters who were unremarkable, undesirable and even, in some extreme instances, grotesque. However, out of these figures with little to no expectation of satisfying endings, Norris not only developed a 'special line' in creating humorous, peripheral characters but instilled within these women a specific ability to contravene moral, narrative and theatrical codes which applied to the company's leading ladies. As a woman whose career is built on drawing laughter, Norris was able to

[125] Behn, *The City Heiress*, pp. 37.

facilitate subversion behind the comic veil of her bawdy, even puerile reputation whilst delivering, on occasion, moments of tremendous significance. In other words, in a world in which 'virtuous heroines, no less than prostitutes and adulterous wives, are objectified', it is the lone capacity of a woman like Norris to subjectively champion a partisan female perspective.[126]

This ability to transcend the restraints of female characterisation through comic means is best demonstrated in the final scene of *The City Heiress*, when the dubious hero Wilding is set to forsake Lady Galliard, win Charlot, and thoroughly embarrass his imperious uncle. Clacket, when asked to shed light on Charlot's mysterious bout of madness accuses Wilding and states 'I never knew your Nephew was a Lord: Has his Honour made him forget his Honesty?'[127] This line works on a multiplicity of levels, each made richer by having Norris as its speaker. Firstly, Norris who is so often shamed and abused by the end of Behn's plays is here shaming another and retaining the façade of haughty superiority so often denied her. Furthermore, the audience would have been quite aware that Norris has been acting duplicitously this whole time and the sheer hypocrisy of this final line, delivered as she is quite literally in the midst of betraying one of her former conspirators, is made even funnier by the fact that Norris is finally getting away with it. Lastly, and most importantly, Norris is openly admonishing the gallant Wilding, so-called hero of the play and forcing him, if not entirely satisfactorily, into honouring Charlot. In a final scene in which the only other women on stage are the half-crazed Charlot falling with pathetic gratitude into the arms of the untrustworthy Wilding, and the mistreated Lady Galliard, still '*Sighing and looking on Wilding'* as she is handed over to Sir Charles, it is refreshing to behold a steadfast female character free to throw abuse at a recipient worthy of her vitriol.[128] *The City Heiress* is an uneasy play, as most of Behn's best plays are, and the growing sense of resentment towards the swaggering libertine ideology which so often pervades her work is at its most prevalent here. However, in answer to Kreis-Schnick's allegation that this play

---

[126] Markley, 'Behn and the Unstable Traditions', p. 100.
[127] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 60.
[128] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 61.

offers not ‘one inch of space for her female characters’ and an ending of ‘fear and weeping’, it may serve to remember the important impact of the ‘indispensable’ Mrs Norris.

Chapter Two
Elizabeth Currer

Aphra Behn's complicated treatment of the character Diana in *The City Heiress* was by no means a unique approach to the Restoration theatre's comic displays of supposedly immodest women, nor was it the first time the comedian Elizabeth Currer was called upon to play such a part. Throughout her career, spanning 1675 – 1689, Currer was popular for her portrayals of mistresses and prostitutes and her casting as Diana is perhaps the best example of Behn using an actress's reputation to help aid an understanding of a role. This reputation for bawdy and pragmatic characters had already been long established by 1682 through intimate audience interactions such as Currer's delivery of the prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans* three years earlier, when she self-referentially claimed, 'Yet I am handsome still, still young and mad,/ Can wheadle, lie, dissemble, jilt, egad/ As well and artfully as ere I did'.[1] Playing on Currer's established popularity in these roles, Diana is presented for the most part as a likeable figure. She is honestly described by Sir Charles as 'a cheerful, witty Girl', who will 'bring no scandal home'.[2] Diana acts as a sort of gentler, more palatable inheritor to earlier roles believed to be played by Currer, such as Miss Betty Flauntit in Behn's *The Town Fopp; or, Sir Timothy Tawdrey* (1677) or Dryden's Mrs Tricksy in *Mr Limberham; or, The Kind Keeper* (1680). These plays in many ways exemplify what we now call Restoration sex-comedies.[3] The real boom in the output of these comedies occurred in the middle of the 1670s, the most enduringly famous successes being Wycherley's *Country Wife* in 1675 and Etherege's *Man of Mode* the following year, but these are only examples of the onslaught of bawdy, aristocratic, manners comedies which were produced throughout the decade. Discussing this period, Janet Todd writes that the 'pert, vivacious Currer from Ireland was one of the new actresses at the Duke's, her whorish reputation offstage being eminently exploitable in

[1] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (sig. A4r).
[2] Behn, *The City Heiress*, p. 61.
[3] Aphra Behn, *The Town Fopp; or, Sir Timothy Tawdrey* (London: J Magnes, 1676); John Dryden, *Mr Limberham; or, The Kind Keeper* (London: R. Bentley, 1680).

the *double entendres* of prologues and epilogues'.[4] In spite of the excellent work produced in recent years dedicated to the acknowledgement and re-examination of the first women in professional English theatre by academics such as Elizabeth Howe, Gilli Bush-Bailey, and Diana Solomon, this trifling assessment of Elizabeth Currer's career has remained obstinately unchallenged. Where Elizabeth Barry has been praised for her astounding talent and savvy business acumen and Anne Bracegirdle lauded for the subtlety with which she manipulated her popularity through her virginal image, Currer is time and time again consigned to the role of bawdy comedian with little deeper examination.[5] If she is mentioned at all, it is to reflect briefly on her as the epitome of the actress/whore archetype, her roles trending towards the mercenary, resourceful, and unscrupulous mistresses so popular in 1670s sex-comedies, with Howe going so far as to subtitle her brief section on the actress, 'Elizabeth Currer as Whore 1675 – 1679'.[6]

Howe and Bush-Bailey have produced the most thorough recent accounts of Currer's career but beyond their simple acknowledgements of her undoubted skill in bawdy roles and breeches parts, and her 'growing status in the company' as evidenced by her being awarded the prologues and epilogues in several plays, little more is said about the contributions of the Duke's Company comedian.[7] This chapter will begin by examining the potential of these prologues and epilogues to provide Currer with specific opportunities to engage with and persuade her audiences. Due to the often intensely personal connection between these theatrical moments and their performer during the Restoration, the prologues and epilogues of plays such as Thomas D'Urfey's *Squire Oldsapp; or, The Night-Adventurers* (1679) and Edward Ravenscroft's *Dame Dobson; or, The Cunning Woman* (1684), can be used as markers to trace the development of Currer's characters and their place within the Duke's Company's repertoire. These speeches will also demonstrate the increasing importance of

---

[4] Todd, *Aphra Behn*, p. 215.
[5] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens,* p. 31; Hamilton, 'The "Famous Mrs. Barry"'; Diana Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), p. 57.
[6] Howe, *The First English Actresses*, p. 78.
[7] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds*, p. 39.

Currer as a figure of disruption through the use of her comic stage persona. As well as answering some questions about likely castings, Currer's prologues and epilogues, particularly the prologue to Behn's *Feign'd Curtizans,* provide insight into how these liminal performative moments were used by and for the company to invoke political, social, and economic benefits on both a personal and public scale. The chapter will continue by exploring Currer's roles in the years leading up to, during, and shortly following the tumultuous years of the Exclusion Crisis which cast a long shadow on the theatrical industry of the 70s and 80s. Through an examination of Currer in relation to the mythical Whore of Babylon, this chapter will demonstrate how Currer enacted a cheerful, alluring onstage persona to embody the pervasive, exoticised threat of religious dissidence which consumed the world of civic politics. By inhabiting roles which threatened the patriarchal mainstream at a time of fragile national instability, such as the unfaithful mistress Mrs Tricksy in John Dryden's *Mr Limberham* and the scheming Lady Desbro in Behn's *The Roundheads; or*, *The Good Old Cause*, Currer used her sexuality to threaten the self-same male audience who might subjugate and objectify her, all whilst remaining cheerfully ensconced within her own comic line of flirtatious temptress. Finally, this chapter will examine the titular breeches roles in Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter.* The last known part Currer would play for the London stage, Ranter personifies the wild, liberated she-gallant as a direct inheritor to characters such as Moll Cutpurse of Thomas Dekker's and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl; or, Moll Cutpurse* (1611). Ranter's adventures in the consciously exotic setting of the New World demonstrate Behn's attempts to move towards an optimistic fantasy of female liberation towards the end of her career. From the mercantile mistresses and adulterous wives of the late 1670s, through the increasingly provocative characters created in light of the emerging Exclusion Crisis, and finally culminating in vibrant Widow Ranter, this chapter will reassess Currer's contributions to the comic landscape of the period which demonstrate a surprising but pragmatic display of coded morality, not one dependent on institutionally instilled misogyny but rather a proto-feminist, tolerant aversion to oppressive hypocrisy and factional politics.

Todd's brief comment in *Secret Life* that Currer grew 'notorious for tough, unconventional women' hits far closer to the mark than Howe or Bush-Bailey's limited evaluations.[8] The first recorded role for Currer was as a young girl named Alcinda in Elkanah Settle's *The Conquest of China, By The Tartars* (1675), but most sources agree she is likely to have joined the Duke's Company earlier.[9] Currer landing the role of Betty Frisque in John Crowne's *The Country Wit* (1676) the following year was the real moment which would shape the trajectory of her career. Although the frustrating tendency of contemporary manuscripts and subsequent published quartos to omit actors' names in cast lists means we cannot definitively attribute some key roles believed to have been performed by Currer, we can use other methods to fill in some of the gaps in her career. A brief examination of her characters' names aids the process of attribution given the tendency of Restoration playwrights to recycle names and rely on aptronyms for quick character recognition. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the rookie comedian who played the 'young, jilting wench', Betty Frisque, would be chosen eight months later to take on the role of Betty Flauntit, a 'tawdry, mercenary whore' in Aphra Behn's *The Town Fopp*. Elizabeth Howe also raises the point that 'Currer was a "Betty" herself and the repetition of this Christian name in Behn's play surely makes the possibility that she played Flauntit more likely'.[10] A similar argument can be made for the attribution of John Dryden's character Mrs Tricksy, mistress to the titular 'Kind-Keeper' of his 1678 play. Performed the same year as Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), in which Currer played the cunning, adulterous wife Lady Fancy, *Mr Limberham*'s Mrs Tricksy falls very neatly into the same line of duplicitous women. Continuing the trend, the next role Currer is definitely known to have played was Madam Trickwell in Thomas D'Urfey's *Squire Oldsapp*, for which Currer was given the epilogue. The following section will use another epilogue, from the 1681 production of Aphra Behn's *The Roundheads,* to argue for Montague Summers's assertion that Currer was also the most likely choice

---

[8] Todd, *Aphra Behn*, p. 237.

[9] Howe, *First Actresses*, p.78; Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary,* IV, p. 99; Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 39.

[10] Howe, *First Actresses*, p. 79.

for the part of Lady Desbro and, if so, why this particular epilogue reinforces the figure of Currer as a site of theatrical disruption, an orator of political dissatisfaction, and an agent of social critique.[11]

Prologues and Epilogues

In his *Biographical Dictionary*, Philip Highfill writes that 'over the years [Currer] became one of the Company's most popular speakers of prologues and epilogues'.[12] When Currer's seven extant prologues and epilogues performed in her fifteen years on the stage are compared to the sixty-odd performed between the company stars Barry and Bracegirdle over the span of thirty-five years, this seems like an enthusiastic overstatement. Although fewer in number, however, the prologues and epilogues written for Currer are deeply informative of her place in the company and demonstrate the popularity of her as not just a player of parts, but as a celebrated personality in her own right. All being what Diana Solomon categorizes as 'exposed' as opposed to authoritative, impersonal, and 'cloaked', the comic meaning and impact of all Currer's prologues and epilogues are completely informed by herself as a performer.[13] The more conventional prologues in Medieval and Renaissance plays were designed with the intent of being informative, trustworthy, and impersonal and as such the orator would traditionally dress in a plain, black cloak with a wreath around their head, which masked any distinctive characteristics. By donning the cloak, the speaker would transform into the character of the prologue and was entrusted to deliver the text, which would most often serve as a prefatory explanation, provide moral instruction, or announce current events. Possibly because prologues were designed to be figures of authority, when female characters spoke a prologue or epilogue they would do so in costume and forgo the conventional cloak, delivering what Solomon calls an 'exposed' performance. Rosalind's epilogue to *As You Like It* (1599) is perhaps the most famous example of this. Although cloaked prologues and epilogues remained popular towards the end of the sixteenth

[11] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, I, p. 439.
[12] Highfill, *Dictionary*, IV, p. 99.
[13] Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 42.

century, they evolved as writers became more experimental with their design. By 1607, audiences seemed to be growing weary of the trend, with John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont writing in the prologue to *The Woman Hater; or, The Hungry Courtier* (1607), 'a Prologue in Verse is as stale, as a blacke Velvet Cloake, and a Bay Garland'.[14] By the Restoration, references to the prologist's black cloak were few and far between but Solomon avows that the 'idea and the occasional presence of the cloaked prologue speaker' endured well into the eighteenth century.[15] Although not entirely literal, the term 'cloaked' continues to be used by Solomon to describe any Restoration prologue/epilogue in which the speaker is designed to represent 'sobriety, authority, and neutrality', including female spoken speeches where the actress was required to don a metaphorical black cloak.[16] By Solomon's estimate these sorts of prologues and epilogues numbered in the fifties suggesting they were popular with audiences. With the introduction of women to speak for themselves, however, the number of female-spoken 'exposed' performances exploded. These relied intrinsically on the speaker being connected to their character, often drawing on audience's foreknowledge of the actress to achieve comedic and theatrical success. Using Diana Solomon's work on the developing taxonomy of Restoration prologues and epilogues, this section will go on to assess these performative, largely transient moments in relation to Currer.

It is unknown precisely how often a prologue or epilogue was performed. Pierre Danchin and Tiffany Stern agree that these speeches were usually dropped after either the first or possibly the third night, whereas there is some evidence to suggest they accompanied each individual performance.[17] Certainly, as Solomon demonstrates with Nell Gwyn's epilogue to *Tyrranick Love; or, The Royal Martyr* (1669), a speech of this sort can outstrip its attached text in terms of notoriety and be revived over and over for years after the initial run.[18] Within some prologues and epilogues, however, there

---

[14] Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Woman Hater; or, The Hungry Courtier* (London: John Hodgets, 1607) (sig. A2r).
[15] Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues,* p. 44.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues,* p. 33 n. 49.
[18] Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues,* p. 16.

are clear signs of a writer's or a performer's attempts to instil extemporaneity into their dialogue, which is transmuted to the published page. The published edition of Currer's epilogue to *The Loyal General* (1680) reads,

> Doom me to a Nun's Life? --- A Nun! Oh Heart!
>
> The Name's so dreadful, that it makes me start!
>
> No! Tell the Scribbling Fool I'm just as fit
>
> To make a Nun as he to make a Wit.
>
> What? *A-la-mort* Messieurs? Nay then I'll fit ye
>
> Adieu! I' faith no Epilogue for Betty!
>
> And yet, shame on my Foolish Womans Heart,
>
> I fain wou'd see ye smile before we part.[19]

The employment of these rhetorical questions, as if reacting to an unamused audience, and the appearance of this last-minute change of heart implies a specific moment of either genuine or artificial spontaneity in which Currer commanded the stage and was capable of manipulating audience reaction. The strength of this sort of baiting, the ability to tease control over an audience member's response, is indicative of Currer's talent as a comic performer. This section will demonstrate that through her prologues and epilogues it is possible to reimagine Currer as more than just a highly sexualised, bawdy comedian, although this she undoubtedly was, but as a politically radical and disruptive figure who operates as both a mouthpiece and embodiment of feminist ideals. An exploration of the 'between' state Currer inhabits whilst performing exposed prologues and epilogues, as a representation of both the roles she plays and her highly produced stage persona, will provide a basis for the rest of this section.

[19] Nahum Tate, *The Loyal General* (London: Henry Bowicke, 1680).

Diana Solomon recognises that, at least under the rule of the re-instated monarchy, female-spoken prologues and epilogues 'presented the first sanctioned spaces for non-monarchical women to voice ideas, theirs and other, in public'.[20] Although it was more common for a prologue or epilogue to be written by a man for a female speaker, the execution of performance became itself a boldly empowering act. Before examining how Currer's stage persona aided the process of theatrical disruption, it is necessary to categorise each of the performances this section will examine by considering Diana Solomon's taxonomy against the one produced by Autrey Nell Wiley in the 1930s. The differences between these two scholars' attempts at comprehensive taxonomies highlights how understanding of the first female pioneers in English theatre has been reconsidered since the twentieth century. Wiley describes female prologists in terms of their theatrical function, separating them into the following categories, 'Adjuring, or Conjuring, Occasional, Begging, Challenging, Preaching, and Merry'.[21] These categories emphasise the importance of the paratheatrical influence on the audience, with Wiley remarking upon how the most popular actresses 'were entrusted with the office of pleader after they had proved their power to charm an audience'.[22] For Wiley, the prologue or epilogue is always supplemental to the pre-eminence of the play proper and its speaker serves predominantly as a vessel through which an author can manipulate and cajole their audience into approving the play by using whichever method best suits the 'type' of woman she happens to be. Solomon's more recent and far more comprehensive work goes a step further in understanding the complexities of prologues and epilogues as intricate and deeply layered performative moments in their own rights by repositioning the onus for providing meaning onto the person of the performer. Whilst Wiley recognises how the play must influence these moments in order to charm its audience, she fails to consider how the prologues and epilogues influence the audience's understanding and appreciation of the play. By separating prologues and epilogues into the cloaked and exposed varieties, Solomon's work gives

[20] Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues,* p. 11.
[21] Autrey Nell Wiley, 'Female Prologues and Epilogues in English Plays', *PMLA*, 48.4 (1933), pp. 1060-1079, p. 1069.
[22] Wiley, *Female Prologues,* p. 1066.

primacy to the actor as an individual, with their rich performance histories serving as a backdrop which can contextualise their performance. It is therefore significant that every one of Currer's prologues/ epilogues is exposed. Currer uses personal pronouns, refers to the characters she inhabits within texts, and twice employs the use of her name in the third person in an informal, flirty style such as in the aforementioned teasing epilogue to *The Loyal General* and again in the prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans* where she mockingly asks the crowd, 'Who says this age a Reformation wants,/ When *Betty Currer*'s lovers all turn Saints?'[23] A cloaked prologue draws authority from its anonymity, hence the very need for a homogenising cloak, whereas an exposed prologue draws power from its overt flouting of the rules of spectacle, audience expectation and metatheatricality.

By exploring the prologues to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or, The Defeated Widow* (1677) and *Dame Dobson*, and the epilogue to *Squire Oldsapp* (1678), this section will demonstrate how Currer's specific skills were being used to criticise the mistreatment of women and celebrate female solidarity, whilst comically manipulating the misogynistic expectations of her male audience. These speeches demonstrate that Currer used her bawdy reputation and talent for highly sexualised comedy to empower women's place in the public sphere. The prologue to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* is the earliest extant example of Currer delivering such a speech. Performed in the late summer of 1677, Aphra Behn and Thomas Betterton's *Counterfeit Bridegroom* tells the story of the cunning Mrs Hadland who, robbed of her father's estates, plays a crafty and unkind game in which she disguises herself as a perfectly charming rake in order to outpace her rivals to the hand of the widow now in possession her fortune. On the night of their wedding, Mrs Hadland swaps in her brother, Noble, and then blackmails the hapless widow, forcing her to relinquish Hadland's lands in exchange for saving her reputation. Following the bed-trick, Mrs Hadland quips 'Thy Husband's subtleties shall be repaid,/ Thus women are by women best betray'd'.[24] Canfield reads the ending of this play as

[23] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (sig. A4r).
[24] Aphra Behn and Thomas Betterton, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or, The Defeated Widow* (London: Langley Curtis, 1677), p. 48.

ultimately prizing male bonding over female acumen, writing of Mrs Hadland that she is ‘just a trope in the hands of a playwright who, even if she is a woman, underwrites patriarchal aristocracy’.[25] Whilst this play undeniably adheres to the strictures of patriarchal systems of ownership and inheritance, to call Mrs Hadland no more than a trope designed to cement the supremacy of such systems at the expense of women and even female homosociality is to completely ignore the extratextual and metatheatrical components of the performance as set up by the prologue.

The prologue to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* is an ostensibly simple work written for the theatre’s slow season. In it, Currer admonishes the city ‘Sparks’ who by all rights should have departed London for the summer and left the playhouses to the ‘Trading Gentlemen’, the prologue’s seeming heroes, allowing for Behn’s usual dose of patronising elitism.[26] As Janet Todd disparagingly puts it, the ‘Vacation Chear’ of Behn’s prologue, ‘had a decidedly secondary cast, with few major actors included, as was common in the unfashionable summer months’.[27] Perhaps this was why the young Currer was permitted the honour of speaking the prologue and demonstrating for the first time her striking ability to command her audience and use her position, both socially and theatrically, to manipulate gendered conventions and effectively critique the aggressive masculinity of her audience. The brunt of the prologue’s humour is aimed towards mocking the cits, gallants and ‘Gay Baboons’ who would normally dominate the playhouse audience.[28] In the upside down time of summer, Currer can freely single out the lingering high born members of the crowd and punish them in front of her peers. The prologue reads,

> To th’ honest Tradesmen leave this time o’th’ year,
>
> Who while their Wives (good men) are gone to meet
>
> Some of you Sirs t’th’ Countrey here can sit

[25] Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates,* p. 50.
[26] Behn, *Counterfeit Bridegroom* (sig. A2r).
[27] Todd, *Aphra Behn*, p. 216.
[28] Behn, *Counterfeit Bridegroom* (sig. A2r).

> Wonderously pleas'd with our Vacation Treat.
>
> But since against the Rules of Gallantry
>
> Ye keep in Town, faith take your Chance for me;
>
> Huff, Damn and Swear, if you think good – but then
>
> Expect a brush fro'th' Trading Gentlemen,
>
> For' tis their time 't 'approve or to Condemn:
>
> You'l say, 'tis hard, you cannot be allow'd
>
> To Judg, and censure with the Common Crowd[.][29]

Socially, this prologue represents a moment in time in which a woman of low birth is speaking on behalf of the 'common crowd' to the sparks of London, accusing them of foregoing the 'Rules of Gallantry', and usurping the right of 'honest Tradesmen' to judge the play themselves.[30] Admittedly, this prologue is the most anonymous of Currer's, in that the social aspect of the speaker's authority could be applied to most actresses at the time, inhabiting, as they do, the strange liminal space of a so-called dishonourable woman with a recognised public platform. What makes this prologue stand out as a bold criticism of men who mistreat women can be specifically attributed to Currer's careful blend of flirtatious teasing and the 'betweenness' of her public persona and the roles she inhabits, in this case the fearless and manipulative Mrs Hadland. Hadland uses sex and blackmail to gain power and authority which, in the play itself, ultimately punishes the widow of the guilty man from whom Hadland initially sought restitution. In the prologue, however, before the actions of the play have taken place, the audience is treated to these same tools being used to persecute the rich and powerful men, the true instigators of Canfield's 'patriarchal aristocracy'. By trespassing in a space which normally welcomes them at a time not designed for them, wealthy city-men are breaking a form of

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

social contract, thereby leaving them exposed to ridicule and, more dangerously, sexual blackmail. 'Since Vizards are grown scarce', suggests Currer, these men will have little else to do but come and damn the play but, she warns, if they dare to enter the playhouse at this particular time they ought to dress as other audience members do, 'with Coat, Short wig, and Colbertian Crevat'.[31] If these men choose not to adhere to this new social contract as designed by Behn, and enacted by Currer, the actress threatens the same sort of blackmail performed by Hadland. Currer warns that if they do not comply, they can expect the honest folk to 'swear/ *Vacation Pocket* 'tis, that keeps you here;/ And *Play* at Half a Crown does now prove Dear'.[32] Whether this thinly veiled threat refers to her audience's gambling problems or a more euphemistic reference to the availability of the women on stage, these men are then consigned to sit through an entire play which demonstrates the ultimate folly of not adhering to Currer's demands. The financial and reputational ruin conferred upon Widow Landwell becomes, in fact, an echo of this threat reverberating throughout the playhouse, warning of the danger of contravening the conventions of the playhouse as set out by the powerful figure of Currer. Through the prologue, and the casting of Currer as both Hadland and its orator, Behn and the cast of *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* are removing the onus of guilt from a hapless widow and repositioning it back where it belongs, on the wealthy, male audience members crowding the Pit who have, for too long, been recognised as the controlling powerbrokers of the Restoration theatre.

A similar redistribution of blame occurs in Currer's epilogue to Thomas D'Urfey's *Squire Oldsapp*. In this play, Currer plays Madam Tricklove, 'a cunning, vile, deceitful Damsel', mistress to the titular squire, a professed 'Old Dotard', played by the comedian James Nokes.[33] Just as her character in the play-world, aptly nicknamed 'Sneakie', acts at being the appropriately demure mistress whose lover claims her to be 'the most constant Woman in *Christendome*', so Currer begins

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Thomas D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp; or, The Night-Adventurers* (London: James Magnus, 1679), p. 8.

her epilogue in the manner of what Wiley's taxonomy would call a simple adjuring plea for sympathy and understanding.[34] Currer begins,

> Like some true Friend that makes a willing Feast,
>
> And him he loves does still invite his Guest;
>
> Although his Treat prove course, is sure to use
>
> A hearty welcome, and a kind excuse:
>
> So th' Poet fearing this his Case may be,
>
> T'excuse the Play's Defects has chose out me[.][35]

At the seventh line of the epilogue, however, Currer supposedly veers off the path intended by the author as if rhetorically snatching the oratory privilege for herself, stating 'But I swear, am loath to venture it,/ You deal as ill with women now as wit'.[36] The true Madam Tricklove appears once again, a woman with nothing but disdain for the simpering fools who fall for the transparent charms of women, nor the 'true Gallants of this wicked Town' who 'Debauch 'um first, and after Cry 'um down'.[37] It is clear that the epilogue was written specifically to admonish 'Criticks' of D'Urfey's work and that Currer acts more as a mouthpiece rather than the dominant speaker her seventh-line break suggests her to be. However, the interesting aspect of this epilogue derives once again from the 'inbetween' space Currer occupies as an individual, an actress, and a character. Just like in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*, which some of the audience would have seen the previous summer, Currer in her role as performer and Currer in her role as character blend ambiguously into one, strengthening the authority of both. The final moments of the play are given to Currer. Having suitably deluded her lover and persuaded him of her virtue, Trickwell delivers this powerfully assertive couplet to the women in the audience, 'But to forge plots in un extremity,/ Let every Mistress henceforth learn from

[34] D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp*, p. 66.
[35] D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp* (sig. K2r)
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

me'.[38] Although the following stage direction of the 1678 quarto reads '*exeunt omnes',* it is clearly not just Currer who retakes the stage in order to deliver the epilogue. Having immediately proven her credentials in forging 'plots in extremity', with her artificial adjuring in the opening lines, Currer/ Trickwell '*Points to Oldsapp*' and threatens 'this Curse' to the cheating Gallants of the town, 'May you all live till y'are as dull as he;/ And all your darling Misses prove like me'.[39] The reinforcement of Currer's amorous but powerful persona with the direct address to their mistresses at the end of the play is compounded by the meek and silent presence of Nokes standing onstage as a prop for Currer to abuse. This rousing speech of female solidarity ends with a damning couplet in keeping with Currer's ongoing chastisement of misogynistic hypocrisy, 'If our Sex has faults, blame the Original,/ For all our frailties came by *Adam's* fall'.[40]

A different tactic is employed in Currer's prologue to *Dame Dobson*, but one which achieves the same effect of highlighting and mocking insincere morality. Rather than Currer inhabiting a role which complements and strengthens her onstage persona, her prologue is designed to mock and chastise the pretended civility of 'Chaste Ladies' and fearful, jealous lovers, working in direct contrast with a role which emulates the self-same habits.[41] According to the prologue, Ravenscroft wrote *Dame Dobson* to free himself from the accusations of lewdness thrown at his comedy *The London Cuckolds* (1681). Despite the play being extremely popular, particularly at Court, certain factions found the bawdy sex farce with its open ridicule of cuckoldry to be offensive. *Dame Dobson,* Ravenscroft's '*Recantation* Play', serves as a response to such slanders with Currer facetiously remarking that ''tis dull, but then 'tis very civil', both in manners and social rank.[42] The plot revolves around the intrigues of the titular Dame and her confederacy of women, as she pretends to be a spiritual mystic in order to trick and beguile her hapless customers, creating profitable matches,

---

[38] D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp*, p. 66.
[39] D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp* (sig. K2r).
[40] Ibid.
[41] Edward Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson; or, The Cunning Woman* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1684) (sig. A2r).
[42] Ibid.

disrupting unwanted marriages, and confounding any attempts to expose her by credulous patrons. Although small, the beauty of Currer's part in this sequence of episodic set-pieces lies in its contrast to the astute, experienced, and bawdy personality the audience would have come to recognise. Currer's opening line to the prologue reads, 'Gallants, I vow I am quite out of heart,/ I've not one smutty jest in all my part'.[43] This prologue, which could only be performed by an actress like Currer who held a reputation for smutty comedy, proved so popular the printer, Joseph Hindmarsh, had it printed and circulated before the publication of the full text the following year.[44] However, the prologue's effect is most powerful when it is read directly before the events of the play. In *Dame Dobson,* Currer plays Mrs Featly, a housewife who is duped by Dobson when she visits her attempting to seek assurances of the fidelity of her lover. Before Mrs Featly enters the scene, the integration of Currer with her character enacted through the prologue has already undermined any sense of innocence she may have been afforded. Currer's despondence at having to perform a part so unsuited to her natural comic talents in a prologue dripping with disdain towards an audience who dared to insult the integrity of Ravenscroft's previous attempt in *The London Cuckolds* mars the audience's first impression of Mrs Featly. This creates a wholly new interpretation of the character which could not exist without Currer. Any pretence of natural innocence to which this character pretends becomes farcical in the aftermath of Currer's proclamation. In a play whose driving comedic force is social satire of foppery and pretence, the destabilising of Featly's character occurring before the actions of the play sets the scene for the rest of the performance. This prologue informs and underpins every subsequent interaction that Currer, and by association every other performer, has with the audience for the remainder of the play and this disparity is highlighted in the opening moments of the prologue.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Edward Ravenscroft, *Prologue to Dame Dobson the cunning woman spoken by Mrs. Currer. Epilogue to the same: spoken by Mr. Jevorn.* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1683), p, 1.

When taken by itself, Currer's annoyance that her part has 'not one smutty jest' nor 'one scene of tickling Rallery', might appear to be a throwaway comment designed to humorously excuse the incongruity of the casting decision.[45] In fact, by drawing attention to it before the play's beginning, Ravenscroft ensures that the audience recognise the far more subtle exchange occurring between Currer and her character. Being one of the final visitors to enter Dobson's charlatan parlour, Currer's Mrs Featly does not make an appearance until act five. When she is finally ushered in by Decoy, the first of Dobson's two assistants for this particular caper, Featly enters reluctantly, stammering in fear at the potential act of blasphemy which is about to occur. After much encouragement from Dobson, Featly finally stutters out 'Oh la—a—I—a—I am in love'.[46] After much coaxing it is haltingly revealed that Featly, 'a Citizen's Wife', has fallen for another man, one that she 'has found great satisfaction in'.[47] Featly confesses that if she could be assured of her new lover's constancy, she would believe herself to be 'the happiest Woman living'.[48] Decoy then reveals Featly has also been maintaining this gentleman, 'answerable to his Quality'.[49] Dobson's solution to answering this question is for Featly to discourse with the head of Abelanecus, really the maid Beatrice with her body hid within a table leaving just her head exposed. Featly panics at the thought of conversing with devilish spirits and cries at Decoy, 'Whither have you brought me here! What shall I do, not to seem a maid'.[50] A far cry from the bold, self-assured actions of Currer's usual characters, Featly's timid stammering and fearful actions, as demonstrated by the stage direction in which she '*squeaks and starts back*' from the rolling eyes of the supposedly reanimated head, reveal the extent of the character's comic incongruity from the actress playing her.[51] More importantly, Featly reveals herself in a very short space of time to possess all the usual character defects of the doting cullies Currer normally manipulates in her jilting, mistress roles. Featly is superstitious, fearful, jealous, naïve, and hypocritical. She is more terrified of the appearance of her virtue and reputation than its

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson*, p. 57.
[47] Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson*, p. 58.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson*, p. 60.
[51] Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson*, p. 61.

quality. She is eager to find a man who can give her sexual satisfaction outside of her marriage but is fearful her gallant might be unfaithful. She is being cozened by a lover, whom she financially supports, and goes to extreme supernatural lengths to obtain and keep him, very similar to the youth rituals attempted by Squire Oldsapp back in 1678. Featly is a female cit, pathetically attempting to orchestrate an affair with a lover who is clearly trying to use her for her money. Doubling down on the sarcastic tone of the prologue, which threatens to unmask the 'pretended Modesty' of its audience if they should slightly falter in their staunch, high-minded morality, Ravenscroft's play inverts the expected tropes of hypocrisy by placing Currer, so often the satirical complainant of this particular fault, as the figure of its embodiment.[52] It is as if Currer is defending her culturally vulgar but morally honest strain of comedy by performing for the audience the very people her humour is designed to highlight and admonish: the cruel, the weak-minded, and the hypocritical.

Currer and the Exclusion Crisis

Unearthing hypocrisy through comedy is a central aspect of Currer's rationale, but the political climate of the 1670s and early 1680s altogether altered the importance of her rebukes. The prologue to *Dame Dobson* is a late example of the peculiarly political turn that Currer's career took during the years of the Exclusion Crisis, when her method of highlighting and criticising hypocrisy extended beyond the mistreatment of women as part of sexual games and into the more controversial realms of religion and politics. First thought to have been performed in May of 1683, *Dame Dobson* premiered in a slightly more secure political scene than the plays produced at the peak of the crisis, and its contents speak to a universal trend of playwrights moving away from antagonistic, factionally-charged texts. Owen has suggested that the prologues and epilogues of this period are particularly tied to these currents, pointing out that on the one hand if the 'majority of the audience were sympathetic to the opposition, the royalist prologues and epilogues would not work, would simply create hostility

[52] Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson* (sig. A2r).

and drive away custom' but also highlighting the increasingly neutral stances of these dramatic moments for the brief period after 1680 which saw a Whig majority in parliament.[53] Having said this, by 1683 with the Tory faction safely back in power and the Whigs seemingly crushed, with news of the failed Rye House plots only weeks from emerging, there was still a lot of traction to be had in the conventionally Tory space of Restoration playhouses for Whig-baiting. Turning tack towards the end of her prologue, Currer equates the wavering morality of 'Whiggish Nature' to the so-called pious and chaste ladies:

> Thus Brides are Coy and Bashful the first night,
>
> But us'd to't once, are mad for their delight.
>
> Do not the *Whiggish* Nature then pursue,
>
> Lest like *Whig-writer*, he desert you too.
>
> *Whig-Poet* when he can no longer Thrive,
>
> Turns *Cat in Pan* and writes his *Narrative.*
>
> No *Irish* Witness sooner shall recant.
>
> Nor oftner play the *Devil* or the *Saint.*[54]

A popular insult levelled at Whigs by Tory playwrights was that they were disloyal, inconstant hypocrites, and Ravenscroft was no different, accusing Whig-writers of turning '*Cat in Pan',* a contemporary idiom for switching sides for personal gain, when they can longer thrive.[55] Currer is the ideal orator for this jibe, marrying the sexually charged comparison of virgin brides losing their virtue to the supposed weakness of Whig hypocrites. Currer's final couplet of the prologue speaks to how Currer's authoritative voice was developed in the years since her euphemistic flirtation in *The Counterfeit Bridegroom*.[56] Referencing the Irish witnesses, or 'Macshams', brought forward by the

---

[53] Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 14.
[54] Ravenscroft, *Dame Dobson* (sig. A2r).
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

Earl of Shaftesbury as evidence of a completely fictional, French-backed, Irish uprising, this statement serves as a bitter indictment of political players on the national stage. Although undeniably still inhabiting her role as bawdy, licentious comedian, Currer's persona takes on a pointedly political and authoritative aspect, and her later roles reflect this, becoming more and more entrenched within the religious and ideological systems controlling the London zeitgeist in these years. By inhabiting often controversial displays of dissenting and unorthodox religions and ideas, Currer's place on stage is a political act not just due to her being a woman occupying and controlling a traditionally male space, but because Currer herself becomes a site of political criticism.

The most prominent blending of Currer as a celebrated personality and her position as commentator on current affairs can be found in the prologue to Aphra Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans*. Although this play has already been discussed in terms of its comic depictions of status, age, and sexuality, little has been mentioned of the political and religious climate in which it was produced. This play is thought to have premiered in March 1679, the same month as Lord Danby's impeachment by the newly convened parliament, one of the first major events of the Exclusion Crisis.[57] In reference to the political trouble brewing outside the walls of Dorset Gardens, Currer opened this raucous play with the lines, 'The Devil take this cursed plotting Age,/ 'T has ruin'd all our Plots upon the Stage'.[58] As explored in both John Kenyon's comprehensive account *The Popish Plot* (1972) and Tim Harris's more recent examination of the Exclusion Crisis in his *Restoration* (2006), the period was fraught with paranoia, mistrust and rising hysteria.[59] The relationship between Charles II's government and an increasingly divided parliament rapidly declined throughout the 1670s, culminating in the crisis which lasted from 1679 to 1681. Following the execution of their father, Charles I, at the hands of Cromwell's parliament in 1649, Charles II and his younger brother, James the Duke of York, spent the majority of their time in European exile until Charles's restoration in 1660. With no money and

[57] Van Lennep, *The London Stage,* I, p. 276; Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdoms* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 176
[58] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (sig. A4r).
[59] John Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London: Heinemann, 1972); Harris, *Restoration*, pp.139 - 146.

few options, the brothers moved from country to country, alternately finding hospitality amongst French, Spanish, Irish, and Dutch allies, most of whom were Catholic. Upon their return to England, an overwhelmingly Royalist and pro-Anglican parliament set about ensuring the stability of the crown in alignment with the Church of England through what would come to be known as the Clarendon laws. However, as the 1670s began and it became more likely that James would succeed his brother to the throne, none of Charles's thirteen living children being able to claim legitimacy, increasing fears of Roman Catholic influence at Court led to the factious and strained politics which would mark this decade and greatly influence the theatre produced during its zenith. These fears were well founded, as demonstrated by the secret Treaty of Dover signed in 1670 which saw Charles promise to convert England to Catholicism and aid the French in their war against the Protestant Dutch Republic in exchange for French financing.[60] This encroaching popery and arbitrary government was not just occurring in clandestine meetings but openly in public spaces, law courts, and within Charles's personal circles. Complaints arose of 'popish books and trinkets' being offered for sale in London's market places, a convent being opened within the walls of St. James's palace, and Catholics flouting the restrictions of the Test Acts and freely taking office.[61] Charles supported religious toleration for dissenters as a way of providing greater freedoms for Roman Catholics but his efforts were thwarted by parliament, culminating in the 1673 Test Act which demanded increased proof that all office-holders were practising Anglican rites and denied the doctrine of transubstantiation.[62] This resulted in James being outed as a converted Catholic which forced Charles on the defensive and, amidst accusations of arbitrary and absolutist government, he begrudgingly acquiesced to the demands of an increasingly hostile parliament. The following years saw increased restrictions on Catholic and non-Anglican dissenters, the rise of spurious reports of plots and treasons, and increased pressure to exclude the now openly Catholic James from succession. It was amidst this heady battle over sovereignty, ideology, and financing that Titus Oates and Israel Tonge chose to implement their bizarre and chaotic plan to create a fictitious Catholic plot against the king's life. The so called

[60] Kenyon, *Popish Plot,* p. 14
[61] Ibid.
[62] Kenyon, *Popish Plot*, p. 1.

'Popish Plot' sparked a parliamentary war over the correct line of succession which ultimately cemented partisan factions as a staple of English politics.

It was in direct response to these dangerous times that Currer took to the stage and delivered the prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans* which bemoaned the paranoia and hysteria of her waning audience. The prologue continues,

> Suspicions, New Elections, Jealousies,
>
> Fresh Information, New discoveries,
>
> Do so employ the busy fearful Town,
>
> Our honest calling here is useless grown.[63]

Already a far cry from the playful and politically benign wheedling in her prologue to *The Counterfeit Bridegroom,* this speech launches Currer straight into the murky world of civic politics. The prologue paints the streets of London as bursting with conspiracy and corruption, with each 'fool' calling for new regulations, decrees and laws to suit his own factious ends and the theatre, at the centre of it all, as an innocent victim of the rising tide of popular hysteria.[64] Currer, turning the focus on the audience, declares,

> But Wit, as if t'were Jesuiticall,
>
> Is an abomination to ye all:
>
> To what a wretched pass will poor Plays come,
>
> This must be damn'd, the Plot is laid in Rome[65]

[63] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (sig. A4r).
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

By linking the innocent plot of the play with the religious and political forces enraging the external world, this prologue ostensibly reinforces Currer's position as the entreating actress, doing her bit for waning ticket sales. More importantly, however, it speaks to her growing presence as a site for political and ideological debate. The marriage of 'Wit' to the 'Jesuiticall' extreme of dissident religion is an intentional connection which places the higher-minded purity of reason and logic against the suspicious anti-Catholic factions. This prologue is greatly informed by Currer's on-stage personality, effortlessly blending religious metaphor with sexual euphemism. It is entrenched within a social critique of the fanatical anti-Catholic feeling which was supposedly sending the population into a frenzy, or at the least the image of panic being painted by political factions which would benefit from further discrimination against Catholics and their allies at court. Beginning on a macro-scale, bemoaning the 'plotting Age', 'State affairs, and the 'fearful Town', the prologue twists Currer's rhetoric towards the personal with another seemingly spontaneous shift in tone,

> For my own principles, faith, let me tell ye
>
> I'me still of the Religion of my Cully,
>
> And till these dangerous times they'd none to fix on,
>
> But now are something in meer contradiction,
>
> And piously pretend, these are not days,
>
> For keeping Mistresses and seeing Plays.[66]

Playing off the seemingly submissive but ultimately transactional relationship of Currer and her 'Cully', the prologue allows her to remain consciously empowered whilst the theatre she represents is

[66] Ibid.

being placed as the natural opposite and subsequent victims of the corruption of the political sphere.[67] In entreating her male audience away from grand but sanctimonious notions of 'Reformation', Currer, or rather the on stage orator Currer inhabits, is simultaneously attacking the dangers of political factionalism whilst gently and humorously promoting both her on and off stage vocations.[68] By citing a perhaps optimistically utopian time where religion was not dangerously fixed to political allegiance and manipulated by the governing class to force 'Suspicions, New Elections, Jealousies', she is highlighting the menace that anti-Catholic feeling poses to the nation, the theatre, and to herself in explicitly sexual terms.[69] As prologist, Currer comically moves into a pitiable bargaining position by emphasising that despite being 'handsome still, still young and mad' she wants for 'New Supplies' from lovers lost to the temptations of pretended piety. Currer is flagrantly using her position to publicly advertise her desire for sexual patronage whilst using her performative sexuality and public position to blame the 'hellish times' brought on by civic dissatisfaction on the power-hungry cabals who cite morality and nationalistic religion to defend their factious plotting.[70] Currer finishes by pouting, 'That Youth and Beauty should be quite undone,/ A Pox upon the Whore of Babylon.' Dripping with irony, this statement reduces the anti-Catholic sentiments which prevailed during the Exclusion Crisis to their most ludicrously petty conclusion.

Betty Currer as the Whore of Babylon

Her prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans* was by no means the first time Currer was placed in relation to the biblical 'Mother of Harlots' and the variously complex connotations the figure held during this period.[71] According to Revelation, the Whore of Babylon was a bejewelled harlot who rode a scarlet beast and tempted the kings of the world. Supposedly, 'the inhabitants of the earth have been made

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (sig. A4v).
[71] Revelation, 17.5.

drunk with the wine of her fornication'.[72] This term had been in use long before the Reformation to denounce the abuses and corruption of the Catholic Church.[73] Gendered, exotic, and threatening, the Whore of Babylon denunciation was capitalised on ostensibly by English Protestants as a generic catch-all for the wide-reaching influence of Rome throughout Europe and deep into the royal court of Charles II. According to Laura M. Stevens, however, by the time of the late seventeenth century 'the whore came to stand less for the Roman Catholic Church and more for Protestants' own tendencies to drift towards beliefs and practices that resembled Catholicism, especially through an emphasis on external displays over spiritual substance'.[74] In this capacity, the whore, and consequently Currer as her archetypal inheritor, was used in the theatre of this period not just to exemplify an encroaching and overtly-sexualised threat of foreign power but was also used by some, and Aphra Behn in particular, to highlight and mock the opposing fanaticism and hypocrisy of those who would use the term with sincere alarm. This is clearly exemplified in the associations of the biblical figure which can definitively be tied to Currer. For example, during her tenure as Madam Trickwell in *Squire Oldsapp,* her servant Pimpo declares to her, 'Madam, you are a greater Jilt than the Whore of *Babylon*, and have more tricks, sincerely'.[75] Pimpo, 'seemingly religious if not well rewarded, but else very vitious and mercinary', is the more comically viable of the two figures with his dogged adherence to the pious, fanatical side of religion acting as the driving force of his characterisation.[76] Although it is Currer who is being insulted here in connection with the Babylonian whore, it is Pimpo whom D'Urfey is setting up for comic retribution. Throughout her career, this connection between Currer and the Whore of Babylon occurred time and time again. Of all the references to the Babylonian Whore which occur during the period 1660 to 1700, roughly one third are in relation to one of Currer's characters.[77] Three of these most likely occurred within 6 months of each other. In order to

[72] Revelation, 17.2.
[73] Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 6.
[74] Laura M. Stevens, '"Healing a Whorish Heart": The Whore of Babylon and Protestant Interiority in Restoration and Eighteenth- Century Britain', *European Studies*, 31 (2013), pp. 71-84, p. 71.
[75] D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp*, p. 43.
[76] D'Urfey, *Squire Oldsapp* (sig. A2r).
[77] Collecting data from EEBO and LION, I have found the term 'Whore of Babylon' or synonyms thereof used twenty one times in eighteen plays during the period 1660 to 1700. Of the twenty-one references, seven are said

explore the contrasting ways in which Currer both adheres to and challenges the anti-Catholic implications of the symbolic Whore of Babylon, the following section will first examine the role of Mrs Tricksy in Dryden's *Mr Limberham* as demonstrative of the first, more conventional association. It will then go on to examine how Aphra Behn inverts the trope of the Whore in order to belittle and mock fanatical ideologues in her plays written around the time of the Exclusion Crisis, *Sir Patient Fancy* and *The Roundheads*.

The titular character of Dryden's comedy can be heard bemoaning of his lover, 'Let her be a Mistress for a *Pope*, like a Whore of Babylon, as she is'.[78] According to Van Lennep's calendar of plays, this term was hurled at Tricksy just three months after it was used to describe Currer's Lady Fancy in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* and two months before Currer's Madam Tricklove earned the sobriquet in D'Urfey's *Squire Oldsapp*.[79] Following on from her success as Betty Frisque and Jenny Wheadle earlier in the decade, Currer has been put forward by Elizabeth Howe as the most likely candidate to take on the similar role of Mrs Tricksy in 1678 when the play was first performed. Like Madam Trickwell, Tricksy is a devious, mercenary mistress who spends the play manipulating her kind keeper 'with a combination of ranting fury and extravagant affection', all the while tempting the eligible Woodall away from his honest match with Mrs Pleasance.[80] *Mr Limberham*, a licentious comedy set entirely in a boarding house, was written, in Dryden's own words, as 'an honest *Satyre* against our crying sin of *Keeping'*.[81] The play only lasted three nights and in order to publish the printed edition of 1680, Dryden was forced to make copious cuts and changes leaving the extant copy a much changed creature from the one which was performed in 1678.[82] In his dedication to John Vaughan, 3rd Earl of Carbery, a man who incidentally was decried by Samuel Pepys as one of the

either to, about, or by one of Currer's characters. Six of the references are directly describing the influence of Rome and Popery. Six are used to describe other characters, both male and female. Two are general oaths.
[78] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 16.
[79] Van Lennep, *The London Stage*, I, p. 270.
[80] Howe, *First English Actresses*, p. 79.
[81] 'Keeping' being the act of financially maintaining a sexual partner in a usually lavish lifestyle. This term is most often, but not always, used to refer to men of means supporting their mistresses; Dryden, *Mr Limberham* (sig. A3v).
[82] Van Lennep, *The London Stage,* I, p. 269.

'lewdest fellows of the age', Dryden defends himself by claiming any objection his play received was because it 'expresed too much of the Vice which it decry'd'.[83] Even after the editing, it is easy to understand why a certain faction of the town would be disgusted at a farce which displayed, if satirically, the many recognisable characters of dissenting religion and the lewd promiscuity of libertine ideology. The protagonist, young Aldo, a libertine rogue, returns to England on the understanding he is to marry an eligible and respectable young woman. Fearing this fate, he instead disguises himself under the name Woodall and lodges in the boarding house of the 'Hypocritical Fanatick' landlady, Mrs Saintly.[84] Hereafter ensues a series of increasingly farcical scenes in which Woodall, under the guidance of his lecherous father who remains oblivious to his true identity throughout, attempts to juggle ongoing affairs with Mrs Saintly, the maid Judith, the married Mrs Brainsick, the 'Termagent kept Mistress' Mrs Tricksy, and Mrs Pleasance, the woman who would turn out to be his betrothed, all to varying degrees of success. Dryden's play alludes to a variety of contemporary anxieties: the capability of fatherhood, the corruption of traditional institutions, and the overall degradation of morality within the swamped, almost claustrophobic space of Saintly's lodging house.

As seen in the prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans,* the theatre of this period was shaped in response to the religious discord incited by the factious governance of the 1670s, which saw the growing divide between the exclusionist petitioners and the pro-James Abhorrers, retrospectively recognised as the Whigs and the Tories. Many of these productions served to persuade, satirize, mock, and criticise the overtly dramatic atmosphere which had arisen outside the walls of Dorset Garden Theatre, but more importantly was required to compete with it. When the reality of everyday life included a maelstrom of plotting, assassinations, pope-burnings, and treason the theatre of this period was very much in the business of catching up and, more than ever, plays were written primarily to get

[83] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, 10 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), viii, pp. 532 - 533 (Saturday 16th November 1667); Dryden, *Mr Limberham* (sig. A3v).
[84] Dryden, *Mr Limberham* (sig. A4v).

audience members through the door. John Dryden alludes to as much when he writes in the dedication to the published edition of the play, written in 1680, ‘I cannot easily excuse the printing of a play at so unseasonable a time, when the Great Plot of the Nation, like one of *Pharoah’s* lean Kine, has devour’d its younger Brethren of the Stage’.[85] Even before the events of Spring 1679, which inspired Behn to write her Roman plot, Dryden’s anxieties over creating compelling enough theatre to entice the crowd’s attention away from the high drama being played out in parliament and across the nation are clear in his work. The play to which this dedication is attached was performed two years prior to its publication and is an uneasy text of blatant hypocrisy, false alliances, and the satirising of a universal moral decay. A far cry from the bombastic, moralising heroic dramas which shaped Dryden’s earlier career, there is nothing in *Mr Limberham* to champion honour, disseminate a national sense of hope, or propagate a doctrine of Stuart supremacy. Rather than demonstrating loyalty to any one particular faction or champion any one particular cause, *Mr Limberham* maps out a sordid and lost community in which no character is truly virtuous or redeemable and instead warns against an almost suffocating threat from all sides, both foreign and domestic. Although ostensibly a stalwart defender of the Stuart cause, the politics of *Mr Limberham* shows a murky, shifting and often indiscriminately critical side to Dryden’s position. Increasingly, scholars have come to understand playwrights’ contributions to the contemporary discourse of the Exclusion Crisis as politically elusive. Paulina Kewes writes that there is no doubt ‘that Dryden and other dramatists exploited this climate of interpretative free-for-all to deny responsibility for dangerous or divisive arguments by adopting a pose of naivety’.[86] Owen discusses the flaws in the traditional binary outlook of Whig-writers vs Tory-writers, pointing out that the theatre necessarily altered at the whims and feelings of the public and those who wielded power, not unlike the reality of Dryden’s own fluctuating allegiances. Owen writes that ‘there is a danger in seeing political reference exclusively or mainly in terms of dramatists taking sides, or making the kind of political allusions which we might expect to find in a modern context of clearly defined political allegiances’.[87] Whilst the resistance to any one distinct thread of

[85] Dryden, *Mr Limberham* (sig. A2r).
[86] Paulina Kewes, ‘Dryden’s theatre and the passions of politics’, *A Cambridge Companion to John Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 131-155, p. 134.
[87] Owen, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 28.

political analysis in *Mr Limberham* makes it clear that we must not understand the plays of this period through this lens, the text itself can be used to elucidate the unstable moods of, if not the country, then at least the London masses who frequented the theatre at Dorset Garden and, more importantly, highlight the role of Currer in manipulating and challenging these moods. It is the character of Mrs Tricksy, in alignment with and in narrative opposition to Mrs Saintly, which will be the focus of the following section, illuminating the particular threats of dissenting religion, of all degrees, which their parts inform.

In the opening scene, upon Woodall's arrival at the house, Mrs Saintly is immediately introduced as a lascivious woman who feigns religious zeal but is immediately betrayed by her own actions, not to mention an aggressive linguistic ability to twist her insincere righteousness round to barely concealed lust. Having assured Woodall she would wait up for him into the early hours Saintly says, 'if you were overtaken, and shou'd offer violence, and I consent not, you may do your filthy part, and I am blameless', to which a nervous Woodall whispers in an aside, 'I think the Devil's in her; she has given me the hint again'.[88] In the opening scene of the play, Woodall's servant, Gervase, asserts that Saintly goes 'to a private Meeting House' where she and her associates 'pray for the Government, and practice against the Authority of it'.[89] This immediately paints as her a figure of religious fanaticism and a threat against institutions of power and stability. Upon her introduction in act one and the depiction of her aggressive sexuality through the use of zealous, hypocritical language, for example her concession that 'a little Swearing may then be allowable: you may swear you love me', Mrs Saintly embodies a connection between her gender and sexuality and the religious threat she inhabits. Dissenting religious sects which espoused egalitarian ideologies, such as the Levellers and Diggers, were seen as a threat partly due to their elevation of women into the public world of civil politics, particularly through the use of petitions and pamphlets as political tools. A group of women writing a petition to parliament on behalf of some dissident prisoners in 1648 begins,

---

[88] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 4.
[89] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 1.

'That since we are assured of our Creation in the image of God, and of an interest in Christ, equal unto men, as also of a proportionable share in the Freedoms of this Common wealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes, as to be thought unworthy to Petition or represent our Grievances to this Honourable House'.[90] The Civil War and Interregnum saw a burst of female-led activism and religious work from members of these sects and the proliferation of women preachers, petitioners and pamphleteers in these societies was a topic of much antagonism in the pamphlet war which accompanied the friction of the political stage.[91] The same year *Mr Limberham* was produced a minister named John Brown, in his anti-Quaker tract, used Corinthians to defend his stance against woman's involvement in religion writing '"Let your women keep silence, in the Churches", we might think, that this were indeed enough to satisfie us; but see what the Apostle addeth further to enforce this, "for it is not permitted unto them to speak", to wit, in the Churches; as if he had said, they have no allowance thereunto, permission, or tollerance'.[92] Brown goes on to write that the vocality of such women is 'contrary to that modesty and shamefastness, that is the ornament of women.'[93] The growing fear of these bold, zealous and consequently immodest women is manifest in Dryden's depiction of the bawdy Mrs Saintly and her entrance immediately introduces the audience to the first of many temptations, both sexual and ideological, which confront Woodall in his newfound den of iniquity.

If Saintly's character speaks to an underlying national anxiety concerning the rise of dissenting protestant factions and a threat to the pure and 'true' Anglican Church and its head, Charles II, then Mrs Tricksy represents the other side of the same coin. Peggy Thompson's essay on contract theory in *Mr Limberham* demonstrates how Tricksy 'represents the potential for widespread feminine insubordination' and a threat of 'political radicalism'.[94] What Thompson falls short of, however, is

[90] *To the Supreme Authority of this Nation, the Commons Assembled in Parliament, The Humble Petition of divers Wel-affected Women* (London: 1649), p. 1.
[91] Marcus Nevitt, *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England, 1640 – 1660* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
[92] John Brown, *Quakerisme: The path-way to Paganisme* (Edinburgh: John Cairns, 1678), p. 397.
[93] Brown, *Quakerisme,* p.397.
[94] Thompson, *Coyness and Crime,* p. 45, p. 48.

linking the likely casting of Elizabeth Currer as Tricksy to the specifically Catholic threat the mistress character represents. Tricksy is described by Woodall as a 'two pil'd Punk, a Punk of two descents', meaning she is a second-generation prostitute. Originally, however, Dryden wanted to introduce Tricksy in far more religious terms. The accompanying notes to Vinton A. Dearing and Alan Roper's collection of Dryden's works claim that in the original manuscript of *Mr Limberham* the playwright wrote that Tricksy was described as 'very punk of very punk', a thinly-veiled reference to the Christian liturgical statement of belief, The Nicene Creed, which includes the words, 'very God of very God'.[95] It is hardly surprising Dryden chose to expunge this reference from his printed edition. Despite not being specific to Catholicism, this sacrilegious introduction to Tricksy, the 'brave Strapping Jade', is just the beginning of a complex web of significations Dryden generates around the actress.[96] Throughout the play Tricksy is time and time again placed within a framework of anti-Catholic and anti-European sentiments which are inextricably linked to Tricksy's dominance over her keeper. Tricksy's opening song is a provocative ballad arguing for her freedom to treat with other men once her keeper's 'dull appetites o're'.[97] Naturally this entices Woodall, who upon their meeting begins to recount the fantastical 'Love-Adventure' of a French cavalier of his acquaintance in his attempts to seduce the mistress of the Dey of Tripoli. Their flirtatious interaction is interrupted, however, by the curt arrival of Limberham, Tricksy's kind keeper. In order to escape suspicion, the quick-thinking Tricksy insists on Woodall pretending the part of an Italian merchant who has come to sell her essences. Despite knowing very little Italian, the rest of the scene is carried off by Woodall's butchery of an attempted '*Lingua Franca*' in open mockery of both the 'dull' Italian, as a clear denunciation of Roman influence, and the ignorant, English buffoon who professes to understand the garbled language.[98]

[95] Vinton A. Dearing and Alan Roper, *The Works of John Dryden,* 20 vols. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) XIV, p. 389.
[96] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 5.
[97] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 8.
[98] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 12, p. 11.

This is not the only time Dryden relies on the dependable, audience-pleasing trope of abusing foreign nations and he manages to impose the nationalistic francophobia rife in 1670s England on to Tricksy. Father Aldo describes Tricksy as ‘so Termagent an Empress! and he so submissive, so tame, so led a Keeper, and as proud of his Slavery as a *French* man’.[99] In a clear attack on the absolutist governing of Louis XIV and the Catholic nation which bow under his divine connection to God, Dryden extends the mercenary whore trope crafted by Currer in her previous roles and places on the character of Tricksy an identification with France and its imperialist power over Europe. Tricksy’s immense control over Limberham and the extent of her manipulative prowess is further entrenched within the threat of Catholic heresy. In act two, their passionate argument spills out onto the stage and Tricksy swears to defy her keeper or else ‘go into a Nunnery’, to which the furious Limberham replies, ‘Don’t hinder her, good Father Aldo; I’m sure she’ll come back from *France*, before she gets halfway o’re to *Calais’*.[100] With Aldo’s intervention and careful bargaining, however, Limberham quickly retreats from his position and, humbled, agrees to settle four hundred pounds on his mistress to win back her affections. Upon his departure and having been assured she will receive this agreement in writing, Tricksy quickly drops her façade of indignation and laughs at her lover’s gullibility, ‘That he shou’d be so silly to imagine I wou’d go into a Nunnery! ’tis likely; I have much Nun’s Flesh about me!’.[101] The image of Tricksy threatening to sequester herself in a Nunnery in order to secure financial gratification from her besotted lover endured in public memory and became analogous with fears of converting for the sake of gain. In a Republican speech given in 1787 criticizing the English Secretary for bribing members of the House with double pensions, the Master of the Rolls for the Irish House of Commons John Philpot Curran asked, ‘Was the Secretary afraid of their becoming converts? […] Was there really so much danger that little Tricksey would repent and go into a Nunnery, that the kind keeper must come down with another hundred, to save her from becoming honest?’[102] The shadowy threat of Catholicism creeping into the nation was by no means

[99] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 6.
[100] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, pp. 15-16.
[101] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 17.
[102] John Philpot Curran, *A New and Enlarged Collection of Speeches by the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran, Late Master of the Rolls in Ireland* (London: William Hone, 1819), p. 243.

resolved following the Glorious Revolution and the kept mistress Tricksy served as an embodiment of its underlying presence well into the following century. As a role which was most likely originated by Currer, the character of Tricksy would have been deeply informed by the actress's development of highly sexualised, determined, and economically motivated women, thereby compounding the threat of national disruption she represented. It is worth noting that it was only a year after *Mr Limberham* first premiered that Nahum Tate wrote Currer's epilogue to *The Loyal General* which included the words, 'Doom me to a Nun's Life? --- A Nun! Oh Heart! / The Name's so dreadful, that it makes me start!', suggesting an ongoing comic currency in connecting the actress to a profession so disconnected to her life on the stage.[103] In both instances of Tricksy's theatrical functions, the first of her comparison to the tyrannical Sun King, enslaving the gullible wretch Limberham, the second in which she openly threatens celibacy through conversion in order to manipulate him into promising her more money, Dryden is painting Tricksy as a site of patriarchal disruption. As both the usurper of Limberham's god-given supremacy, demonstrated when she asserts, 'I have gain'd an absolute Dominion over him', and as heretical temptress, draining him of his wealth, strength, and authority, Tricksy disturbs the natural, patriarchal order through a particularly Catholicised threat. Within this framework Limberham necessarily becomes a weak leader whose power is being part manipulated and part forced away from him, a sensitive subject for a fragile nation.

The idea of an authoritative figure being manipulated by a sinful woman may have hit slightly too close to home for Charles II and his mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth. According to a letter written by Dryden to Lord Latimer about not being able to finish his play, which he called 'the Kings Comedy', Charles was 'parcell poet with me in the plott; one of the designes being a story he was pleasd formerly to tell me; and therefore I hope he will keep the jeast in countenance by laughing at it'.[104] Evidently this was not the case, as although the King requested this play be written and actively

[103] Tate, *The Loyal General* (sig. I1v).
[104] John Dryden, in a letter to Edward Osbourne, Lord Latimer in July 1677 in *The Letters of John Dryden: With Letters Addressed to Him* ed. by Charles E. Ward (Durham, N.C.: Seeman Printery, 1942), pp. 11-12.

contributed to it, it was stopped 'after three nights, by royal command'.[105] This discrepancy likely lies in the influence of his mistress. Famously despised for her French Catholicism and her interference in the king's political affairs, Louise de Kérouaille has understandably been likened to Tricksy as a mercantile, meddling whore and similar connections would surely have been made at the time. The particular significance of this association would no doubt have been exacerbated if the part of Tricksy had been played by a woman most well known for her portrayals of cunning, deceitful mistresses. Thompson has argued for the likelihood of Tricksy being a deliberate representation of Kérouaille, considering the specific reference by Father Aldo that Tricksy 'shoul'd eat Pearl, if she wou'd have 'em'.[106] Thompson claims this particular allusion represents 'how costly, unnatural, and undeniable Tricksy's appetites are' and it is clear these same accusations could be levelled at the Duchess who reportedly 'was given a lavish apartment at Whitehall, had very expensive tastes, and reaped large sums of money from Charles to satisfy her greed and extravagance'.[107] As pearl-eating was famously associated with the decadence of Cleopatra and her seduction of Antony, and the Duchess of Portsmouth was linked with Cleopatra through verses attributed to Dryden, it is probable that this reference was a not-so-subtle allusion to Charles's mistress. Furthermore, Dryden's assertion in the dedication that the play 'has nothing of particular *Satyre* in it' and that he may 'solemnly affirm, that no one Character has been drawn from a single man' strongly suggests such accusations were responsible for the play's demise.[108] Dearing and Roper have suggested that rather than the Duchess approaching the Lord Chamberlain directly, she would have done better to simply draw the Court to the King's Theatre on the third night of its performance, Dryden's benefit night, just as she would do two years later to Elkanah Settle's Catholic-bashing production of *The Female Prelate; Being the History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan* (1680).[109] Whether or not Kérouaille did take umbrage with the portrayal of the greedy, manipulative kept mistress Tricksy, scholars have since linked the

---

[105] Charles E. Ward, *The Letters of John Dryden: With Letters Addressed to Him* (Durham, N.C.: Seeman Printery, 1942) p. 148.
[106] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 16.
[107] Thompson, *Coyness and Crime,* p. 50; Robert H. Ray, *An Andrew Marvell Companion* (London: Garland Publishing, 1998), p. 95.
[108] Dryden, *Mr Limberham* (sig. A4r).
[109] Dearing, *The Works of John Dryden,* p. 375.

two time and time again for their similarities in character, position, and religious and national significations.

Through the simple imagery of a pearl, Dryden knowingly compels associations between Tricksy, the temptress Cleopatra, the Catholic Duchess of Portsmouth, and the Whore of Babylon, a figure already established in connection with the actress, Currer. It is written of the Whore of Babylon in Revelation that ‘the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication’.[110] In the final scene of *Mr Limberham*, attention is once again drawn to Tricksy’s jewels. Limberham cries, ‘behold this Orient Neck-lace, *Pug!* ’tis pity any Neck should touch if after thine, that pretty Neck! But, oh, ’tis the Falsest Neck that ere was hang’d in Pearl’.[111] Shortly thereafter, Limberham’s fears of losing Tricksy overwhelm him and he accedes to her demands ‘with all submission’.[112] Despite in this final scene being accursed as worse than the Whore of Babylon, unlike the biblical prostitute who has her flesh eaten and her body burnt, Mrs Tricksy evades the fate of her foremother and departs the stage having secured a marriage to her keeper, ensured £400 a year in maintenance, and refuted any accusations of wrongdoing, a curiously positive ending for the mercenary whore.[113] Whilst there can be no doubt that Tricksy’s character is a problematically gendered representation of female lust and mercenary greed, Dryden insists on treating the threat she poses as emblematic of the Catholic menace. If the role of Mrs Tricksy did belong to Currer, because of its gendering of the Catholic threat and the nationalistic response to foreign bodies being quite literally inhabited by the actress, then Behn’s comment in the prologue to *The Feign’d Curtizans* a year later takes on a new, self-referential meaning with regard to Currer. Although the actress is ostensibly damning the Catholic threat with her words, ‘A Pox upon the Whore of Babylon’, she is really signalling to the audience with a tongue-in-cheek comment that she is fully aware of her own

[110] Revelation, 17.4.
[111] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 60.
[112] Dryden, *Mr Limberham*, p. 61.
[113] Revelation, 17.16.

associations with the figure and will happily wear the costume of patriarchal disruptor and promiscuous temptress in order to mock the very crowds who fear it.

It was in fact Behn herself who first made the link between Currer and the Whore of Babylon in the early part of 1678 in the well-crafted but ill-received comedy, *Sir Patient Fancy*. Unlike Dryden, however, Behn does not use the symbol to cultivate fear of a mysterious, Catholic threat expressed in the body of an actress, but instead turns the association on its head to belittle the types of people who fear such things. The titular Sir Patient denounces his adulterous wife as a 'greater Whore than she of Babylon' and an 'abomination to thy Sex'.[114] In the opening address to this play, Aphra Behn attempts to vindicate her writing from accusations that the play '*was Baudy'*.[115] Behn felt inclined to defend her work from charges that might detrimentally affect her profits and reputation, calling the allegations 'the most unjust and silly aspersion, Woman could invent to cast on Woman'.[116] Rather than accepting the 'negligible disapproval of a modest clique', Behn's address sought to persuade the wider readership by squarely placing this play amongst the similar sex comedies being produced by her male contemporaries.[117] Although it is difficult to entirely agree with Behn's assertion that a reader would 'find nothing that the most innocent Virgins can have cause to blush at' the play being, as it is, almost wholly liberated from the social and legal strictures of contemporary moral conventions, it is a play which also entirely confounds any notion that such comedy '*from a woman was unnaturall*', a claim made against Aphra Behn according to the play's dedication 'To the Reader'.[118] Although the buffoonish clowns and rakish youths parade confidently through this narrative, its boldly amorous women are the true puppeteers of Behn's first politically-minded play. After all, as Leander admits, 'women are best at Intrigues of this kind'.[119] Within the convoluted back-and-forth between two neighbouring households, each containing members with

[114] Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (London: Richard Tonson, 1678), p. 89.
[115] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (sig. A1r).
[116] Ibid.
[117] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn,* IV, p. 6.
[118] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (sig. A1r).
[119] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 52.

myriad affections and intolerances for those in the other, Behn is unrestrained in her use of predictable sex-comedy tropes - bed-tricks, mistaken identities, false engagements, secret marriages, foolish country knights and, of course, the titular neurotic Alderman. Sir Patient Fancy is introduced as an outmoded hypochondriac married to a beautiful, intelligent, and much younger woman who is distrusted by the rest of his family. Played by Currer, Lady Fancy is presented ostensibly as the born inheritor and natural next step to the likes of Betty Frisque. The mercenary mistress turns wife in order to obtain the financial security of an older man all the while seeking the passionate attentions of some roaming gallant. Her step-nephew, Leander, surmises as much with his lament in the first act that his father married a younger woman 'To keep up his Title of Cuckold, I think, for she has beauty enough for temptation, and no doubt makes the right use on't'.[120] Currer's presentation of the tenacious, manipulative cheat is a key stimulus for the play's humour.

Compounding this one-dimensional understanding of Lady Fancy's character, Behn introduces a series of recognisable scenes in which Sir Patient, fearing the death which he perpetually believes himself to be nearing, attempts to leave his young wife the inheritance which he erroneously believes she deserves for her loyalty. Upon hearing her husband profess his impending death and admit the location of his treasures, Fancy erratically cries, 'Oh you'l make me desperate in naming it, - is it in Gold or Silver? […] Why shou'd you take such pleasure in afflicting me? *Weeps* - Behind the Wainscot say you?'[121] A brilliant, and by this time established, use of Currer's comic skills in performative desolation, this sort of wild oscillation would have been familiar to the audience at Dorset Gardens. Through this exchange, in both a monetary and interlocutory sense, Behn is almost begging the audience to consign Lady Fancy as nothing more than the newest addition to Currer's successful line of manipulative, mercantile women capable of ensuring vast financial profit for entirely selfish gain. Behn, however, rarely makes anything so simple. When examining the deeper motivations behind Lady Fancy's actions, and her role as a disruptive force against the oppressive

[120] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 13.
[121] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 57.

environment created by her paranoid, old-fashioned husband, we find a new side to Currer's character. This re-evaluation of Lady Fancy not only exonerates her, at least in part, from the accusations of cheating and manipulation hurled at her from her marital family, but demonstrates Behn's desire, actualised in narrative serendipity, to give a second chance to women unfortunately matched in marriage. This change in perception particularly hinges upon the discovery that Lady Fancy acted for a pre-marital love denied to her and her lover, Wittmore, by the threat of destitution, a revelation which Behn chooses to conceal until the final moments of the play.

A popular theme with Behn, the ideological positions of Lady Fancy's husband Sir Patient and her lover Wittmore stands as a reflection of the factious politics which lurked beneath every civil schism of the mid-seventeenth century – the Roundheads and the Cavaliers, Anglicans and Dissidents, Whigs and Tories. Wittmore, 'a wild young Fellow of a small Fortune', fits neatly into the rakish gallant mould so familiar to the 1670s stage and one which is instantly recognisable in Behn's most famous libertine, Willmore of *The Rover* (1677).[122] The old school Commonwealth man Sir Patient, meanwhile, consigned to his London household having managed to survive the Restoration finds himself ill-suited to the new world of modern royalism and will cry to anyone who will listen that 'we ne're had good daies since these Canonicall Fopperies came up again, meer Popish tricks to give our Children time for disobedience'.[123] Sir Patient is not just anti-popery; he resides on the far side of fanatical puritanism, a dangerous place to be in the late 1670s. At one point, Sir Patient says to his nephew Leander, 'they say thou art a Papist too, or at least a Church of *England* man, and I profess there's not a pin to chuse'.[124] Sir Patient is displayed as a superannuated fool alienated by an encroaching modern world he cannot avoid and Wittmore as a wild deviant, his laissez-faire libertinism thrusting him from each barely controlled moment to the next. In between them stands Currer's character, in love with Wittmore but willing and able to manipulate her husband for

[122] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (sig. A2v).
[123] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 26.
[124] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 72.

everything he is worth by feigning her husband's beliefs. In a legally dubious turn of events, Lady Fancy is liberated from her unsuitable marriage and appropriately coupled with Wittmore at the end of the play. Once Wittmore explains to Sir Patient that he and Lady Fancy 'have long been Lovers, but want of Fortune made us contrive how to marry her to your good Worship', a ridiculous change in attitude comes over the old knight.[125] From the man who only moments before was cursing his wife as the treacherous Whore of Babylon for her infidelity, Sir Patient vows from this day forward to become a city spark, 'keep some City Mistress, go to Court, and hate all Conventicles'.[126] Patient's transformation allows his erstwhile wife to not only 'depart in peace' but keep the money he foolishly gave her.[127] All in all, this is an almost unbelievably cheerful ending for all the young lovers where, as so often happens in Behn's plays, only the old and foolish are required to learn their lesson, which Patient does here quite happily. It has to be said, the ending to *Sir Patient Fancy* feels lazy in its convenience and suggests Behn's preoccupation lay with the liberation of her unhappily matched protagonist rather than ensuring the audience is left reassured as to the play's message of faith and loyalty. Unlike Mrs Tricksy, Currer's Lady Fancy, the biblical whore, was never designed to be a warning against sinning, but as a figure who manipulates and comically abuses the real malefactor of the story, Sir Patient Fancy, and ultimately wins her love and her liberty.

As with all Behn's best writing, she uses her characters to highlight the incredible double standards of zealots who control, undermine, and threaten women in the name of religion. Despite the farcical scenes of heightened comedy in which Currer's skills are put to use wailing over the supposed death of her unloved husband, Behn's heroine is presented as a manipulative but ultimately sympathetic pragmatist, trapped in an unwanted marriage for security and safety. Lady Fancy's real impact on the play lies in her responsibility for the overarching condemnation of moral hypocrisy. Lady Fancy is starkly aware of the pretenders that dominate her life but rather than plot for revenge or

[125] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 90.
[126] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 91.
[127] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 90.

harbour resentment, she openly mocks her husband and his confederates and uses the tricks of Puritan hypocrisy to her advantage. Lady Fancy laughs that 'there is nothing so Comicall as to hear me Cant, and even cheat those knaves the Preachers themselves that delude the Ignorant rabble'.[128] Behind this light-hearted scorn, however, there is a darker turn to Currer's words. Currer's mockery takes the form of a particularly lowly imitation to describe the bodily violations she experiences at the hands of her husband and his friends. An unfamiliar bitterness enters her speech when she says, 'Judge what a fine life I lead the while, to be set up with an old Formal Doating sick Husband, and a Herd of snivelling grinning Hypocrites that call themselves the teaching Saints, who under pretence of securing me to the number of their Flock, do so sneer upon me, pat my breasts and cry fy, fy upon this fashion of tempting Nakedness'.[129] Currer, as Lady Fancy, delivers this final impersonation whilst speaking '*through the nose*'.[130] Her disdain for the group of religious dissidents is similarly brought to prominence when she is describing how her husband flaunts her in front of his associates at a meeting-house and 'is as vainly proud of me as of his Rebellious opinion for his Religion means nothing but that, and Contradiction; which I seem to like too, ''tis the best cloack I can put on to cheat him with'.[131] In the very opening scene of the play, Lady Fancy's ability to not only contend with these men but actively manipulate them is highlighted when a deeply suspicious Lucretia claims, 'I wonder she does not turn [Sir Patient] to Christianity, methinks a Conventicle should ill agree with her humour'.[132] By the end of the play, of course, this prophecy is proven to be true. Behn rewards Lady Fancy who, when living in a world with few options dominated by a corrupt moral system, manages to play the game for herself and use her husband's own ridiculous hypocrisy and deceit against him. Lady Fancy is ultimately rewarded, not with any sense of realism like Dryden's mistress Tricksy who is left married to a wealthy but unlovable husband, but rather in the bizarre false-reality of Behn's play fiction.

[128] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 14.
[129] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, pp. 14-15.
[130] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 15.
[131] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 14.
[132] Behn, *Sir Patient* Fancy, p. 3.

Recriminating outdated, Commonwealth hypocrites is the central purpose of the epilogue written for Aphra Behn's incendiary political tract, *The Roundheads*. Performed towards the end of 1681, at the height of the crisis, this play represents Behn's most fervent display of Stuart-supporting Toryism, and its epilogue her most overt condemnation of their political enemies. Although the plot is loosely based on John Tatham's *The Rump; or, The Mirrour of the Late Times* (1660), which in itself is a creative retelling of the disastrous final days of Cromwell's republic, the creation of Lady Desbro and her Cavalier lover Freeman is entirely an invention of Behn's.[133] In a tirade wholly reminiscent of Lady Fancy's distaste for her husband's confederates, Lady Desbro delivers the final epilogue to the play admonishing 'Yee Race of Hypocrites, whose Cloak of Zeal/ Covers the Knave that cants for Common Weale'.[134] Although the cast of the original production of *The Roundheads* is unknown, Montague Summers gives an approximation based on the fact that the play 'must have entailed the whole comic strength of the house'.[135] Within his allocation of roles, Summers suggests that Elizabeth Barry played Lady Lambert and 'Mrs Currer, Lady Desbro'.[136] In her appendix of actresses' roles in Behn plays, however, Gilli Bush-Bailey consigns the role to Mrs Butler. We will never know for sure who played Lady Desbro, but Summers's casting seems the most promising given the likelihood that Behn wrote such a similar role for Currer in her *Sir Patient Fancy*. By examining the role of Lady Desbro through the lens of Currer's influence, we can unearth some unexplored depths and meaning to her characterisation. Both Lady Fancy and Lady Desbro demonstrate Behn's attempts to complicate their generic stereotypes and instil sympathy for any woman, regardless of moral, financial, or social status, who must enter a marriage because of circumstance instead of desire. Furthermore, Lady Desbro fits into Currer's ongoing line of characters who sharply reject the hypocrisy which threatens to limit the agency and independence of women, as most particularly evidenced by her rousing epilogue.

[133] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, I, p.334.
[134] Aphra Behn, *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause* (London: D. Brown, 1682) (sig. I1r).
[135] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, I, p. 336.
[136] Summers, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, I, p. 336.

Set nineteen years prior to the events of *Sir Patient Fancy, The Roundheads* follows the final chaotic days of a failing republic after the death of Oliver Cromwell and the political machinations of those who would succeed him. Despite this decades-long disparity, it is easy to conflate the stories of two women who met and fell in love with penniless gallants and, in order to save their loves from financial ruin, set about seducing and marrying rich, powerful men. Both Lady Fancy and Lady Desbro are married to canting, over-zealous commonwealth men, both are in love with poor libertines to whom they could never be conventionally married and, most importantly, they both profess to hold an enduring disdain towards moral hypocrisy whilst demonstrating a complete willingness to feign that self-same religious zeal whilst it benefits them. It is revealed early in *The Roundheads* that Freeman lost his estates as a consequence of his loyalty to the king. Freeman is left destitute and incapable of supporting his desired wife after being falsely accused of taking up arms against Cromwell's conquest in Ireland in spite of being, as it turns out, 'but eight years old' at the time.[137] This is Behn's first thinly-veiled attack on the 'Irish Witnesses' called upon by Shaftesbury to give testimony and credence to the Irish Catholic conspiracy which supposedly threatened Charles, England, and the Anglican Church.[138] Already, Behn is rehashing old wars to fight the new one brewing outside in the streets of London. Spanning the politically tumultuous events which defined the twilight years of Charles II's reign, there is a quite natural dialogue between Ladies Fancy and Desbro which speaks to Behn's ongoing aversion towards the prating religious hypocrites which she time and time again used Currer to decimate through satire. Three years after Currer first groaned in exasperation towards the religious zealots who 'do so sneer upon me, pat my breasts and cry, fy fy upon this fashion of tempting nakedness', Behn has Lady Desbro face up to Ananias as he, '*feeling 'em. and sneering*', paws at her breasts and mutters 'Ah! hide those tempting Breasts, --- Alack, how smoth and warm they are'.[139] The following tirade Desbro unleashes upon Ananias, in which she calls

[137] Behn, *Roundheads*, p. 19.
[138] John Spurr, 'Shaftesbury and the Seventeenth Century', *Anthony Ashley Cooper: First Earl of Shaftsbury 1621- 1683,* ed. by John Spurr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), pp. 1-26, p. 22.
[139] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy,* p.15; Behn, *Roundheads,* p. 29.

him a ‘deform’d , ill-favour’d Creature’ who cringes at her sexual transgression but can ‘swallow Whoring, false Oaths, Sequestration, Robbery, Rapes, and Murders daily’, feels like a cathartic release to the tensions first displayed through Lady Fancy’s frustrated but secret vehemence all those years prior.[140]

Although many aspects of these two plays can be read in tandem with one another, the fact that they were written at different ends of a nation-altering political crisis which had a deep impact on the social consciousness, especially where its entertainment industry was concerned, meant that the style of each play comes across as radically different. Where *Sir Patient* was of the same vein of bawdy sex comedies popular before the precipice of the Exclusion Crisis, *The Roundheads* was a play which could only have been contrived in the catalyst of deeply entrenched social and political upheaval. The dedication of *Sir Patient Fancy* is a response to the beginning of the end for the sexually explicit comedies which peaked in the mid-seventies with plays such as William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* and George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*. Despite her protestation that in *Sir Patient* readers would find nothing inappropriate, Aphra Behn clearly employed her singular knack for identifying her audience’s tastes and hereafter veered away from ‘Bug-bear Bawdry’, turning to the more serious political drama which pervades *The Roundheads.*[141] Additionally, the events of the Exclusion Crisis forced Behn to take more seriously her role as propagandist and devotee to the anti-exclusionist cause which is most apparent in the differing theatrical choices she made for her later play. The most notable contrast between Lady Fancy and Lady Desbro lies in the latter’s refusal to have sex with Wittmore whilst her husband still lives. Lady Desbro’s chaste rejection of Freeman’s sexual advances are a far cry from the reveal in *Sir Patient* in which Lady Fancy is caught ‘in disorder’ with a man who is not only not her husband, but turns out to not even be her intended lover.[142] Whilst Lady Fancy playfully departs a scene whilst quipping ‘At

[140] Behn, *Roundheads*, pp. 30-31.
[141] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (sig. A1r).
[142] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 38.

Games of Love Husbands to cheat is fair,/ 'Tis the Gallant we play with on the square', Desbro rebukes Freeman as being unreasonable 'not to have Patience till my Husband be hang'd a little'.[143] Although her tone is admittedly just as flippant as Lady Fancy's, Desbro does not give in to Freeman's persuasive arguments that her 'Heart and vows' belong to him anyway, the very legal sticking point which liberated Lady Fancy, and pointedly refuses to break her marriage vows.[144] Anita Pacheco convincingly argues that this is less to do with the moral strictures on Desbro as a married woman than to her commitment to her oaths taken as a Cavalier. Pacheco writes that 'Through Lady Desbro the play can affirm the legal and judicial integrity of the Tories and distinguish between their adherence to ruling-class traditions of honour and trust and the perjured, oath-breaking Whigs'.[145] When she says to Freeman, 'Suspect my loyalty when I lose my Virtue', Desbro is conflating her individual self and sexual identity with her macrocosmic dedication to the royalist cause, a cause which is ironically personified in the figure of her Cavalier lover.[146] Although both Lady Fancy and Lady Desbro are placed in extremely similar situations, during the period where Behn is intent on promoting monarchic loyalty, Desbro is specifically confined by her ideological commitment, a moral demand which is never made of Lady Fancy.

Despite the generic and tonal differences between the two plays and the subtle alterations in the women's narratives, Behn uses the two characters to do the same thing - highlight and admonish hypocrisy whilst warning against religious ideologues who wield enormous power. Although it is difficult when speaking of this period to separate an adherence to a particular religious ideology with that of a specific political loyalty, in the case of Aphra Behn's *Roundheads*, such a division should be made. Whilst her political affiliation to the Stuart cause is not only obvious but the entire reason for the play's production, Behn does not go as far to display here the same pro-Catholic tendencies which

---

[143] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 29; Behn, Roundheads, p. 32.
[144] Behn, *Roundheads*, p. 32.
[145] Anita Pacheco, 'Reading Toryism in Aphra Behn's cit-cuckolding comedies', *The Review of English Studies*, 55 (2004), pp. 690-708, p. 699.
[146] Behn, *Roundheads*, p. 33.

can be found in her *Feign'd Curtizans*. Her work does promote, however, a comic reflection of the national fear of religious dissent. This is suggested in the line, 'How, this from you, the Head o'th' Church Militant; the very Pope of Presbytery?'[147] This oxymoronic conflation of two religious extremes is precisely the figure which the Whore of Babylon, characterised so often by Currer, had come to represent. In her epilogue, Lady Desbro mimicks the '*Preaching Tone'* of the seditious Whigs who call their political enemies,

> Those Fools, those Pimps to Monarchy;
>
> Those that Exclude the Saints; yet open th' Door
>
> To introduce the *Babylonian* Whore[.][148]

This mockery is in line with the sort of cautionary warning Stevens is referring to when she writes of certain treatments of the Whore as being 'governed by a duality that positioned her beyond the pale of legitimate religious debate. Held up as a lens onto monstrous Catholicism, she also blurred the line between Catholic and Protestant, revealing anti-Protestant qualities in those most eager to defeat her'.[149] Behn used Currer in *Sir Patient Fancy* to strip away the performative duplicity of extreme religious factions by simultaneously sending up Sir Patient's distaste for his wife, 'a greater Whore than she of *Babylon*' and consequently revealing the hypocrisy of his, and his associates', fanatical devotion.[150] It appears that in *The Roundheads* Behn returned to this application of an unhappy wife to highlight the dangers, or at least the incongruities, of religious extremism, perhaps even using the same actress with which to do so.

[147] Behn, *Roundheads*, p. 29.
[148] Behn, *Roundheads* (sig. I1r).
[149] Stevens, *Healing a Whorish Heart*, p. 71.
[150] Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 89.

Elizabeth Currer, setting herself up by brazenly confessing to being 'of the Religion of my Cully' in her prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans*, follows through in the character of Lady Desbro, who must pretend to support the commonwealth cause and its puritanical trappings in order to survive the Interregnum. In her epilogue, however, Desbro is allowed her liberty. As a woman who has spent the majority of the play wrapped in the disguise of a dedicated Puritan wife, Lady Desbro breaks free in the final moments of Behn's political tract with the declaration,

> The Vizors off, and now I dare appear,
>
> High for the Royal *Cause* in Cavelier;
>
> Though once as true a *Whig* as most of you,
>
> Cou'd Cant, and Lye, Preach and dissemble too;
>
> So far you drew me in, but faith I'le be
>
> Reveng'd on you for thus debauching me,
>
> Some of your pious Cheats I'le open lay,
>
> That lead your *Ignoramus* Flock astray:
>
> For since I cannot fight, I will not faile
>
> To exercise my Tallent; that's to raile[.] [151]

Aside from the lambasting of the Whig faction and the 'pious Cheats' to whom Currer spoke with such distaste in the prologue to *Curtizans,* and the aforementioned reference to the Whore of Babylon, this epilogue is filled with the same euphemistic language which came as second nature to Currer. There is no better metaphor that Currer could employ than the removal of a 'Vizor', symbolic of the

[151] Behn, *Roundheads* (sig. I1r).

prostitutes who frequented the theatre, to reveal a costumed cavalier capable of all the cunning trickery of the opposing Whigs.[152] Lady Desbro's final plea returns the epilogue to the safe ground of theatrical imploring. Cursing those who would 'pray us harmless Players to the Devil' she asserts that 'Our small Religion sure can do no harm'.[153] The manifestation of the theatre as a religion, incongruous enough not to be deemed threatening but separated from the contention which marred the political world, allowed Currer to bring the audience together and present the theatre as a safe space, separated from the dangerous reality of 1670s London whilst simultaneously reminding and warning the gathered crowd of what lurked outside. Elizabeth Currer's work in the years 1678 to 1682 marked a curiously political stage of her career. From relatively straightforward roles of comic bawdry, Currer's characterisations of mistresses and unfaithful wives became complicated by an increasing national anxiety concerning the stability of figures of patriarchal authority. Whilst Dryden used Currer's established line of mercantile women to embody an external peril which threatened the nation, the characters developed by Currer and Behn served to highlight and undermine the existing fragility of a society which relies so heavily on the limitation and oppression of women. By embodying both an exoticized threat of destabilising religious dissidence whilst at the same time mocking those who feared these self-same threats, Currer's highly sexualised characters during this period challenged a specifically gendered form of morality upon which women were judged by highlighting the hypocrisy of religious and moral debate on all sides.

The Widow Ranter

The Exclusion Crisis plays written by Behn and Dryden would not be the last time Elizabeth Currer was called upon to play a lively, licentious woman who embodied the ideological spirit of religious zeal. The rowdy, genial Widow Ranter, in Behn's play of the same name, would be Elizabeth Currer's

[152] Ibid.
[153] Behn, *Roundheads* (sig. I1v).

last known part. Heidi Hutner writes of Currer's character, that 'In an odd twist for the class conscious Behn, […] Ranter is a positively portrayed lower-born woman […] she drinks, swears, and smokes a pipe, but she also negotiates her desires effectively and remains, in contrast to all of the other female characters in the play, uncontrolled and unvictimized by men'.[154] Whilst it is undeniable that Behn's preoccupation with notions of class is a mainstay of all her works, to write with incredulity that Behn should positively portray a morally licentious, boisterous woman with explicitly transgressive habits is to ignore the steady catalogue of characters she had specifically created for Currer in the thirteen years of their association. As for negotiating her desires effectively, Behn's treatment of Lady Fancy, Lady Desbro, and even Diana of *The City Heiress,* should give some indication that Behn did not shy away from writing women capable of creating their own victories even in the face of all narrative logic. Currer's Widow Ranter is an exciting character not because she is a wholly new form of female representation but more because she is a completely unapologetic amalgamation of all the independent, flawed, and resourceful women Behn had created over the years. Precisely because she had already developed several similar and recognisable characters for Currer, Behn could move on to doing more interesting things with her eponymous widow outside the constraints of her sex. Namely, Behn could write her as a subversive figure of cultural and ideological nonconformity, in this case the seditious form of Protestantism invoked by her name, Ranter. By once again inhabiting a role synonymous with the radical extremes of ideology, Currer could embody Behn's fantasy of a New World unity, in which a boundary-violating woman could readily be matched on equal terms with a nobly born, legitimate partner who symbolised the Old-World royalism which Behn so admired.

What is perhaps most remarkable about Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter; or, the History of Bacon in Virginia* (1690) is its complete resistance to consistent analysis in modern scholarship. Since the resurgence in scholarly interest in *Ranter*, following the work of Margo Hendricks and Margaret Ferguson in the nineties, there has been very little agreement as to what exactly Behn was thinking

[154] Heidi Hutner, *Colonial Women: Race and Culture in Stuart Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 104.

when she wrote her Virginian tragicomedy. Those that have read *Ranter* as an essentially conservative text, the natural conclusion to a career of pro-Stuart royalism, have denounced the New World setting as nothing more than an opportunity for Behn to transcribe Old World anxieties onto the microcosm of revolutionary Jamestown. Critics such as Cynthia Lowenthal and Paul Musselwhite have usefully read Behn's presentation of the Justices, 'being too self-interested, too ignorant, and too blind to rule', as an allegory for the political tensions and Whig ascendency in post-revolution, post-Stuart England.[155] Within this allegory, Bacon then becomes 'the legitimate Cavalier Patriarch' fighting in vain against an increasingly bureaucratic and corrupt authority, his speech dripping with heroic indignation that he might 'stand by and see my Country ruin'd, my King dishonour'd, and his Subjects Murder'd, hear the sad Crys of Widdows and of Orphans'.[156] It is an important defence of this criticism that Bacon, despite leading a rebellion against ostensible figures of authority, does so in the name of an absent King and as a staunch defender of a legitimate crown. This theory also explains why Behn's account contradicts the, admittedly biased, royal commissioners' report which describes the historic Bacon as having 'a most imperious and dangerous hidden Pride of heart' and being 'very ambitious and arrogant'.[157] When Behn transmutes Bacon into an heroic figure in the dramatic vein, his tragic failure and ultimate suicide becomes a melancholic lamentation for the loss of true royalist defenders, a far cry from the ignominious reality of his death from the 'Bloody Flux […] accompanyed with a Lousey Disease'.[158] The fictional Bacon's final command to 'never let Ambition – Love – or Interest make you forget as I have done – your Duty – and Allegiance' is the lasting message from a dying breed of men at the end of a glorious age.[159] Bacon condemns his own transgressive love for the Indian Queen, Semernia, his words cemented by her accidental death at his hands. As Paul Musselwhite succinctly puts it, 'Critics have identified an increased sense of despair

---

[155] Lowenthal, *Performing Identities,* pp. 71-72.
[156] Paul Musselwhite, '"What Town's this Boy?": English Civic Politics, Virginia's Urban Debate, and Aphra Behn's *The Widow Ranter, Atlantic Studies,* 8.3 (2011), p. 279-299, p. 279; Behn, *The Widdow* Ranter, p. 24.
[157] 'A True Narrative of the Rise, Progresse, and Cessation of the Late Rebellion in Virginia, Most Humbly and Impartially Reported by His Majestyes Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affaires of the Said Colony,' (1676), reprinted in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 4.2 (1896), pp. 117-154, p. 122.
[158] 'A True Narrative', p. 153.
[159] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 54.

and disillusionment in the play as Behn faced this reality and her own declining health'.[160] Despite being a relatively neat reading of Behn's play, which satisfactorily ties up her established conservative leanings, her support of the Stuart line, and her elitist dedication to appropriate hierarchies, it fails to account for the unexpectedly meritocratic stance the play exhibits. In the opening scene Behn has Hazard, newly arrived in Virginia, claim, 'great Souls are born in common men, sometimes as well as Princes'.[161] This is a surprisingly positive sentiment which sets the tone for the colonial world of opportunities in which pick-pockets can become privy-councillors and it is a great affront 'to call a woman Mistris, tho' but a retale Brandy-munger'.[162] The play's ending betrays a similarly hopeful view of the collapse of social hierarchies. It sees the Justices pardoned for their cowardice and treachery, an (admittedly high-born) council of peers ruling in lieu of a state-appointed figure, and the indentured servant turned ideological dissident, Ranter, happily married to her Cavalier lover in a thrilling but not altogether surprising subversion of theatrical convention.

Due to these and numerous other inconsistencies, many have found in *Ranter* varying degrees of optimism. By using the heroic genre's predilection for exotic settings and Behn's own personal connection with the New World, some claim she is attempting to explore and fracture traditional power systems which cannot be effectively transcribed onto inherently innovative, if not wholly progressive, colonial communities. Ferguson describes 'Behn's fantasies about a new English empire that would perhaps prove more just (at least to women and maybe some others) than the historical regime appeared to be'.[163] Jennifer Frangos reads the New World as an exotic space which allows for the bending of Old-World notions of gender, economics, and power where low-born characters can thrive and women can shape themselves into new ideas of womanhood.[164] Peter Herman goes even

[160] Musselwhite, 'What Town's this Boy', p. 286.
[161] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 4.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Margaret Ferguson, 'New World Scenes from a Female Pen', *Dido's Daughters: Literary, Gender and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 333-373, p. 334.
[164] Jennifer Frangos, 'The Early Modern Queer Atlantic: Narratives of Sex and Gender on New World Soil', *The Edinburgh Companion to Atlantic Literary Studies*, ed. by Leslie Eckel and Clare Elliott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 163 – 175.

further and posits a 'view of Virginia as a separate cultural space, different from and possibly superior to, England. Rather than using the New World as a screen to project Old World ideologies and concerns, Behn transforms Virginia's culture into something rich and strange for her English audience'.[165] The language and manners inherent to the colonist's self-proclaimed '*Virginia* Breeding' is recognisable as the beginning of a burgeoning national identity, separate to and independent from the modes and etiquettes of the Old World.[166] These views are important in complicating Behn's outlook towards the end of her career, particularly in terms of a wider, global recognition of the failure of heroic modes of thought and strict hierarchies which inevitably oppress their constituents. However, it would be dangerous to consider *The Widdow Ranter* wholly in terms of a progressive restructuring of traditional power systems entrenched, as it is, in a problematic framework of racial and cultural binaries. The play was, of course, designed for a London audience and everything, from the depiction of Virginian Justices as petty criminals to the overtly reductive portrayal of the indigenous characters as 'noble savages', demonstrates Behn's predilection for engaging with harmful stereotypes for the sake of theatrical spectacle and an easy laugh. The answer is to be found somewhere in the middle ground of this analytical friction. From Behn's confusing and unlikely narrative choices there appears signs of a crisis of identity at a somewhat challenging, but not altogether hopeless, moment both nationally and personally for the ageing writer. *Widdow Ranter* serves as a convergence of multiple anxieties concerning identity, power, and ideology leading to what Heidi Hutner describes as a 'crisis in meaning'.[167] Derek Hughes' description of the play's 'sense of dissolution […] in which a vacuum of authority and collision of cultures create a confusion of criteria' is helpful insofar as it attempts to pinpoint the driving factors particular to this play's complexity but would benefit from considering *Ranter* not as an idiosyncratic curiosity written by an ailing woman at the end of her life but as an extension of her previous works and within the community of the existing company.[168] Whilst this play will undoubtedly endure as a peculiar

[165] Peter Herman, '"We all Smoke Here": Behn's *The Widdow Ranter* and the Invention of American Identity', *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 254-274, p. 255.
[166] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 5.
[167] Hutner, *Colonial Women,* p. 92.
[168] Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn,* p. 188.

swansong for Aphra Behn's pioneering career, a deeper examination into its title character, as a beneficiary of the many faces of Elizabeth Currer, will elucidate the uncharacteristic choices Behn made for her play.

The reason for this play's ambiguity of meaning can be found in the particular time, both in theatrical and political history, in which it was produced. Depending on one's view, the end of the 1680s saw the dying embers of the last fully legitimised absolute monarchy England would know, or a Glorious Revolution which symbolised the waxing powers of democracy and the rise of an emerging empire based on mercantilism and trade. The strange political leanings of *The Widdow Ranter* aside, any study of Behn would have to assume she could be readily placed into the former camp but perhaps the decade which had passed since the supposed Tory victory of the Exclusion Crisis had dampened Behn's loyalty. Following the death of Charles II and the failure of the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685, the worst fears of the Whig faction had been realised: a Catholic sat on the throne of England. James was not just a Catholic, but an absolutist who suspended both English and Scottish parliaments and who, in 1688, sired the male heir required to ensure the dreaded Catholic dynasty. Amidst an outbreak of anti-Catholic riots, a Whig-led cabal invited James's protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband William to invade England and take the throne, leaving James little option but to abdicate his rights and flee to France in fear for his life. It is unknown whether Behn wrote *The Widdow Ranter* before or after the apex of these events, but it was amidst this tumult she set her eyes on the distant shores of colonial Jamestown and created her tale of a rebellious hero engaged against a familiar group of immoral and undeserving councilmen.

Whilst these events were playing out on the national stage, the repercussions for London's theatrical scene were not quite as stark as those caused by the Exclusion Crisis several years earlier. The end of the 1680s saw a resurgence in new plays and, indeed, new types of plays. The Exclusion Crisis at the beginning of the decade appeared to have a detrimental impact on tickets sales and

audience interest which, combined with the poor management of the King's Company, led to the unification of the duopoly to form the single United Company in 1682. As Susan J. Owen points out, however, whilst productions of many political plays during these years were subject to increased censorship, printed text versions were relatively unchecked, meaning writers on both sides of the schism were able to produce a flurry of political tracts.[169] As we have seen, Behn was very much at the forefront of the Tory charge, producing many of her greatest works during this period including *The Feign'd Curtizans, The Roundheads* and *The City Heiress* all of which viciously satirised the puritanical Whigs and their dispositions of hypocrisy and ignoble greed and all of which starred Elizabeth Currer. Despite this flurry of larger political roles, *A Duke and No Duke* (1684) would be Elizabeth Currer's last known production for five years. Following her performance as Isabella, she disappeared from cast lists until her comeback performance as the titular Ranter in 1689. Perhaps the rise of young comic stars, Charlotte Butler and Susannah Mountfort, or the generic shift towards sentimental she-tragedies, left little room for Currer's particular skills. She was, by then, entering her thirties and, as we have seen with her colleague Elizabeth Norris, the London stage did not react kindly to women's ageing. It is also possible that Currer was scouted by John Ogilby and Joseph Ashbury, the managers of the Smock Alley Players in Dublin, who were known to travel to London to recruit 'English actors aspiring to perform in larger and more complex roles', just as they did with Elizabeth Norris's promising young son, Henry.[170] It seems probable that Currer's absence from the London stage can be explained by her developing her talents further afield given her return in 1689 to perform in the posthumous production of *Ranter,* written by the same woman who had time and time again trusted Currer with complex roles which explored the depths of female identity.

[169] Susan J. Owen, 'Drama and Political Crisis', *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 158 – 173, p. 159.
[170] Patrick Tuite, *Theatre of Crisis: The Performance of Power in the Kingdom of Ireland: 1641-1691* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), p. 64.

Derek Hughes writes that Behn's *Ranter* is neither good nor valedictory.[171] Of the former he might be right, but in the widow herself we do see Behn's final attempt at writing a funny woman unrestrained by patriarchal authority, moral standards, or the conventions of character, wholly certain of her desires and fully capable of negotiating their dangers. When it is suggested she might die in a duel against her lover whilst disguised in breeches, the very fate which befalls Semernia when she is confronted by Bacon, Ranter laughs it off and claims, 'I'le take care to make it as Comical a Duel as the best of 'em, as much in Love as I am, I do not intend to dy it's Martyr'.[172] More importantly, however, we see the results of what Behn can achieve by centring a truly liberated woman whose literary power and theatrical disruption reaches far beyond the simple conditions of her sex. Since Margo Hendricks' superb discussion on civility and barbarism in *Ranter,* criticism has tended to focus more on the high, tragic plot between Bacon and Semernia. If the lower, comic plot is discussed, it is usually in terms of a foil for its principal counterpart. Anita Pacheco has written a particularly insightful essay about how Behn uses the Justices of the Peace as a Falstaffian reflection of the high notions of honour, duty, and military glory instilled in Bacon's arc.[173] Similarly, the widow herself is most often mentioned in relation to her place as a comic foil to Semernia which highlights the very mirroring effect achieved by the two duels and their vastly different outcomes. Despite her relatively limited role in terms of stage time, Behn chose to foreground the character of Ranter by giving her primacy over Bacon in the title of the play, suggesting, if nothing else, a personal desire to highlight the woman's narrative from indentured servant to fully accomplished master of her fate. Jennifer Hale Pulsipher writes that when 'Ranter rose to wealth and social prominence in Virginia she was simply doing what was popularly believed (and historically demonstrated) to be common in that colony. While such inversions could occur, London audiences expected theatrical demonstrations of class-climbing to be firmly quashed by the end of the play, restoring political and social order. Perhaps Behn allowed this one exception as a nod to reality'.[174] As has already been discussed, Behn's

[171] Hughes, *Aphra Behn,* p. 189.
[172] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 43.
[173] Anita Pacheco, 'Festive Comedy in *The Widdow Ranter*: Behn's Clowns and Falstaff', *Restoration Studies in English Literary Culture*, *1660-1700,* 38.2 (2014), pp. 43-61.
[174] Jennifer Hale Pulsipher, '*The Widow Ranter* and Royalist Culture in Colonial Virginia', *Early American* Literature, 39.1 (2004), pp. 44-66, p. 54.

tendency to adhere to class-based notions of hierarchy might suggest her treatment of Ranter is exceptional but we only need to look back to the previous roles she wrote for Currer to realise she is no stranger to manipulating convention in order to ensure endings which benefit her female characters either romantically or financially, often directly contravening class boundaries. The unfaithful Lady Fancy is granted an improbable divorce from her husband to be with the love of her life. *The City Heiress* sees the 'cheerful, witty' but 'common' girl, Diana, accepted as the wife of Sir Timothy with whom she can have wealth and security.[175] The morally bankrupt Isabella of *The False Count; or, A New Way to Play an Old Game* (1682) is left married to a kind chimney sweep, albeit one who turns out to be richer than believed.[176] Puslipher might suggest that Behn's choice of allowing Ranter her happy ending was nothing more than an acquiescence to the social reality of colonial Jamestown, but the evidence points to her once again manipulating her narrative to reward her female characters with their deserved, if somewhat unlikely, endings. This is, in fact, the common tendency for all the parts she had written for Currer – those of the morally ambiguous but ultimately sympathetic women.

For every bit that Ranter's ending is indicative of an ongoing attempt to enact positive outcomes for some of Behn's more complex female characters, Semernia's is a reminder of Behn's ability to resort to formulae and crude tropes for others. It is no coincidence that the simplistic, reductive role of Semernia was awarded to the rising actress, Anne Bracegirdle, still very early in her career. Whilst it can be assumed the returning Currer was cast in the role of Widow Ranter due to a still pervasive popular recognition by London audiences as bold, bawdy and transgressive, the part of Semernia went to Anne Bracegirdle who was only beginning to build a reputation for playing virginal, youthful beauties in tragic roles. Several critics, including Margaret Ferguson, have associated Semernia being killed in a tragic inversion of Ranter's fate as a specifically racialised return to social

[175] Behn, *The City Heiress*, pp. 59-60.
[176] Aphra Behn, *The False Count; or, A New Way to Play and Old Game* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1682), p. 65.

order.[177] Very few, however, have noted that Behn radically altered history in her creation of the young queen. Hutner details the military and diplomatic stratagems of Cockasoeske, leader of the Pamunkey Indians who had been attacked and brutalised by Bacon's men in 1676. Hutner posits Cockasoeske as the figure on which Semernia is based due to her diplomatic relations with the colonial government and that she was said to have had a relationship and child with Colonel John West, a commander under Governor Berkeley.[178] Unlike Semernia, however, Cockasoeske's relationship with Bacon was nothing but antagonistic. Hutner describes Cockasoeske as 'both benevolent and dangerous, necessary to the colonial government and feared/hated by the rebels'.[179] This is a far cry from Behn's Indian Queen, 'tim'rous as a Dove, by nature fram'd,' who becomes besotted by Bacon the first time she sees him.[180] Through the reimagining of her queen as a fearful 'Dove' and the subsequent casting of Bracegirdle in this part, the treatment of Behn's indigenous women becomes as restrictive and oppressive as Ranter's is liberating. Whilst Behn's treatment of Ranter is still a remarkable progression in the depiction of lower-class women with agency, it has to be recognised that whilst a low-born servant girl might become rich and happy in the New World, these sentiments are entirely reserved for the upwardly mobile white women who seek marriage and riches. As a play which uses and challenges conventions of the Heroic genre in its high plot, Behn relies on a problematic and homogenous depiction of the indigenous characters as 'noble savages', a popular trope of the genre made famous by John Dryden's series *The Indian Queen* (1664) and *The Indian Emperor; or, The Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards* (1665). These plays employ notions of love and honour as the driving forces of both native and colonizing citizens as opposed to any real examination of the intricacies of colonial warfare. This depiction of Indigenous Peoples serves to paradoxically impose recognisable European ideals and customs onto native communities, including names born from Roman and Greek antiquity, whilst simultaneously emphasising and exploiting a constructed cultural otherness, and ignoring the varying alliances and hostilities between different

[177] Margaret Ferguson, 'News from the New World: Miscegenous Romance in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*', *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* ed. by David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair and Harold Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 151-180, p. 169.
[178] Hutner, *Colonial Women,* p. 97.
[179] Hutner, *Colonial Women,* p. 98.
[180] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 16.

tribal groups. The casting of the untested Bracegirdle, in her role as virginal beauty, combined with the reductive alterations to the characterisation of the Pamunkey Indian's leader betray Behn's willingness to adhere to the Restoration canon's oversimplification, exploitation and disregard of indigenous female characters.

Ranter's characterisation, meanwhile, is anything but simple. Ranter is very similar to literary characters associated with the grotesque such as Ursula, the 'pigge-woman', of Ben Jonson's *Bartholemew Fayre* (1631), first performed in 1614, and Moll Cutpurse of Thomas Dekker's and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611).[181] They all boisterously interact with men on free and equal terms, cheerfully engage with the murkier side of moral iniquity, and despite relatively little stage time, they all serve as the catalyst for comic action within the plot. In the manner of the grotesque, characters such as Ursula, Moll, and Ranter are often referred to in carnal terms, as heavy drinkers, prodigious smokers and, as the name 'pigge-woman' suggests, indulgent eaters. Upon entering Ranter's home in act two, Surelove, the model of appropriate femininity, complains, 'This Madam *Ranter* is so prodigious a Treater – oh! I hate a room that smells of a great Dinner, and what's worse a desert of punch and tobacco'.[182] Everything about Ranter speaks of distasteful, bodily pleasures readily associated with negative portrayals of womanhood, bar the fact that she is an utterly positive character. Whilst filling Hazard in on the great and the good of foundling Virginia, Friendly describes the Widow Ranter as a 'great Gallant, But assuming the Humour of the Country Gentry, her Extravagancy is very pleasant, she retains something of her Primitive Quality still, but is good natur'd and Generous'.[183] Despite the trappings of a grotesque figure, Ranter is presented as witty, brave, resourceful, and deeply deserving of love. When it came to casting this remarkable character in the year following its creator's death, it is easy to see why the 'pert, vivacious Currer', who had spent her career winning over audiences in spite of a paucity of moral virtue, was thought appropriate for the

[181] Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fayre* (London: Robert Allott, 1631).
[182] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 17.
[183] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 3.

part. Whilst it cannot be said conclusively that Behn wrote the part with Currer in mind, Ranter's narrative and comic style are well within the strain of the parts the playwright had written specifically for her long-time acquaintance. The tongue-in-cheek salaciousness of Dareing and Ranter's interaction as the former intentionally insults her, knowing her to be in disguise as a rival, harkens back to the euphemism of Currer's heyday:

> Dar. There's not a Blockhead in the Country that has not --
>
> Ran. -- What --
>
> Dar. -- Been Drunk with her.
>
> Ran. I thought you had meant something else Sir.[184]

Whilst it has often been remarked that Ranter's breeches role is significant because she remains in them even as she weds Dareing, as he never liked her 'half so well in Petticoats', it is rarely commented on that she hardly need put them on at all.[185] Once she has changed into breeches, Ranter declares, 'why should I sigh and whine and make myself an Ass and him conceited, no, instead of snevelling I'm resolv'd [...] to beat the Rascal'.[186] Whilst it is not uncommon for a woman to act with swagger and threaten violence once they have disguised themselves in breeches, Currer's Mrs Hadland being an obvious example, Ranter has the unique privilege of being as foul-mouthed and publicly violent out of breeches as she ever is in them. In her introductory scene she threatens to 'pistol' Friendly should he attempt to harm Dareing in the fighting and brashly insults her confederates with curses such as 'Ye Drunken Dog' and 'Son of Baboone'.[187] Ranter is, in short, a

[184] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 45.
[185] Janet Todd, 'Introduction' to *Aphra Behn: Oroonoko, The Rover and Other Works* (St Ives: Penguin Publishing, 1992) p. 9; Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 45.
[186] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 42.
[187] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 13, p. 10.

remarkably exciting female character within the Restoration canon, perfectly suited to the particular talents of Elizabeth Currer.

Ranter's femininity, or perceived lack thereof, however, is only the beginning of what is so extraordinary about her. Years of crafting characters audiences would instantly recognise as being boisterous, bawdy, licentious yet sympathetic had paved the way for Currer to perform the part of an infinitely more interesting type of character. As Todd astutely summarises, 'For Aphra Behn neither race nor gender creates the category of the Other, as both would come to do in the next age, and neither is as important as class, breeding, and inherent nobility, which alone oppose the shoddy commercialization and commodification of values and feelings she saw around her in London'.[188] What becomes significant, then, is not that Ranter is an authoritative, powerful woman, something we know Behn and Currer had created together many times before, but that she represents an ideology, both in terms of class and commercialization, so opposed to what Behn is known to advocate. Upon their first meeting, Ranter demands of Hazard, 'what Cargo, what goods have ye? any Poynts, Lace, rich Stuffs; Jewells; if you have I'le be your Chafferer'.[189] Not only is she an indentured servant who rose to social prominence through a cross-class marriage, but with her accumulated power she chooses to engage in trade and commodity. Her very name, Ranter, is of course indicative of the peculiar confederacy of loosely related dissidents who rose to a sort of mythical prominence during the Interregnum. Whether the term Ranter could ever be applied to a tangible counter-culture or was a merely a term used to incite horror in the law-abiding masses due to their 'antinomian denial of the reality of sin to the believer and a moral indifference to behaviour since all acts were inspired by God', is a matter for historians to quibble.[190] What is pertinent to this study is the fact that once again Currer was inhabiting a role which was directly informed by dissenting religion, this time in the form of an anarchic sect of anti-establishment heretics who threatened social order. Where Currer's

---

[188] Todd, 'Introduction', p. 19.
[189] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 12.
[190] James Colin Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 14.

previous characters were linked through the Whore of Babylon motif to the continental threat of Catholicism, her final part exhibits an opposing, although equally disruptive figure, of ideological dissidence. Ranter, the widow, becomes representative of the specifically New World order which threatens and destabilises Behn's pre-established judgement of certain forms of hierarchical structures of power.

In this role, Ranter is also the most perceptive character within the play and offers a social commentary which criticises the ideals of honour and duty which inform Bacon's militarism whilst simultaneously condemning the cowardice, hypocrisy, and litigiousness of the whiggish Justices. Speaking on officers' military glory, Ranter cries, 'Hang 'em, they get a name in War, from command, not courage […] Gad I have known a Fellow kickt from one end of Town t'other, believing himself a Coward, at last forc'd to fight, found he could, got a Reputation and bullyed all he met with, and got a name, and a great Commission'.[191] Herein we see Behn's most overt reference to the historical Bacon and those of his ilk. This condemnation efficiently summarises the problematic reality of power distribution, far removed from the outdated codes of honour to which her fictional Bacon attests. Meanwhile, in her own home Ranter resides over festivities in which a punch bowl is paraded in to her guests, including the notorious Justices, in a startling display of indulgence. For the exuberant widow, this is a joyful example of her generosity, but when this exercise is repeated in a later scene and '*a Bowl of Punch, and a great Ladle or two in it*' is brought in to satiate the Justices' interminable appetites as they hold court and negotiate any number of petty and personal grievances, the carnivalesque spectacle spills over into a dangerous reflection on ill-governance.[192] Unlike the high-born cavaliers who eventually take control over the colony, the allegorical city-aldermen are intrinsically associated with gluttony, pettiness, and self-serving misconduct. Whilst the untenable heroics of the Cavalier Bacon and the poor governance of the common Justices can be easily ascribed with the qualities of the Tory/Whig division of the Old World, Behn chooses to make something new

[191] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, pp. 42-43.
[192] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 27.

of her socially unsettling heroine. In pairing Ranter with Dareing, Behn takes a raucous figure of disruption and creates a unity which exemplifies, rather than diminishes, a renegotiated system of governance and power. Ranter and Dareing's union, representative as it is of Behn's historic loyalties to Old World Royalism and her desire to find a, if not a truly meritocratic then at least fairer, social order in colonial Jamestown, is entrenched in the light-hearted comedy for which her plays are known. The exciting possibilities of their new kind of partnership are best demonstrated in the comic timing emulated by the printed version of Dareing's vow, 'Give me thy hand Widow, I am thine -- and so intirely, I will never -- be drunk out of thy Company'.[193] The dramatic promise of Heroic love language is disrupted by a mischievously pregnant pause before Dareing's punchline, forcefully reminding the audience they can no longer expect adherence to conventional rules of oppressive courtship in Behn's festive, riotous new world. The audience need to get used to these new 'Territories' in which Ranter bars 'Love-making' as ''tis' inconsistent with the Punch-Bowle'.[194] By giving primacy to one of Ranter's many social foibles, linked as it is with her innate Ranterism, as the cornerstone of their burgeoning partnership, Behn is consolidating the authority of proper governance with the promise of a changing and adapting status quo. Whilst it is satisfying and entertaining to read into Ranter an optimistic confluence of Behn's response to the frustrations of power systems which unfairly oppress and restrict women, it is important to see beyond the conditions of her sex. After years of inhabiting the roles created for her by Behn, Currer's last character is radical not because she is a sexual, humorous woman who aggressively pursues what she wants but rather because she represents a wholly disruptive, antithetical ideology to the conservatism Behn is known for and she is celebrated and rewarded for it. Behn once again uses Currer's notoriety to create a figure of disruption but then goes further in creating a unionising force out of her relationship with Dareing, representative of a renegotiated system in the New World.

[193] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 45.
[194] Behn, *The Widdow Ranter*, p. 18.

In many ways the parts played by Elizabeth Currer throughout her career almost typify the conventional modern assumptions about Restoration comedies. In her Mrs Tricksy and Betty Frisque we might be able to read the 'lusty young wench' of John Harold Wilson's vivid imagination.[195] In her provocative prologues and epilogues which tease and cajole male audience members we can understand the uneasy voyeurism to which Elizabeth Howe refers when she writes of how an actress's 'rapport with spectators' could lead to the promotion of 'gratuitous titillation'.[196] In the affairs of Currer's trapped wives, Lady Fancy and Lady Desbro, we can read both the libertine ideals of Charles's Cavalier court and the ways in which this ideology uses and abuses its women. However, through all these parts, played by a single actress, there is an underlying development which speaks to the Restoration stage's ongoing exploration of female identity from a specifically comic perspective. From a coarse bit-part in John Crowne's *Country Wit*, Currer became a prominent comic performer in both the Duke's Company and its successor, using her performed identity and onstage persona to develop a successful line of sexual women who not only flirted with the boundaries of morality but actively undermined their stringency. When the political stage looked set to outstrip the theatrical one, Currer was an essential contributor to the company's attempts to stay current with the topical conversations of the day and provide compelling entertainment whilst simultaneously commenting on and satirising the political movements which threatened the nation's stability. In her origination of the inimitable Widow Ranter we can see a development in female characterisation which was directly aided by Currer's career, one which complicates and invigorates the tired tropes of the female grotesque, the witty heroine, and the moneyed widow by combining them into a fantastic portrayal of female potential in a vibrant New World setting.

[195] Wilson, *All the King's Ladies,* p. 2.
[196] Howe, *First English Actresses,* p. 171.

Chapter Three
Susanna Verbruggen

As was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, in Restoration theatre a player's part was their property. This was the intimate relationship between actor and character at a time where a scarcity of performers and the limitations of patent theatre required playwrights to write parts for actors rather than acquire actors for parts. As has been demonstrated by the casting of Elizabeth Norris as Mrs Clacket and Elizabeth Currer as the Widow Ranter, a proficient playwright would use an actor's specific repertoire of skills to the best advantage of the play. For the popular comedian, Susanna Verbruggen, this included her remarkable versatility, a talent for mimicry, and a fondness for low, coarse humour. Verbruggen, often referred to by her maiden name Percival, or the name of her first husband, the celebrated writer and actor William Mountfort, was a comic sensation, performing in over sixty varied comic roles in the course of her career. Whilst her aversion to the more highly respected tragic roles kept her from achieving the heights of fame and financial success enjoyed by her contemporaries, Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle, Verbruggen was greatly admired by her colleagues. Antony Aston, a young actor who knew Verbruggen in her later career, described her as 'all Art, and her Acting all acquired but dress'd so nice, it look'd like Nature'.[1] Charles Gildon, the notoriously callous author of *A Comparison Between the Two Stages* (1702), described her as a 'miracle' whilst in the same sentence condemning her fellow comedians, Jane Rogers and Anne Oldfield, as 'meer Rubbish that ought to be swept off the Stage with the Filth and Dust'.[2] The two stages referred to by Gildon in 1702 allude to the two companies which had formed following the Actors' Revolt of 1695 and the departure of many of the leading members of the United Company in response to the greedy and severe rule of their manager Christopher Rich. Despite initially joining her colleagues in their departure from Rich's company, Verbruggen was enticed back by a lucrative

[1] Anthony Aston, *Stroller and Adventurer* ed. by Watson Nicholson (South Haven: Watson Nicholson, 1920), p. 91.
[2] Charles Gildon, *A Comparison Between the Two Stages* (London: 1702), p. 200.

contract and the chance to play the bigger roles which had been the erstwhile domain of company stars Barry and Bracegirdle. Whereas her predecessors Elizabeth Norris and Elizabeth Currer spent their careers largely in the roles of supporting performers, inhabiting characters which complemented, contrasted, and subverted the theatrical functions of plays' protagonists, Verbruggen found herself elevated to become one of the stars of the Patent Company after 1695. As an actress who progressed from secondary to principal performer, whilst remaining entirely within the comic genre, Verbruggen's career is particularly revealing of the different ways comic parts were written for women of varied theatrical status. The last chapter of this study will explore the earlier, subversive characters of Verbruggen's career and then go on to examine how Verbruggen's change in company position affected the parts she played and how she played them. Verbruggen's talents were recognised by several notable playwrights of the late seventeenth century and over the course of her twenty-two-year career, she worked with playwrights such as Thomas D'Urfey, William Congreve, Thomas Southerne, George Farquhar, and Mary Pix. Within these playwrights' work, Verbruggen managed to tease out different but equally enjoyable lines which showcased her variety of skills and cemented her as one of the leading comedians of the period and a particularly important asset to the Patent Company's ongoing survival.

Born as Susanna Percival on the 29th July 1666 to the minor actor, Thomas Percival, and his wife, Ann, Verbruggen spent her young life in and around the theatre, learning the trade and possibly even playing some small parts as a child. If the vicious attack on the Percivals in the anonymous *Satyr on the Players* is to be believed, Thomas always intended for his daughter to take to the stage. The manuscript transcription of the *Satyr* reads:

> *Su: Percivall* so long has known the Stage
>
> She grows in lewdness faster than in Age

From eight or Nine she there has friggin been

So counts that natural which is counted Sin

Her Coffee Father too so basely poor [3]

And such a hireling that he'll hold the door

Be pimp himself that she may play the Whore. [4]

Whilst Thomas may have had ambitions for his daughter to find success as an actress, the anonymous satirist's accusations that she should 'play the Whore' appear to be unfounded, both on and off the stage. By all accounts, Verbruggen maintained a reputation of virtue until her marriage to the young talent William Mountfort on the 22nd of June 1686. In a slightly cutting assessment of Verbruggen's qualities, George Etherege wrote in a letter to William Jepson in 1688 that prior to her marriage, 'Mrs Percivall had only her youth and a maidenhead to recommend her'.[5] Similarly, unlike her colleague in comedy Elizabeth Currer, Verbruggen was very rarely called on to play explicitly lascivious characters. Aside from this small caveat, there were very few comic parts Verbruggen did not successfully inhabit. Her first documented performance was as Winifred, 'A young Welsh Jilt', in Thomas D'Urfey's *Barnaby Whig; or, No Wit Like a Womans* (1681).[6] Verbruggen's talent for accents and her penchant for comedy would serve her well through the next twenty-two years of a career which would see her play swaggering breeches parts; old, embittered maids; young coquette prudes; innocent country lasses; cunning chambermaids; affected playwrights, and even a eunuch. Verbruggen was the ultimate character actress. Her skills in comedy were widely recognised whilst her antipathy to tragic roles was often noted. Aston commented that when it came to tragedy, 'Mrs

---

[3] It is unclear as to what this insult is referring although possibly the booth Thomas Percival ran at Bartholomew Fair (mentioned in Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary,* XI, p. 261) at which he was arrested for clipping, was a coffee-booth and the phrase is a reference to the 'coffee-men' and 'coffee-women' who ran such establishments. Elsewhere in the text the anonymous author lampoons coffee houses and those that frequent them.

[4] Anon, 'A Satyr on the Players', *Satyrs and Lampoons*, British Library (c.1682) (Harley MS 1717).

[5] George Etherege, *Letter 27 Feb/ 8 March,* in *The Letterbook of Sir George Etherege,* ed. by Sybil Rosenfeld (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 336.

[6] Thomas D'Urfey, *Barnaby Whig; or, No Wit Like a Womans* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1681) (sig. A4v).

Verbruggen never attempted it', whilst in a letter to his publisher, John Dryden worried about re-casting her in the 1684 winter revival of his *Conquest of Granada* (1672) writing, 'I know not whether Mrs Percivall, who is a Comedian, will do so well for Benzayda'.[7] Whilst contemporary accounts avouch for her popularity and talent, it is possibly her resistance to tragic roles which kept Verbruggen from reaching the heights of success enjoyed by her peers. At a time when demand for so-called 'she-tragedies' was reaching its peak, Barry and Bracegirdle both benefited from developing their repertoire to include tragic roles, whilst Verbruggen stuck firmly to comedy.[8]

Susanna Verbruggen's strict adherence to comedy, and the relative success she found within it compared to Norris and Currer, is what makes her such a crucial addition to this study. Where her contemporaries found great acclaim in their tragic roles, Barry's Monimia and Bracegirdle's Semernia being two obvious examples, Verbruggen managed to build a successful career in the less traditionally prestigious comic genre. Not only did Verbruggen inhabit some of the greatest comic characters of the 1690s, but she used her position as a leading comedian to excel during a particularly trying period for both herself and for the theatre. The first section of this chapter will demonstrate Verbruggen's importance to the Patent Company following the Actors' Revolt of 1695 and how her contributions as a comedian helped to turn the fortunes of the company. The next three sections go on to explore how her talents were adapted by three playwrights, Thomas Southerne, Thomas D'Urfey, and George Farquhar, to create not only one or two impressive lines but a whole variety through a trailblazing but all too short career in comedy. Finally, this chapter will consider how the changes in moral standards and the reformation movement towards the end of the century brought about limitations in female comic roles, even for those enacted by Verbruggen as a leading professional in the genre. By examining Verbruggen's collaborative relationships with these different playwrights this chapter aims

[7] Aston, *Stroller and Adventurer,* p. 92; Dryden, *The Letters of John Dryden,* p. 24.
[8] Nicholas Rowe coined the term 'she-tragedies' to refer to the rise of sentimental dramas which became popular in the 1680s and 1690s. Predominantly centred around young, female protagonists, 'she-tragedies' highlighted the suffering and distress of innocent women trapped in intimate, domestic environments. Nicholas Rowe, *The Plays and Poems of Nicholas Rowe*, *Volume III: The Late Plays*, ed. by Stephen Bernard and Claudine van Hensbergen, 5 vols. (London: Routledge, 2017), III, p. 10.

to exemplify the multiple comic lines Verbruggen developed in response to changing theatrical trends and to illustrate the enormous importance of her work as a comedian to the success of the Patent Company. This chapter will begin by examining the breakdown of the United Company and the reasons for the Actors' Revolt. Using archival resources, including her 1695 contract, this section will demonstrate Verbruggen's financial worth to the Patent Company and her subsequent rise as principal performer. Given the generous nature of the contract and Verbruggen's seniority compared to other actors who remained with or were shortly hired by the Patent Company, it is evident that Verbruggen was intended by Rich to become the new company star. Extending the work of Judith Milhous on the management of Lincoln's Inn Fields under Betterton, this chapter will focus on the implausible success of Rich's Company at Drury Lane following their rivalry with the Players' Company. This success was in large parts due to the former's decision to move away from traditional tragedies. In order to survive, the Patent Company was required to alter their creative output to include innovative forms of entertainment, as well as produce new comedies which specifically highlighted the skills and presence of their comic powerhouse, Susanna Verbruggen.

Verbruggen and the Patent Company

What is most remarkable about Verbruggen's overwhelming talent for comedy is the background of tragedy which marked her life. Her marriage to William Mountfort was celebrated in the theatre with several playwrights, including Mountfort himself, pitting the two against one another in displays of courtship and matrimonial discord, such as Don Charmante and Bellamonte in Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687). This happy partnership was not to last, however, as after just six years William Mountfort was killed at the hands of Captain Richard Hill and his friend, Charles Mohun, due to a rumoured affair between Mountfort and Anne Bracegirdle, with whom Hill was obsessed.[9]

[9] Albert S. Borgman, *The Life and Death of William Mountfort* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 140

The day after Hill and Mohun ambushed him on his way home, Mountfort died from his wounds, having had just enough time to make his last will and testament which made his 'Deare Wife Susanna' the sole executrix of his estate, leaving everything to her, their child Susanna, and the unborn child Verbruggen was carrying.[10] Verbruggen's ordeal did not stop there. Captain Hill escaped the country to evade arrest, but the trial of Charles Mohun before the House of Lords was a sensational affair with several poems being written to honour and obtain justice for the popular William Mountfort.[11] Despite Verbruggen's endeavours, Mohun was acquitted on the 6th February 1693 due to a lack of evidence for premeditation. Verbruggen demanded a retrial, but other events were to take her mind away from the matter. In October of that year, her father was caught and convicted of clipping (the shaving of a coin in order to collect small amounts of its precious metal) and sentenced to death.[12] According to one account, it was the direct petition of Susanna to Queen Mary II which caused the intervention of the monarch who, 'struck to the heart upon receiving Mrs Mountfort's petition, immediately granted all that was in her power, - a remission of her father's execution, - and afterwards was graciously pleased to procure a mitigation of his sentence, which was changed to that of banishment'.[13] Verbruggen's efforts went to waste, however, as Thomas Percival fell ill and shortly died whilst on his way to Portsmouth to board the ship which would take him to his exile.

Verbruggen did not remain unmarried for long, remarrying another promising but tempestuous actor, John Verbruggen, on the 31st January 1694. It is unknown whether Verbruggen's second marriage was as happy as her first, but it is believed to have been a marriage more of 'courtesy' rather than 'warm affection'.[14] Aston suggested that whilst Verbruggen was 'the best

---

[10] 'The Last Will and Testament of William Mountfort' in Borgman, *William Mountfort,* pp. 140-141.
[11] A detailed account of the attack and the subsequent trial can be found in Highfill's *Biographical Dictionary*, XI, pp. 357-359.
[12] Cathy Hartley, *A Historical Dictionary of British Women*, 2nd ed. (London: Europa Publications, 2003), p. 326.
[13] William Oxberry, *The Actor's Budget,* 2 vols. (London: W. Hildyard, 1811), II, p. 179.
[14] John Doran, *Annals of the English Stage from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean* (New York: Armstrong, 1880), p. 120.

conversation possible' she feared anyone should speak grossly around her 'lest fiery Jack shou'd so resent it as to breed a Quarrel; for he wou'd often say, -- Dammee! Tho' I don't much value my wife, yet no Body shall affront her, by G-d; and his sword was drawn on the least occasion'.[15] The following month, despite not being in the main cast, Verbruggen delivered the epilogue to Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage; or, The Innocent Adultery* (1694), a play about the dangers of remarriage after widowhood. In it, Verbruggen offers her own tongue-in-cheek remarks on the protagonist's death, following her 'Innocent adultery':

> Now tell me, when you saw the Lady dye,
>
> Were you not puzled for a Reason why?
>
> A Buxom Dam'zel, and of Play-house race,
>
> Not to out-live th'injoyment of a Brace![16]

Despite the chaos ensuing in her private life, Verbruggen remained dedicated to her craft, always willing to bring humour out of tragedy. Throughout her pregnancies, miscarriages, her husband's death, the trial, the loss of her father, and her re-marriage, Verbruggen never stopped performing, appearing in at least 15 new plays between 1693 and the break-up of the United Company two years later.[17] In fact, the hardships of her life required Verbruggen to develop a keen understanding of the importance of financial security for a woman in a man's domain and whilst scholars such as Milhous and Hume have explored the break-up of the United Company and its subsequent aftermath as a whole, focusing primarily on the rebel company, this section will examine how beneficial it was for the young comic who remained at the Patent Company in providing her with new prospects. The Actors' Revolt, the details of which are outlined below, would be a crucial development in

[15] Aston, *Stroller and Adventurer,* p. 93.
[16] Thomas Southerne, *The Fatal Marriage; or, The Innocent Adultery* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1694) (sig. K4v).
[17] Van Lennep, *The London Stage*, I, pp. 411-443.

Verbruggen's career as it afforded both her financial opportunities on a personal level and allowed her to fill the role of principal actor.

Following the initial success of the United Company, the 1680s saw the beginnings of a shift which would take company control away from the Davenants and cause the eventual breakdown of patent theatre.[18] The company continued to be profitable under the stewardship of Thomas Betterton and Henry Harris through cost-effective revivals and royal patronage until commercial and political influences, including William and Mary's indifference towards the playhouse, altered the dynamics of the business after 1688.[19] Despite Betterton and Harris's relative success, the period leading up to the revolt was far from smooth. According to Leslie Hoston's transcription of the indenture, on the 30th August 1687, Charles Davenant sold the patent and shares in the company to his brother, Alexander Davenant, for £2400.[20] Alexander Davenant was, in turn, financed by the baronet and notorious philanderer, Thomas Skipwith, and the wily lawyer, Christopher Rich. Alexander Davenant's governance of the United Company proved disastrous. A combination of financial mismanagement, creative risks in the shape of big-budget operas, and outright embezzlement brought the United Company into debt.[21] Milhous recounts how Alexander hired his inexperienced brother as a manager, paying him a 'managerial stipend almost twice as large as his thoroughly experienced predecessors; Alexander seems to have offered Betterton a larger share in the profits to get him to agree to the administrative changes'.[22] Alexander's poor financial management both within and without the theatre

[18] Milhous expansively clarifies the financial and personnel problems of the United Company leading up to the Actors' Revolt in her essay, 'United Company Finances, 1682-1692' and book, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields* (1979). This summary was drawn from these and various archival and scholarly works, including Milhous and Hume's 'Annotated Guide to the Theatrical Documents in PRO LC 7/1, 7/2 and 7/3'. Judith Milhous, 'United Company Finances, 1682-1692', *Theatre Research International*, 1 (1981–1982), pp. 37–53, p. 45; Judith Milhous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields*; Judith Milhous and Robert D Hume, 'An Annotated Guide to the Theatrical Documents in PRO LC 7/1, 7/2 and 7/3', *Theatre Notebook*, 35.2 (1981), pp. 77-86.
[19] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 76; Milhous, *Thomas Betterton,* p. 75.
[20] Leslie Hotson, *Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 296.
[21] Judith Milhous estimates this debt to be approximately £800 in the year 1691-2 (*Thomas Betterton,* p. 53). Paul Sawyer has the debt in its entirety to be as high as £1600 by the time Rich took over management of the company. Paul Sawyer, *Christopher Rich of Drury Lane: The Biography of a Theatre Manager* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), p. 14.
[22] Milhous, 'United Company Finances, 1682-1692', p. 45.

culminated in his fleeing to the Canary Islands to escape from creditors in 1693, leaving the company in the hands of Skipwith and Rich.[23] Much to the consternation of the actors, Rich commenced a policy of austerity. Together, the new managers stopped funnelling profits into new productions and attempted to cut the salaries of the leading performers. When this was met with indignation from the upper echelons of the company, Rich forged a plan to redistribute the biggest roles to newer, and consequently lesser-paid, members. This, more than anything, caused outrage amongst the highest-ranking stars because a player's parts were viewed as their property, not as temporary accessories to be confiscated and regifted at the whim of the two managers. Rich and Skipwith were determined to go to any lengths to ensure the profitability of the playhouse. By 1694 the tensions between the actors and management had reached a boiling point. Underestimating their opponents, the management refused any offers of compromise, assured that the strength of their patents would protect them under law.[24] However, with the backing of important friends such as Sir Robert Howard, not to mention the support of the public at large, the players sent a petition to the Lord Chamberlain and were subsequently granted an audience with the king. William III approved the players' petition and, on the 25th March 1695, Betterton, along with ten of the United Company's leading actors, was granted a licence to act.[25]

The name 'Susan Verbruggen' appears on the list of the eleven actors granted licence by the Lord Chamberlain to perform 'all manner of Comedyes & Tragedyes, Playes, Interludes, and Opera's'.[26] Despite this bold show of industrial unity, all was not settled amongst the members of the newly founded Players' Company. It became apparent that whilst this new venture was launched to obtain better terms for all the actors involved the shares were not to be divided equally. Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle were to receive the lion's share, whilst the others were to receive lesser shares

[23] Ibid.
[24] Cibber, *Apology*, pp. 110-111.
[25] Lowe, *Betterton*, p. 144.
[26] National Archive LC 7/3, f. 7.

or, in the case of Susanna Vebruggen, expected to remain on a salary.[27] Thomas Doggett and William Bowen, whether through their own volition or not, stayed on as salaried actors rather than receiving a share whilst Susanna Verbruggen felt affronted by the inequitable division of profits offered by Betterton and, seeing an opportunity to fill the vacated positions of principal player, renegotiated terms with Rich.[28] Meanwhile, as the 'select number' of leading actors were organising this revolt, many others were left out in the cold.[29] Realising the full extent of their loss, Rich and Skipwith scrambled to replenish their diminished ranks by bringing in travelling players from the country and ensuring the loyalty of those overlooked by Betterton and his coterie, ironically leading to pay-rises for several actors, including John Verbruggen.[30] By the 10th of April, Susanna and John Verbruggen had both successfully negotiated a contract with Rich and Skipwith on enviable terms. In exchange for an exclusive contract of three years, both actors were each promised a share of 20% of the patentees' profits, or in other words, 'the sume of ffoower pounds to be sett downe in the incident charge on every time that Twenty pounds shall be divided amongst the Inheiritors of the Sheare proffits'.[31] £8 out of every £20 profit the patentees made would be going into the pockets of the Verbruggen household, demonstrating the lengths to which Rich and Skipwith were required to go to secure their loyalties.

Susanna Verbruggen, however, needed more. As her husband, John Verbruggen was necessarily party to the articles of agreement between Susanna Verbruggen and Skipwith but it is worth noting the discrepancy in their contracts. On top of her generous share in the profits, Mrs Verbruggen's contract also required she receive an immediate bonus of £75 and a guarantee of £105 per year. Should her 20% of the profits not reach £105 by year's end, then 'what she shall soe reisive upon such Dividends shall be made up to her One hundred and ffive pounds'.[32] Should her share

[27] Milhous, *Thomas Betterton,* p. 69.
[28] Lowe, *Betterton,* p. 147.
[29] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 113.
[30] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 112; National Archive, LC 7/3, f. 33.
[31] National Archive, LC 7/3, f. 34.
[32] Ibid.

exceed £105, she could keep the surplus. To put this in perspective, in the players' initial petition to the Lord Chamberlain at the end of 1694, whilst Barry was demanding a guaranteed profit of £70 per benefit night, Verbruggen was only requesting 5^{s} more a week.[33] If we are to take the 35 weeks listed in Verbruggen's contract with Skipwith as a standard period of work in a year, Verbruggen was only set to gain £8/15/- per annum. From the diminished bargaining position she held whilst in Barry's shadow, Verbruggen went on to negotiate a prime deal with Rich. It should be noted here that whilst these were the terms agreed upon by Rich and the Verbruggens, this is not necessarily what was received. By all accounts Rich continued to be a miserly and rapacious manager when it came to paying his actors their dues, with Cibber noting that 'our good Master was as sly a Tyrant as ever was at the Head of a Theatre; for he gave the Actors more Liberty, and fewer Days Pay, than any of his Predecessors'.[34] Despite the reality of Rich's subsequent extortion, with a share of the company, a guarantee of a yearly income, and a not insignificant bonus, Susanna's worth to the patentees, and subsequent loss to the Players, is clear. Cibber agreed, writing 'The first Error this new Colony of Actors fell into was their inconsiderately parting with […] Mrs *Montfort* upon a too nice (not to say severe) Punctilio; in not allowing [her] to be equal Sharers with the rest'.[35] Cibber goes on to write, 'though *Mrs Montfort* was only excellent in Comedy, yet [her] Merit was too great almost on any Scruples to be added to the Enemy'.[36] It seems that in spite of the patentees' victory in securing the continued employment of Verbruggen, the prospects of the Patent Company looked far from optimistic. Cibber finishes by writing, 'Notwithstanding the Acquisition of these two Actors, who were of more Importance than any of those to whose Assistance they came, the Affairs of the Patentees were still in a very creeping Condition'.[37]

---

[33] Nation Archive, LC 7/3, f. 3; Howe, *First English Actresses,* p. 29.
[34] Cibber, *Apology*, p. 146.
[35] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 115.
[36] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 116.
[37] Ibid.

As beneficial as the change in hierarchy of Rich's Patent Company was for the newly appointed star, Susanna Verbruggen, the next few years saw a difficult period for both companies as they competed for the public's favour. Their legal disputes did not end with the players' secession but rather overshadowed the working relationships in London's theatrical community for years to come. According to the case files of Lord Chief Justice, Sir John Holt, in 1695 Betterton was issued a writ claiming his new playhouse was a 'Nusance to the Neighbourhood' and he was to cease operations. The report goes on to dismiss this accusation on the grounds that 'the Prosecution is carried on by the Patentees of the Old Playhouse, and not by the Inhabitants of the Place, which shews they do not think it a nuisance, if it be one'.[38] This litigiousness crept inside the playhouses and affected the employment of the actors. Both John Verbruggen and Thomas Doggett opted to change their loyalties, fancying a better deal at the other's playhouse, but both were contractually obligated to continue where they were, leading to petitions on both sides. Due to an actor's attachment to their part and the audience expectation of seeing a certain player in a role, it was particularly harmful to the company's repertoire to lose a specific performer.[39] In spite of this, John Verbruggen and Doggett were eventually permitted to trade places, meaning that for many years, Susanna Verbruggen and her husband worked for different theatre companies. This was not the only time actors were tempted to switch sides. For the next eight years Rich and Betterton attempted to seduce actors away from their parent companies to strengthen their cast and draw greater numbers. The rivalry also had a direct effect on the creative output of the companies, stemming sometimes from necessity but other times from intentional acts of industrial sabotage. Cibber writes in his *Apology,* 'it has been always judg'd their natural Interest, where there are two Theatres, to do one another as much Mischief as they can'.[40] Cibber recounts a memorable piece of theatrical skulduggery in which Betterton and his company were to perform *Hamlet* (1603) at Lincoln's Inn Fields on a Tuesday. Upon acquiring this information, the company at Drury Lane resolved to perform it on the Monday. In retaliation,

---

[38] *A Report of all the Cases Determined by Sir John Holt, Knt. From 1688 to 1710* (London: J. Harzard, T. Osborne etc., 1738), p. 538.
[39] Milhous, *Thomas Betterton,* pp. 84-85.
[40] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 117.

Betterton and company announced their intentions to stage *Hamlet* on the Monday instead of Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693), relying on their superior acting talent to draw the bigger crowd. Realising the dangers of this, Rich's Company opted to perform Congreve's *Batchelour* instead, despite none of the actors knowing the parts of the play. To make up for their ignorance, the comedian George Powell decided that to play the eponymous bachelor, he would 'mimick Betterton throughout the whole Part' and the play was subsequently advertised as a mocking imitation of the original.[41]

Beyond this petty 'mischief', the competition between the Patent and Players' companies also necessitated more practical developments for the industry as the need for innovation and excitement grew. The end of the 1690s saw an increase in new plays being produced, interspersed with light entertainments and big-budget operas, leading to both Rich and Betterton hiring professional singers and dancers to perform alongside their main body of actors.[42] Rich had the advantage here as, in retaining the use of Drury Lane, the Patent Company had the space to produce elaborately staged operas. As for new plays, the initial departure of the principal actors required its own solutions. According to Hume, 'the year 1696 saw seven actors' plays mounted, six of them at Drury Lane. This is the highest total in the period. Part of the explanation is no doubt that the company needed plays exclusively their own works in which the company did not show disadvantage in contrast to the senior actors at Lincoln's Inn Fields'.[43] Out of these actor-written plays came large parts for the newly anointed principal actress Susanna Verbruggen, including Narcissa in Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion* (1696) in the 1695/96 season and Marsilia in *The Female Wits; or, The Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal* (1696) in the 1696/97 season. The new plays inspired by the schism were also responsible for providing Verbruggen with some of her most enduring roles, such as Charlot Weldon in Southerne's *Oroonoko* (1696) and Berinthia in Vanbrugh's *The Relapse; or, Virtue*

---

[41] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 118.
[42] Van Lennep, *The London Stage,* I, pp. 439-532.
[43] Robert D. Hume, 'The Origins of the Actor Benefit in London', *Theatre Research International,* 9.2 (1984), pp. 99-111, p. 105.

in Danger (1696), both performed in the 1696/97 season. Despite the trouble the two sides caused for one another, their competition drove experimentation and provided an opportunity for actors and untested writers such as Cibber, Farquhar, and Delarivier Manley to produce some of their best work.

Starring Susanna Verbruggen as the haughty, arrogant playwright Marsilia, *The Female Wits* was one of the most overtly antagonistic productions to be staged following the break-up of the United Company. The play contained a vicious satire of Delarivier Manley's tragedy, *The Royal Mischief* (1696), recently staged at Lincoln's Inn Fields after having been initially promised to the Patent Company. *The Female Wits* follows the attempts of Marsilia, an exaggerated caricature of Manley, in rehearsing a new play. Verbruggen starred alongside Letitia Cross as Isabella, a copy of Bracegirdle's character Bassima, and Frances Maria Knight as Lady Loveall, or Barry's Homais. As with many of her roles, Verbruggen was remembered fondly for her cutting impersonation of a vain, sharp-tongued, easily angered Manley. In the preface to the 1704 edition, the author remembers 'Mrs. Verbruggen, who play'd the Chief Character, and whose Loss we must ever regret, as the Chief Actress in her Kind, who never had any one that exceeded her, or ever will have one that can come up to her'.[44] Whilst the play was originally ascribed to a mysterious Mr. W. M., Lucyle Hook posits that '*The Female Wits* has all the remarks of having been put together by a group effort, and the evidence points to the actors at Drury Lane'.[45] Perhaps stung by her departure to Lincoln's Inn Fields or possibly still irked by her pretentious and domineering manner whilst she rehearsed at Drury Lane, it seems likely that the actors of the Patent Company launched this vicious attack on Manley's character, using the opportunity to get some shots in at their recently departed colleagues. It was not the sole intention of this play to mock and belittle certain persons, but to launch an attack on the style of acting for which Barry and Bracegirdle were famous and the genre of heroic plays which Betterton's Company were reviving at the time. The melodramatic, highly devised technique which is

[44] Anon, *The Female Wits; or, The Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal* (London: William Turner, 1704) (sig. A1v).
[45] Lucyle Hook, 'Introduction', *The Female Wits*, ed. by George Robert Guffey, Earl Miner, Maximillian E. Novak & Robert Vosper (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. xxi.

most strongly associated with Restoration era performance was primarily reserved for tragedy and heroic plays and was used heavily in Manley's *Mischief.* Writing on the famed comedian Doggett's attitude towards the difference between tragic and comic acting style, Cibber writes that 'he over-valu'd Comedy for its being nearer to Nature than Tragedy', going on to describe how Doggett 'could not with Patience look upon the costly Trains and Plumes of Tragedy, in which knowing himself to be useless, he thought were all a vain Extravagance'.[46] Verbruggen evidently felt the same and avoided the high-flung excess of tragic performance, except when her comic talents could be used to imitate and mock it. *The Female Wits* missed no opportunity of viciously lampooning this style and Verbruggen was repeatedly called upon to highlight its artificiality. In the last act, Marsilia begs Mrs Cross's leave to instruct her how to cry in excruciating detail. Marsilia says, 'Oh! there's a great deal of Art in crying; Hold your Handkerchief thus; let it meet your Eyes, thus; your Head declin'd, thus; now, in a perfect whine, crying out these words, *By these tears, which never cease to Flow'*.[47] One can imagine Verbruggen's direct imitation of Bracegirdle's characteristic pathos in delivering this line. Similarly, Barry's style of histrionics is singled out for ridicule. Marsilia instructs Mrs Knight, to 'speak that as passionately as you can, because you are going to swoon; and I hate Women shou'd go into a Swoon, as some of our Authors make 'em, without so much as altering their Face, or Voice'.[48] This style of acting which demanded each thought and feeling be accompanied by an action was ripe for mockery and Verbruggen's role in facilitating this comparison further cemented her reputation as a talented mimic.

There can be no doubt that, following the departure of the leading players, Verbruggen was a vital part of the ongoing survival of the Patent Company. Of the three plays Van Lennep cites as the turning points for the Patent Company's fortunes, *Oroonoko*, *Love's Last Shift*, and *The Relapse*, Verbruggen played a starring role in each.[49] As trying a time as it was for the younger company,

[46] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 132.
[47] Anon, *Female Wits*, p. 50.
[48] Anon, *Female Wits*, p. 30.
[49] Van Lennep, *The London Stage,* I, p. 465.

Verbruggen played many of her greatest roles during the period from 1695 to her death in 1703. As her contract suggests, the managers were desperate to have her and she became the star which, had she remained in a company alongside Barry and Bracegirdle, would have been denied to her. Anthony Aston ascribed her success to both her appearance and her skill, describing her as a 'fine, fair Woman, Plump, full-featured; her Face of a fine, smooth Oval, full of beautiful, well-dispos'd Moles on it, and on her Neck and Breast – Whatever she did was not to be call'd Acting; no, no it was what she represented: She was neither more nor less, and was the most easy Actress in the World'.[50] Aston is unsurprising in his praise of the young and beautiful actress but his commendation of her ease and naturalistic style should be noted especially as these qualities were exclusively to be admired in comic performance. The tragic mode of acting which was so mercilessly mocked in *The Female Wits* may have relied heavily on histrionics and exaggeration but this was not the case for comedy. Sir John Hill wrote in his 1750 work, *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing* that it is 'an indispensable rule, that the actor, in comedy, is to recite as naturally as possible: he is to deliver what he has to say, in the very same manner, that he would have spoken it off the stage'.[51] Verbruggen's talents were not meant for the embellishment of the tragic mode, but rather she was praised for the ease and seeming effortlessness she brought to the stage. This would serve her well in her later career, when developing fashions called for more subtle, sympathetic comic heroines. That is not to say she could not rise to comic exaggeration when it was called for. Whilst many made use of her desirability by writing her young, virginal parts, it was her talent for comic mimicry and ability to adapt to low, eccentric, or absurd characters which were most appreciated by the rising playwrights and actors of the time. Although diverse and different in their presentation, from simple, country wench to doddering old maid, Verbruggen was given the opportunity of inhabiting some of the biggest comic characters of the 1690s. Those who did write for her, including D'Urfey, Southerne, Congreve, Farquhar, and Pix, each saw something different in her skills thereby allowing her to develop not just one line, as was generally the case with Restoration comics, but different lines throughout her career. The following

[50] Aston, *Stroller and Adventurer,* p. 92.
[51] Hill, *The Actor*, p. 187.

section will examine three such lines, beginning with Verbruggen's convention-defying roles at the hands of Thomas Southerne.

Verbruggen in the Plays of Thomas Southerne

Including her delivery of the bittersweet epilogue to Thomas Southerne's tragicomedy *The Fatal Marriage* in 1694, Verbruggen appeared in five of the six plays produced by Southerne during the 1690s. Of those, three were based on the works of Aphra Behn. Southerne wholeheartedly admitted his 'Debt' to Behn's *History of the Nun; or, The Fair Vow Breaker* (1689) and her novella, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688) for his greatest and most enduring successes, *The Fatal Marriage* and *Oroonoko.*[52] Less well known is that Southerne's masterful breeches comedy, *Sir Anthony Love; or, The Rambling Lady* (1691), also has its roots in Behn's work, namely her 1689 novella *The Lucky Mistake* which also tells the tale of a French count with two daughters, one of whom is betrothed to a count Vernole, altered to Verole by Southerne three years later.[53] However, the title character of Sir Anthony, played by Susanna Verbruggen (or Mountfort as she was then called), is not only the sole invention of Southerne but is remarkable in its novelty. Perhaps due to Southerne's innovation in creating such a fresh character for Verbruggen, *Sir Anthony* was a great commercial success at the time of its production in September 1690, being described in an issue of *The Gentleman's Journal* (1691/2) as a play which 'all the Town have lik'd so well' and securing Southerne a third and sixth night benefit.[54] Off the back of this success, Southerne's comedies entered a new stage of experimentation in the early years of the 1690s, turning towards more cynical observations of a degraded society with *The Wives Excuse* (1692) and *The Maids Last Prayer; or, Any Rather Than Fail* (1693). Although the high-paced plotting and bewildering implications of these plays have

[52] Thomas Southerne, *Oroonoko* (London: H. Playford, 1696) (sig. A2v).
[53] Robert Jordan, 'Mrs Behn and *Sir Anthony Love*', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, 12.1 (1973), pp. 58-59, p. 58.
[54] Van Lennep, *The London Stage,* I, p. 389.

confounded critics for years, with Allardyce Nicoll claiming that the former 'is not a very good play' and the latter 'sinks below even the level of' the first, Southerne's London-centric comedies have experienced a recent resurgence in scholarly examination, receiving praise for their rejection of theatrical conventions and the frank way in which they deal with women's experiences.[55]

One of his most ardent supporters in recent times, Robert D. Hume, describes Southerne's writing as 'Chekhovian', stressing that whilst *Sir Anthony* is essentially a romp, a good theatrical vehicle but short on substance', *The Wives Excuse* is 'virtually without precedent in the seventeenth century'.[56] *The Wives Excuse* follows the action of a group typical to London society, centred around the unhappy couple, Mr and Mrs Friendall. Mr Friendall has no qualms in letting his wife be seduced so long as it does not interfere with his own intrigues, much to the joy of Lovemore, one of several men who attempt to pursue the women of the play to varying degrees of success. Other important characters include Wilding, the rapacious rake who is purely interested in sex for the sake of his reputation, Wellville, who has more noble but equally acquisitional intentions towards the eligible Mrs Sightly, and Mrs Teazall, the pious matriarch of a local family, disgusted at the decay of morality she sees around her. Whilst it is true that *Excuse* should be praised for its novel approach to societal self-examination, by ignoring what it owes to Southerne's earlier work, particularly *Sir Anthony*, Hume fails to recognise the subtlety of its treatment of the play's most unexpected character, Verbruggen's Wittwoud. By appreciating Wittwoud in relation to Sir Anthony Love, as ostensibly different as the two characters may seem, the following section will examine Southerne's construction of the disparate desires and realities of the female experience through a shared performer. An analysis of Southerne's exploration of identity and reputation as malleable things and his illustration of the folly of seeking absolute truths in such changeable ideas is a useful way of examining his more complicated female characters, such as those he wrote for Verbruggen.

[55] Nicoll, *Restoration Drama,* p. 228.
[56] Robert D. Hume, 'Review: The Importance of Thomas Southerne', *Modern Philology*, 87.3 (1990), pp. 275-290, pp. 282-285.

The years 1690 to 1691, in which Verbruggen performed in *Sir Anthony Love* and *The Wives Excuse,* mark an important shift in her career. The part of Sir Anthony was the first indication of the success she could achieve as a protagonist, whilst the character of Wittwoud in *Wives Excuse* marked a decisive move towards the sort of idiosyncratic and complex women she would come to play in future years. Before the 1690 premiere of *Sir Anthony*, Verbruggen's roles were largely restricted to supporting 'young girl' roles, as Elizabeth Howe defines them, such as Isabella in Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) or Feliciana in Mountfort's *The Successful Straingers* (1690).[57] In Southerne's work, Verbruggen was given an opportunity to extend her repertoire beyond the fairly limiting confines of 'young girl' roles and she began to be recognised as a truly exceptional comic talent, with Gerard Langbaine describing the starring role of Sir Anthony as 'being most Masterly play'd by *Mrs. Montfort*'.[58] Although Sir Anthony was not Verbruggen's first breeches role, it is the first in which she played the protagonist and with its innovative approach to gender identity, it does more to defy the conventions of breeches roles than any that she had played before. *The Wives Excuse,* meanwhile, saw the beginnings of the young actress's association with unconventional portrayals of womanhood in inherently comic characters. During the early years of the 1690s, both Southerne and Verbruggen were pushing the limits of convention and expanding their skills through a period of exciting but ultimately doomed experimentation. Following the split up of the company in 1695, Southerne was called upon to recreate the sure-fire success he had achieved with *Sir Anthony* and wrote the part of Charlot Weldon for Verbruggen in his remastering of Behn's *Oroonoko.* Cibber describes the production of *Oroonoko* as holding 'inconceivable Value' for their 'rising Company'.[59] However, whilst experimental and eccentric depictions of womanhood were a great challenge for her, following the revolt Verbruggen was asked to return to an audience-pleasing, ticket-selling breeches role which had very little of the dangerous experimentation of Sir Anthony and a much higher regard for audience taste. Despite the role being a pale imitation of the former rakehell, Verbruggen's

[57] Howe, *First English Actresses,* pp. 180-183.
[58] Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (sig. Oo4v).
[59] Cibber, *Apology*, p. 174.

appearance as Charlot Weldon no doubt contributed to the 'uncommon Success' the play enjoyed.[60] As well as considering the nuance of Verbruggen's earlier characters with regards to their identity and reputation, this section will go on to demonstrate that were it not for the versatile actress and her success as Sir Anthony Love, the Patent Company's much-needed triumph in Southerne's *Oroonoko* would not have been staged.

In the preface to *Sir Anthony,* Southerne singles out Verbruggen for praise, commending her particular contributions to shaping the eponymous rambling lady, writing 'as I made every Line for her, she has mended every Word for me; and by a Gaiety and Air, particular to her Action, turn'd every thing into the Genius of the Character'.[61] *Sir Anthony Love* tells the tale of the ultimate rakehell, as popular with the women as he is with the men, roaming a cleverly exoticized French setting, aiding his friends in their hunt for advantageous matches, wrangling money from wealthy buffoons, and generally enjoying the pleasures of life. Unlike his canonical predecessors, Etherege's Dorimant and Behn's Willmore, Sir Anthony also happens to be a woman, Lucia, fleeing from a despicable match. Although as brash and brave and rowdy as the previous chapter's Widow Ranter, Sir Anthony/Lucia pushes the boundaries of what was expected from breeches roles. Introduced in male attire, and notably included amongst the men of the cast list, Anthony/Lucia resists the limiting definition of breeches roles, as set out by Elizabeth Howe. Howe writes, 'Breeches roles became little more than yet another means of displaying the actress as a sexual object [..] In most cases a woman dons male disguise as an unnatural action caused by some obstacle to her marrying her lover or otherwise getting her own way. Once her wishes are met she almost always invariably returns, like her Renaissance predecessor, to a conventional female role at the end of the play'.[62] Whilst Sir Anthony/Lucia does move in and out of women's clothing and ends the play married, there is little conventionally female about the role. Southerne takes the possibility of a gender fluid character who is fully in control of

[60] Gildon, *A Comparison,* p. 19.
[61] Thomas Southerne, *Sir Anthony Love; or, The Rambling Lady* (London: Joseph Fox, 1691) (sig. A2r).
[62] Howe, *First English Actresses*, p. 59.

their identity to the extreme and creates a more liberated and nuanced figure in Sir Anthony/Lucia than the female characters who don male attire for a short while before being appropriately coupled off and returned to their original state. As Youmi Jung points out, Sir Anthony/Lucia 'is the only character who freely jumps from one plot to another to play both men and women' and there is no indication that the ostensible ending to this play is the end of their adventures, but rather just another jumping off point into another plot and another identity.[63]

Whilst breeches parts were nothing new, with Howe noting that 'nearly a quarter' of the plays produced between 1660-1700 had one or more roles for actresses in male clothes, Sir Anthony truly transgresses the gender binary and is free to flit, at will, between identities depending on need or desire.[64] This ability is introduced in the first scene when Anthony declares, 'For as the Conduct of Affairs now goes, I'm best disguis'd in my own Sex, and Cloaths'.[65] The complex duality of Anthony/Lucia simultaneously owning their female identity whilst acknowledging it as a disguise, dependent on the outwards trappings of clothes recalls Waitwell's introductory comment to Sir Anthony that '[you] so perfectly act the Cavalier, that cou'd you put on our Sex with your Breeches, o' my conscience you wou'd carry all the Women before you'.[66] Even the play-text is flexible in its definition of the character. In act four, the stage directions reads, 'Valentine *following* Sir Anthony Love *in her Woman's Cloaths',* suggesting a supremacy for the name attached to the male identity but using the pronouns of the female, all the while complicating the matter by specifying that *she* is in *her* 'Woman's Cloaths' in direct contrast to the equally viable Men's Clothes in which *he* has spent the majority of the play.[67] The name 'Sir Anthony' is used in the play-text to indicate the lines Susanna Verbruggen was required to speak, even when the character is in their 'Lucia' apparel. For Anthony/Lucia, the creation of identity is an act and a disguise, a tool to adopt and a part to play when

[63] Youmi Jung, '"Cou'd You Put On Our Sex With Your Breeches": Destabilising Libertine Performance in Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love: Or, The Rambling Lady', English Studies,* 101.3 (2020), pp. 312-326, p. 316.
[64] Howe, *First English Actresses*, p. 57.
[65] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 2.
[66] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 1.
[67] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 48.

the situation requires, but each identity is also a real and viable part of their character. Unlike Howe's breeches roles, Anthony/Lucia's donning of male or female clothes is never presented as an unnatural action, or a departure from some ideal form to which they must return to restore proper order. When Anthony/Lucia reveals themselves in woman's attire to Valentine, he is initially surprised asking, 'But are you *Sir Anthony Love*?' to which they reply, 'All but my petticoats', reaffirming that the character is no less Sir Anthony than they are Lucia and that the petticoats are an accessory to frame their chosen appearance at any given moment.[68] What is perhaps most curious about this scene is what follows this revelation. Although it is not unusual for a deceived lover to be pleased his brash companion has secretly been his would-be love all along, much like Ranter and Dareing of Behn's Virginia comedy, convention usually dictates this to be the moment that all deceits are thrown aside, and the young couple agree to settle down into their societally prescribed roles as husband and wife. This expectation is particularly prominent in *Sir Anthony* as Valentine was played by Verbruggen's husband and usual on-stage partner, Mountfort. In a clever inversion of this expectation, however, Anthony/Lucia rejects this idea, claiming they 'neither desire, nor deserve' to marry Valentine and even if they did, they know him too well to trust him.[69] Anthony/Lucia's goals do not fit neatly into the Restoration woman's trivector of desire: love for marriage, marriage for reputation, reputation for security. If Anthony/Lucia's actions achieve these goals, including the continuation of a sexual relationship with Valentine after his marriage to Floriante and receiving an ongoing 'Rent-charge of Five hundred' a year from their estranged husband Sir Gentle, it is an incidental bi-product of their main desire. Sir Anthony/ Lucia's main goal is achieving 'Universal Empire', or in their own words, being 'As famous for my Action with the Men, as my Passion for Women'.[70] Sir Anthony desires what all rakehells do – unbridled infamy.

[68] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 49.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 76; Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 1.

Southerne's dismantling of the gender binary is not restricted to the play-world itself. In the epilogue to *Sir Anthony,* Charlotte Botelar, who played Floriante, love-rival to Verbruggen's Anthony/Lucia, asserts that any man would sit through the dullest scene to see:

> The Female *Montford* bare above the knee.
> She makes a mighty noise, like some of you,
> Who often talk of what you never do:
> She's for all Womankind, and aws the Town,
> As if her Husband's Breeches were her own.
> She's been to Night our Hero, tho' a Female,
> Show me but such a Whoremaster, tho' a Male
> Who thro' so many shifts, is still the same,
> Pursues all Pettycoats, preserves her Fame,
> And tho' she can do nothing, keeps the Name.[71]

This section of the epilogue returns to Southerne's playful reconstruction of identity demonstrating that by 'Fame' and in 'Name', the subject of the epilogue can outmatch any male. In this case, the subject is not Lucia or Sir Anthony or any one of the identities taken up in the play, but Verbruggen herself. Initially referred to by her reputation, in relation to her famous husband, 'The Female *Montford*' is presented as partially removed from a true identity, an othered companion to a more famous figure. However, just as her character remained Sir Anthony despite their appearance in woman's petticoats, the distinct self of the player remains fixed despite her 'many shifts' through

[71] Southerne, *Sir Anthony* (sig. N2v).

multiple identities, including that of wife. She is all at once the sexualised wife of Mountfort, the male 'Hero' of the play, the female star who 'aws the Town' and the idealised libertine 'Whoremaster' who keeps the 'Name' beyond the limits of the play-text, remembered by the eager audience. The multi-layered blending of actress, character, disguise, and self in this epilogue is akin to Southerne's representation of identity as both an innate and at the same time unstable, alterable quality. By highlighting the depths of performativity in the construction of the self, Southerne calls into question the efficacy of constricting such identifications to any single, absolute truths.

Both *Sir Anthony Love* and *The Wives Excuse* make use of reputation and how a person's identity is bound to it. The word 'reputation' is spoken fifteen times in *Sir Anthony* and twenty times in *The Wives Excuse*; it is often the driving force of characters' motivations. In the fantastical world of *Sir Anthony* reputation and identity are not fixed and they can be controlled by any individual who is daring enough to change them. According to Peter Holland, in the far more confining, even suffocating environment of London's social scene in *The Wives Excuse*, reputation is 'out of the control of the individual, irrespective of one's actions, but controlled by society's expectation aroused by context, by juxtaposition, by pattern'.[72] Southerne is obsessed with the conflict between how the world sees a person, how that person sees themselves, and who that person really is. The tensions between these states are responsible for much of his plays' humour. Whether it is in Sir Anthony/Lucia's deft handling of their multiple identities to achieve their goals or the huge gap between a character's assertions and their actions, Southerne repeatedly highlights reputation as being a poor metric of judgement, being, as it is, a superficial construction. When Anthony/Lucia is still in disguise as the mysterious '*English* Lady', Valentine attempts to dissuade her/them from favouring Sir Anthony to which she/they respond that Anthony is 'A little too young indeed to be trusted' with a woman's reputation.[73] This tongue-in-cheek remark is made all the funnier because Anthony/Lucia has long since proved to the audience that their reputation is entirely safe in their own hands and the

[72] Holland, *Ornament of Action*, p. 144
[73] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 48.

only person who could hope to damage it is themselves, only for it to be safely secured once again by some clever manoeuvre. At the other end of the scale from Anthony/Lucia's adept manipulation of character are Southerne's foolhardy sparks desperate to secure a reputation of which they are not worthy, much like the audience members to whom Botelar is speaking when she says, 'some of you, Who often talk of what you never do'.[74] The most obvious example of this is the overblown drama in *The Wives Excuse* surrounding the spark, Ruffle's, orchestrated affront to Mr Friendall's reputation outside the '*Musick-Meeting*'.[75] In order to save himself being labelled a coward, Ruffle is persuaded by Lovemore to start a quarrel with the conflict-shy Mr Friendall in order to publicly embarrass him in front of the company, thereby improving Lovemore's chances of seducing Mrs Friendall, fulfilling the wifely excuse of the play's title. Mrs Friendall, however, would rather forgo this pleasure if it means the whole town knowing her husband's foibles and strives to keep them secret. Her immediate solution to the awkward entanglement outside of the music meeting is to cry, 'Good Mr. *Friendall*, another time, Consider where you are. You are more a Man of honour, I know, than to draw your Sword Among the Women' while pretending to hold her husband back.[76] Knowing her husband's nature, she jumps in to save him, and herself, from humiliation by giving him an excuse to let the matter pass until the morning. With both parties being too cowardly to engage in actual fighting but also fearful for their public image, Mrs Friendall spends the next few acts trying to out-manoeuvre Lovemore's attempts to 'ruine' Mr Friendall's reputation. In a disturbing parody of Sir Anthony's jovial manipulation of their character's standing, Mrs Friendall's own strategies are continually thwarted until the final damning revelation in act five of her husband (mistakenly) in the arms of Wittwoud in front of the whole company, forcing her to be a 'witness' to her own 'ill usage'.[77]

Scholarly examinations of Verbruggen's characters in *Sir Anthony Love* and *The Wives Excuse* tend to highlight their similar qualities, for example their tenacity and resistance to gendered

[74] Southerne, *Sir Anthony* (sig. N2v).
[75] Thomas Southerne, *The Wives Excuse; or, Cuckolds Make Themselves* (London: W. Freeman, 1692), p. 1.
[76] Southerne, *The Wives Excuse*, p. 13.
[77] Southerne, *The Wives Excuse*, p. 54.

conventions of modesty, whilst insisting on their differences. This ultimately results in readings which would present Sir Anthony as likeable and unconventionally progressive whilst insisting that Wittwoud is a degraded and unsympathetic character. C. A Price describes Sir Anthony/Lucia as 'a strong-willed, clever, and somewhat rapacious female rake' whilst Wittwoud is a 'despicable procuress' and one of the 'most depraved characters in the play'.[78] Helga Drougge comments that Verbruggen's characters shift from a 'universally irresistible girl-boy' in *Sir Anthony* to a 'female eunuch, neither girl nor boy' but 'unsexed by her wit' in *The Wives Excuse*.[79] By all accounts, Sir Anthony is gay and lively where Wittwoud is bitter and resentful with Peter Holland describing her as an 'evil, isolated, ageing bawd'.[80] By looking at what brings the two characters together, however, Southerne's appreciation of the complexity and constraints of womanhood becomes clear, cemented in their embodiment by the same actress. By creating two characters for Verbruggen who have several overlapping qualities but are treated radically differently by the characters of the play, Southerne is inviting the discourse which is still being generated today, highlighting how easy it is so judge and condemn women for actions which would be celebrated in a man. Sir Anthony and Wittwoud both reject the societal demands of marriage in favour of 'Wit' and libertine matchmaking, both are more at ease in the throng of the town than at home, and most importantly, both are unbothered by their reputation, seeing it as immaterial to their personal wants and desires: Sir Anthony because they have learnt to control it and Wittwoud because she covets scandal and intrigue more. The men of *The Wives Excuse,* embittered shadows of earlier libertines, are preoccupied with reputation above reality in a way specifically harmful to women. Wilding, the most overtly aggressive of the young rakes, admits to bedding Fanny because he prizes 'the Reputation of undoing her'.[81] As Sir Anthony self-consciously put it a year earlier, 'Reputation must be had: And we young Men generally raise ours out of the Ruine of the Womens'.[82] Unlike the other characters in the play and despite her many flaws,

[78] C. A. Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 169, pp. 175-176.
[79] Helga Drougge, '"We'll Learn That of the Men": Female Sexuality in Southerne's Comedies', *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900 (1993) 33.3, pp. 545-563, pp. 552-553.
[80] Holland, *Ornament*, p. 146.
[81] Southerne, *The Wives Excuse*, p. 20.
[82] Southerne, *Sir Anthony*, p. 57.

Wittwoud does not heed her reputation, explaining that 'since want is the rate of things, I know no real value of Reputation'.[83] The connection between these characters in the embodiment of Verbruggen points to Southerne's overarching condemnation of those who value the appearance of things rather than considering their reality.

The main difference between Sir Anthony/Lucia and Wittwoud is in the theatrical mood of Southerne's plays rather than any material disparity between their morals or desires. Although none of Southerne's plays is grounded in realism, *Sir Anthony* exists in a state of fanciful whimsy whereas *The Wives Excuse* is steeped in a cold artificiality, both designed to highlight the fluidity and intangibility of so-called 'truth'. A breeches role would jar with the dispassionate bitterness exhibited by every character in Southerne's London and is therefore not an option for Wittwoud. When Wittwoud does half-heartedly attempt a disguise in the final act, by masking herself and donning the scarf of the attractive Mrs Sightly to fool Wilding, her plans are almost immediately unearthed. In a clever inversion of expectations, Verbruggen is placed across from her husband, William Mountfort in a 'union neither intended', as Wittwoud is tricked into an embarrassing tryst with the cowardly Mr Friendall.[84] Just as Southerne playfully twisted audiences' expectations of seeing the real-world husband and wife happily coupled up at the end of *Sir Anthony,* Southerne once again undercuts their partnership by leaving them comically disgusted by their mistaken pairing. Wittwoud's final act is to storm off stage, cursing her would-be dupes. Writing on the remarkable creation of Sir Anthony, Helena Drougge points out that 'it apparently took a male dramatist and a trousered heroine for the women in the audience to be able to enjoy vicariously the combination of playfulness and ruthlessness which makes the perfect Restoration rake'.[85] Verbruggen's later characterisation of Wittwoud is the result of what happens when that same dramatist is less interested in creating a compelling fantasy world and more focused on illuminating the feebly constructed artifices on which real human

[83] Southerne, *The Wives Excuse*, p. 24.
[84] Peggy Thompson, 'Facing the Void in *The Wives Excuse;* or Characters Make Themselves', *Papers on Language and Literature,* 31(1995), pp. 78 - 98, p. 84.
[85] Drougge, '"We'll Learn That of the Men"', p. 552.

interaction is based. If Verbruggen's Sir Anthony is an escapist, fantastical portrayal of a person freed from the shackles of reputation through their own clever trickery, able to mould their own identity and get their way without consequence, her Wittwoud is the inevitable reality of a woman without those skills and without the ability to self-actualise an alternative identity, whose plans are ruined and whose reputation, as an obstinate marker of worth, is irretrievably lost. Despite in both plays touting the same ideals and rejecting the conditions of respectability enforced on her characters by society and the pious matriarch Mrs Teazall, Verbruggen's later character is condemned rather than celebrated for her wiles, all for the want of a pair of breeches.

A few years after the huge success of *Sir Anthony Love*, the departure of Betterton and his confederates created a distinctly bleak outlook for Rich's Patent Company. With few stock plays and fewer popular actors, the company was required to experiment with new forms, hiring new players and commissioning more original plays than their counterpart, not all of which were successful. According to Milhous, 'The Patent Company tried seven new tragedies, of which only Southerne's *Oroonoko* became a stock play'.[86] Milhous goes on to credit *Oroonoko*, along with Cibber's comedy *Love's Last Shift* and an operatic version of Dryden's *Indian Queen* (1695), as the plays which 'proved Rich's company a viable operation'.[87] Performed at the beginning of the 1695/1696 season, *Oroonoko* partly tells the tale of Behn's 'Royal Slave', kidnapped from his home in Coramantien and forced into slavery in Suriname only to stage a tragically unsuccessful rebellion. This story of love, loss and heroism sits awkwardly alongside the merry adventures of Charlot Welldon, Verbruggen's breeches part, as she attempts to cajole successful matches for herself and her sister, Lucy. The split-plot which seems merely incongruous in *The Fatal Marriage* feels downright jarring in *Oroonoko* and the answer to its inappropriateness most likely lies in the time of its production. The prologue and epilogue frame *Oroonoko* in such a way as to make it clear that the play was written with the schism very much at the forefront of the company's mind. Spoken by George Powell, the prologue compares

[86] Milhous, *Thomas Betterton*, p. 102.
[87] Milhous, *Thomas Betterton,* p. 103.

the ‘Contending Stages’ to two ‘Neighbouring States’ living in ‘Hostile Times’ whilst Verbruggen’s epilogue emphasises that the company will ‘try all Shapes, and Shifts, and Arts’ to gain the audience’s favour much to the chagrin of the author who is ‘forc’d’ to ‘joyn mirth and grief together’.[88] Given the enormity of the stakes, it is no surprise that the finished version of Southerne’s adaptation was more a work of compromise and necessity than artistic vision. *Oroonoko* reads more as a strained combination of Southerne’s previous successes than the boundary-pushing, experimental dramas he produced before 1695. Writing on the patchwork fusion of high and low plots in *Oroonoko*, Hume argues that he has ‘trouble believing that [Southerne] was mainly serving up smut because he thought the audience would buy it’.[89] Given Southerne’s own comments on the matter, however, audience satisfaction was clearly an extremely important driving factor behind his creative choices. As Drougge points, Southerne apologised for this very thing in the epistle dedicatory of *The Fatal Marriage* which reads, ‘I have given you a little taste of Comedy with it, not from my own Opinion but the present Humour of the Town’.[90] Similarly, the prologue to *Maid’s Last Prayer* alludes to the necessity of doing so. In it, Elizabeth Barry says on his behalf, ‘They who must write (for writing’s a Disease)/ Shou’d make it their whole study how to please:/ And that’s the thing our Author fain wou’d do;/ But wiser Men, than he, just tell me how:/ For you’re so changeable, that every moon,/ Some upstart whimsie knocks the old ones down’.[91] It seems unlikely such a motive would depreciate during the ‘hostile times’ of the schism. Powell’s prologue to *Oroonoko* suggests Southerne’s understanding that the play was ‘made with awkward skill’ but, unfortunately for him, the play proved immensely popular and remained so throughout his lifetime.[92] As Mary Ann O’Donnell notes, *Oroonoko* enjoyed ‘over three hundred performances between its premiere in November 1695 and the end of the eighteenth century’.[93] However, in 1759 it was adapted by Dr Hawkesworth for David

[88] Southerne, *Oroonoko* (sig. A4r, sig. M3r).
[89] Ibid.
[90] Drougge, ‘Love, Death and Mrs Barry’, p. 424 n. 20; Southerne, *Fatal Marriage* (sig. A2v).
[91] Thomas Southerne, *The Maids Last Prayer; or, Any Rather Than Fail* (London: R. Bentley, 1693) (sig. H4v).
[92] Southerne, *Oroonoko* (sig. A4r).
[93] Mary Ann O’Donnell, ‘Myth and Myth making in the Works of Aphra Behn’, *Aphra Behn (1640-1689) Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity* ed. by Mary Ann O’Donnell (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000), pp. 101-110, p. 107.

Garrick to play the title character and the comic low plot was entirely removed.[94] Just as it was included to fit the taste of the town, so it was removed once public opinion changed its mind.

Hume offers the choice that Southerne's decision to inject a comic low plot into *Oroonoko* was either 'a frivolous commercial sell-out or a serious comment on the form and content of such comedy', convincingly arguing for the latter.[95] Whilst it is understandable to want to search for the literary factors of this decision and to argue that the comic plotlines should not be ignored for want of value, the extremities of this ultimatum somewhat disregards the realistic financial limitations on theatre makers, especially when considering the pressures on the company at the time. Suggesting that responding to a given audience and making artistic choices based on the necessity of making money is a 'frivolous' endeavour is as selective as insisting one genre should hold superiority over another. Given the riskiness of *Wives Excuse* and *Maids Last Prayer* and their subsequent failure, it seems far more likely that Southerne would find himself bending to the will of the town and inserting a comic low plot into otherwise desperately pathetic tragedies rather than doing so for his own artistic vision. The fact that Southerne wrote these plots well and that they are worth study is not tarnished by his reasoning for doing so. His primary desire to have originally intended *Oroonoko* as a straight tragedy is indicated by the play's designation as such on the title page, despite more than half of the action being taken up by the comic marriage plot. Whilst Southerne could rightly claim to have acceded to a 'little taste' of comedy in his *Fatal Marriage*, by 1695 he was required to overhaul Behn's tragic tale of an enslaved prince and reposition a daring Verbruggen in a breeches part, an already established fan favourite, as the protagonist. Inspired by his first real commercial success and the extraordinary reception of Verbruggen as Sir Anthony Love, *Oroonoko* was re-written as a split-comedy to centre Verbruggen's talents. Not only was pleasing the audience imperative at a time when the two companies were vying for ticket sales but in order to produce the play at all Southerne was required to work within the bounds of the Patent Company. As Cibber puts it, following the departure of

[94]Joseph Knight, *David Garrick* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1894), p. 177.
[95] Hume, *The Importance of Thomas Southerne*, p. 286.

Betterton's party, the Patentees 'were reduced to make sure of as good a Company as the Leavings of Bettertons Interest could form'.[96] If anything, Southerne was lucky to be able to secure John Verbruggen as the tragic hero Oroonoko at all, given his departure to Lincoln's Inn soon after. Were Southerne to have produced *Oroonoko* with the complete United Company, the part of Imoinda would most likely have gone to Barry to emulate the pathetic tragedian's success in *The Fatal Marriage*, both characters ultimately dying for the sake of their beloved. Without the established tragic actress in this role, Southerne made the most generically and economically viable decision and foregrounded Verbruggen's comic plot, thereby giving more stage time to the strongest and best-known actress available. *Oroonoko* demonstrates that, following the immediate devastation of the Actors' Revolt, Verbruggen was the company's strongest asset and was used as such by Southerne.

Verbruggen as the 'Clownish Hoyden'

In remembering Susanna Verbruggen, Cibber writes of his erstwhile colleague that 'she was so fond of Humour, in what low Part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair Form to come heartily into it; for when she was eminent in several desirable Characters of Wit, and Humour, in higher Life, she would be, in as much Fancy, when descending into the antiquated *Abigail,* of *Fletcher*'.[97] It is unknown whether or not Verbruggen played the role of Abigail in John Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (1616), but given Cibber's commendation and the fact that Van Lennep believes the play may have been revived around 1691, the same year Verbruggen played the unalluring Wittwoud, it is certainly possible she took on the role of the lecherous elderly servant, a part which would have been very familiar to Elizabeth Norris decades earlier.[98] The exceptional quality of Verbruggen's talents can be found in the breadth of roles in which she excelled. Her versatility, commented on here by Cibber, allowed her to inhabit diverse comic roles from the

[96] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 112.
[97] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 98.
[98] Van Lennep, *The London Stage*, I, p. 387.

swaggering Sir Anthony to the 'resourceful young' coquette Miranda in Catherine Trotter's *Love at a Loss; or, Most Votes Carry It* (1701).[99] Verbruggen's significant contributions to the development of comedy in the 1690s have been widely noted, particularly in 'employing her talents as a male impersonator' and in 'reviving the style of the 'witty couple', performing opposite first William Mountfort, and then John Verbruggen.[100] What are less appreciated and less explored are the 'low Parts' which Cibber describes. Critics such as Howe and Solomon both briefly comment on Verbruggen's 'talent for the grotesque', her caricatures which 'linger on the periphery of social norm'.[101] However, there has been little work done towards unearthing the cultural ramifications and shifting trends in the representation of these characters through the 1690s. In the hands of Verbruggen, beloved for her talent for mimicry, these low parts were popular additions to the canon in the early 1690s but as the fashion for coarse humour waned, even her low, provincial roles needed altering to fit the reformist mood of the 1700s. This section will examine two of Verbruggen's characters written by the playwright Thomas D'Urfey. It will explore the often harmful stereotypes these characters embodied whilst demonstrating the effect the pressures of the reformist movement was to have on the propriety and acceptability of such roles. Verbruggen's caricatures, which mocked the elderly, the poor, the provincial, and the unrefined, essentially all that was anathema to a desirable London audience, foreground the peripheral 'other' and stoked the flames of a class-based mockery already rampant in the theatre at the end of the century. The first of these characters, Mary the Buxome in Thomas D'Urfey's three-part *Comical History of Don Quixote* (1694-6), is a poor squire's daughter in Spain who dreams of betterment should her father, Sancho Panza, ever deliver on his promise to make her a Countess. The second, Gillian Homebred in D'Urfey's *The Bath; or, The Western Lass* (1701), is a richer, more sympathetic, squire's daughter who actively avoids betterment

[99] Wilson, *All the King's Ladies,* p. 79; Margaret J.M. Ezell, *The Oxford English Literary History: The Later Seventeenth Century*, 5 vols. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017), V, p. 382.
[100] Howe, *First English Actresses,* p. 83; Ezell, *Literary History*, V, p. 382.
[101] Howe, *First English Actresses,* p. 84; Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues,* p. 127.

of any sort, disliking the affectations and fopperies of city life and quite at home in the Somerset countryside.[102]

Verbruggen's growing popularity as a comic actress can be tracked through her increasing prominence in the three parts of D'Urfey's *Don Quixote*. The first two parts of his trilogy were performed by the United Company in the middle of 1694 and were generally well received. The third, performed over a year later, fell to Rich's Patent Company following the schism. Possibly due to the altered cast, or because the third part meandered farthest from Cervantes's original content, the play was met with a bad reception with the anonymous dialogue, *A Comparison Between the Two Stages,* describing it as having been 'Damn'd, damn'd to all intents and purposes'.[103] Verbruggen's character became increasingly foregrounded throughout the series and it seems likely the third part was largely written to showcase Verbruggen's comic talents at a time when the Company was required to make greater use of its comedians. Whilst Cervantes's original does include Sancho Panza's daughter, Marisancha, D'Urfey insists that the comic part of Mary the Buxome, slovenly daughter to the squire, was invented anew for the theatrical retelling of the Don Quixote legend. In his preface to the second part, D'Urfey writes, 'I deserve some acknowledgement for drawing the Character of Mary the Buxom, which was intirely my own […] yet by making the Character humorous, and the extraordinary well acting of *Mrs* Verbruggen, it is by the best Judges, allowed to be a Masterpiece of Humour'.[104] This is not the first time Verbruggen is singled out for praise in this role. The description of Mary the Buxome in the dramatis personae of the first part reads, '*Sancho's* Daughter, a Rude, laughing, Clownish Hoyden, Incomparably Acted by Mrs *Verbruggen*'.[105] This commendation is exclusively reserved for Verbruggen, and I have been unable to find anything comparable in other

[102] It is worth noting here that Sancho Panza is a squire in the traditional, medieval sense i.e. the attendant to a knight, whereas Homebred's father is a squire in the seventeenth-century English sense of a landowning member of the gentry.
[103] Gildon, *A Comparison,* p. 25.
[104] Thomas D'Urfey, *The Comical History of Don Quixote,* part II (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1694) (sig. A2v-A3r).
[105] Thomas D'Urfey, *The Comical History of Don Quixote,* part I (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1694) (sig. A4v).

cast lists. Not only did D'Urfey go out of his way to praise her performance, but he also ensured she would get more stage time. In the first part of the trilogy, Mary and her mother, Teresa, feature in a single scene as a light-hearted introduction to Sancho's low, coarse relations and their ludicrous ambitions of social climbing. The mother and daughter pair feature far more prominently in the second part. Following the advancement of Sancho to governor, albeit as nothing more than a prank played upon him by a whimsical Duke and Duchess, Mary and Teresa are called to court and must learn how to comport themselves appropriately by the Duke's Steward Mannel. There follows several scenes in which the two women are prompted to undergo a Pygmalion-esque transformation into 'Admirable, Adroit and Easie' ladies of the Court, at which they fail miserably much to the consternation of Mannel and the amusement of the assembled onlookers.[106] The final part of the trilogy features Mary heavily as a bride on the cusp of marriage, feigning to be every inch the docile wife to her betrothed, Jaques. Once the wedding has been and gone, the boisterous, loud-mouthed 'ill-bred dowdy' the audience would have come to recognise in Verbruggen's character from the previous two plays is revealed as she and her husband romp around the stage in comic displays of matrimonial discord.

Whilst the first two parts are simply subtitled 'Part I' and 'Part the Second' respectively, the third is conspicuously advertised as featuring 'The Marriage of Mary the Buxome' and consequently most of the action pivots around this central event.[107] Verbruggen's importance to the play and an indication of her rise through the cast is further demonstrated by her increasing presence in the plays' prologues and epilogues. In Part I the prologue and epilogue are given to Betterton, absent from the cast list but a respected veteran of the stage, and the popular Thomas Doggett who played Sancho. The end of the second instalment, however, sees Mrs Verbruggen share the epilogue with Cave Underhill who, despite being nearly forty years his senior, took over the role of Sancho from Doggett.

[106] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part II, p. 44.
[107] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* parts I, II (sig. A1r); Thomas D'Urfey, *The Comical History of Don Quixote*, part III (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1696) (sig. A1r).

Despite ostensibly telling the saga of the errant knight and his provincial squire, the last words of the trilogy are given solely to Mary the Buxome. Verbruggen's final prologue is a particularly coarse 'Ditty' which centres around her accusing all the women of the audience, both low born and 'Gentlefolk' to be as sex-obsessed and "hoyden-ish" as Mary herself.[108] It is not surprising this accolade was given to Verbruggen given that, by this point, she had held onto her role in *Don Quixote* for longer than any other actor. Between the staging of the first and second parts and certainly by the time the Patent Company got round to reprising the Don Quixote saga in 1695, opportunity and circumstance caused a great deal of shuffling of the available actors. For some, the disruption of the United Company and the formation of Betterton's rebel company prevented them from resurrecting their roles in 1695, as was the case when Patent Company comedians George Powell and his wife took over the roles of Quixote and Teresa Panza from Underhill and Elinor Leigh respectively. Even when considering the lasting effects of the Actors' Revolt, there was an unusual amount of role switching. Several actors appeared in all three productions but returned to play different parts, for example John Verbruggen swapping out his Ambrosio to play Carrasco in the final part. Through all this, Susanna Verbruggen was the only actor to remain in the same role over the course of the three plays and her characterisation of the 'young Todpole Dowdy' became increasingly vital to the production of D'Urfey's trilogy.[109]

Despite the third part of *Don Quixote* not gaining the appreciation D'Urfey felt it deserved, this did not stop him revisiting the notion of Verbruggen as a likeable but coarse country bumpkin with poor manners, provincial speech, and a dream of marriage. In 1701, the Patent Company staged D'Urfey's *The Bath; or, The Western Lass,* with Verbruggen taking the role of the eponymous lass. Just as he did in the published version of *Don Quixote*, D'Urfey singles out Verbruggen for praise in his dedication to the Duke of Argyll. D'Urfey writes that he has 'furnish'd this with a pretty Plot and at least four new Characters, particularly Mrs *Verbruggen's* (whose incomparable performance

[108] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part III (sig. A7v).
[109] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part I, p. 7.

answering my design, has rais'd it, if not to her Master-Piece, yet at least second to any)'.[110] Unlike her Spanish counterpart, Gillian Homebred of Somersetshire is a born member of the gentry, but this is hardly enough in the eyes of the London urbanites who meet her on their trip to Bath. Lydia, young bride to the doddering Knight Sir Oliver Oldgame, says of Gillian, 'she has six thousand pound portion 'tis true, but what then, she's only a dirty Squires Daughter, and has had the curse of being a stale Maid time out of mind; she was never at *London* but once I hear, and so weary ont in three days, that she had not patience to stay till she could get off her Tan'.[111] Where Mary yearned to be accepted in high society and attain all the trappings of a genteel life, Gillian's defining characteristic is her distaste for the city and all the affectations that accompany it. This is made starkly clear in the humorous exchange in which Gillian is invited to take tea with a local upstart, Du Grand, and a visiting noblewoman, Delia Codshead, only to announce she detests the taste of tea and asks that the 'Wanch help us to a Pot of Metheglin and a Toast' before promptly requesting leave 'to take two or three whiffs of Tobacco', much to the embarrassment of her host.[112] When Du Grand attempts to remonstrate with Gillian for her brash ignorance of the 'methods of women of Quality' Delia responds with pitying contempt as she mutters to the audience that 'these are both sad Creatures' and quickly leaves.[113] The whole comic interlude is happily concluded by Gillian, however, when she promises to Du Grand, to 'send ye in a Flitch of Bacon to make ye amends'.[114] Despite their differing ambitions, Mary and Gillian are both defined by their betters and relegated to clownish fools by the witty sparks they encounter. Mary is duped into believing she has been made a Countess whilst Gillian is tricked into marriage by a poor but savvy farm labourer who disguises himself as the Captain of a Sussex militia and pretends to detest city life as much as she. In both performances, the comic potential of the characters lies in the incongruity between the refined behaviour of the nobly born and the lack of etiquette of the two country women, one in her attempts to mimic the former and the other in her absolute resistance to it.

[110] Thomas D'Urfey, *The Bath; or, The Western Lass* (London: Peter Buck, 1701) (sig. A3r).
[111] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 10.
[112] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, pp. 20-21.
[113] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 21.
[114] Ibid.

Everything about these characters from their appearance and behaviour to their speech emphasises their rustic, country roots. When Crab is affecting love language to Gillian, he stresses his agricultural metaphors to the point of absurdity, calling her 'dear Ploughshare of my Heart, fair Wheatsheaf of my Soul' and 'thou rich spot of Arable Land'.[115] The way the two characters are described by the wits of the plays, as well as by friends and even family members, speaks to the comic delight taken in mockery of anything rural. Teresa confirms as much when she frets, ''twill give me Gripes to hear how the Folks will Laugh at her; Look how Stately the Hoggrubber goes; says one; she that was yesterday at her Spinning Wheel'.[116] Fuelling the predominantly urban audience's own bias against country upstarts was no doubt D'Urfey's intention. Not only is their treatment within the play-texts similar, but so is the manner of their performance with each part requiring an exceptional talent for mimicry and clowning. In the second part of *Don Quixote,* Verbruggen is directed to speak '*broad Country like*' whilst in *The Bath* Gillian Homebred is described as speaking 'the broad *Somersetshire* dialect', which is seen as a negative attribute by the other characters in the play and a sure sign of physical and social degradation.[117] In act two of *The Bath*, Lydia claims Gillian 'speaks the Western Dialect so broad, that those that don't know her wou'd swear she had been bred in a Coal-Pit' whilst later on Crab suggests that, 'He that has her, if he would live with her ought to be deaf and blind – for if he hears her talk he'll be apt to forget his other language, and if he sees her face and dress, he will certainly run away'.[118] The printed version of the texts emphasises the specific differences in the characters' dialects and pushes the incongruity of their speaking voices to the point of nonsense. When written on the page, Mary and Gillian share many of the same verbal idiosyncrasies, for example 'F's are replaced with 'V's such as in the word 'Vather'. Gillian's speech is exaggerated to an even greater degree than Mary's, her 'S's are written as 'Z's and she uses the term 'che' as a first singular pronoun. The two women both rely heavily on colloquial oaths, such as 'odslidikins' and are

[115] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 44.
[116] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote*, part I, p. 9.
[117] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part II, p. 35; D'Urfey, *The Bath* (sig. A1v).
[118] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 10; D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 23.

extremely fond of peppering their speech with provincial imagery and metaphors. When Gillian witnesses Delia's attempts to bribe her ailing son into drinking some caudle, a sweet, restorative drink, she states, 'Fond; odslid, if he had bin my Zon, and had refus'd to eat the Kadle, when I bid'n, chad a madn a takn into his Throat through a Horn, as we do when we drench our Horses – A Vowl meazle'.[119]

Mary the Buxome and Gillian Homebred are the strongest defence of Cibber's assertion that Verbruggen would enthusiastically deface her 'fair form' to achieve a realistic mimicry of exaggerated and grotesque depictions of easily mockable figures. Verbruggen's roles were popular precisely because they pushed the comic potential of age, low-birth, provinciality, and undesirability to their limits, entrenched in often harmful and demeaning stereotypes. The dramatis personae for *The Bath* calls for Gillian to be 'so awkward in her speech, behaviour and dress, that she affects to be Anti to all Fashions'.[120] Evidently, Verbruggen's performance was more than proficient. According to Cibber's recollection, 'In a play of D'Urfey's, now forgotten, call'd, *The Western Lass*, which Part she acted, she transform'd her whole Being, Body, Shape, Voice, Language, Look, and Features, into almost another animal, with a strong *Devonshire* Dialect, a broad laughing Voice, a poking Head, round Shoulders, and unconceiving Eye, and the most be-diz'ning, dowdy Dress that ever cover'd the untrain'd limbs of a *Joan Trot*. To have seen her here, you would have thought it impossible that the same Creature could ever have been recover'd, to what was easy to her, the Gay, the Lively, and the Desirable'.[121] This description of a performer's transformation, not just into but out of character, speaks to the developing appreciation of performance as agency. The skilled actor, rather than being an empty vessel, had meticulous control over their presentation and could transform and be recovered at will. Aston commented on Verbruggen's ability to enact this change, remarking that 'Her Face, Motion &c chang'd at once'.[122] It is was certainly not unusual for Aston or Cibber to heap praise on

[119] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 34.
[120] D'Urfey, *The Bath* (sig. A1v).
[121] Cibber, *Apology,* pp. 98-99.
[122] Aston, *Stroller and Adventurer,* p. 91

their fellow actors, particularly those young and beautiful: one needs only to read Cibber's assessment of Anne Bracegirdle with all her 'Charms, and Attractions of a Conscious Beauty.'[123] It is, however, extremely rare for actresses to be praised for their skills in spite of, rather than due to, their appearance on stage. Whilst there are no contemporary accounts of Verbruggen's physicality when playing Mary the Buxome beyond the published play-text, the description of her 'as freckled as a Raven's Egg, with matted Hair, snotty Nose, and a pair of Hands as black as the Skin of a Tortois, with Nails as long as Kites Tallons upon every Finger' would suggest a similar manipulation of Verbruggen's fair form and voice.[124]

Certainly, the role of Mary would require a larger-than-life physical performance, especially in the third part. Once the marriage between Mary and Jaques, played by William Pinkethman, has taken place, Mary transforms from the faux-coy bride, 'as if Butter would not melt in her mouth, but Cheese of three half pence a pound won't choak her', into to a 'plaguy mettled young Quean'.[125] Revealing her true self to her husband, the two spend the remainder of the play engaging in some light slapstick. Mary '*Gives* Jaques *a thump on the back*' so '*He rumples her to Kiss her, and she gives him a Box on the Ear*'.[126] Later, when Mary finishes singing a rousing country ditty, Teresa warns her she is sweating and her husband entreats her to 'wipe Bubbies' whilst throwing a cloth at her, to which she responds by throwing it back in his face.[127] These qualities, the rousing physicality, the reference to bodily function, her strength and dominance over her husband, all speak to Mary as a grotesque figure which Verbruggen could inhabit. Aston praises Verbruggen's consistency and skill as a physical performer, claiming that 'there was not a Look, a Motion, but what were all design'd; and these at the same Word, Period, Occasion, Incident, were every Night, in the same character, alike'.[128] Returning to Tiffany Stern's work on rehearsal practices, once a writer had initially read their work

[123] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 102.
[124] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote*, part I, p. 7.
[125] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part III, p. 22; D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part III, p. 26.
[126] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part III, p. 26.
[127] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part III, p. 30.
[128] Aston, *Stroller and Adventurer*, p. 91.

‘publicly to the full company’, each player embarked on a long period of solitary, private study.[129] Large group rehearsals were only attempted towards the very end of the rehearsal period and whilst larger parts were often informed by a variety of people including the author, the managers, the prompter, and other actors, the design of a player’s character was left largely in the hands of the player themselves.[130] As long as the cues remained the same for other actors, ‘the actor’s “right” to parts written for them gave them considerable freedom in the way they manifested those parts on stage’.[131] If the production of *Don Quixote* followed conventional rehearsal practices, Verbruggen would have been largely responsible for the physicality and style of her performance. Verbruggen’s ability to flit between characters high and low, rich and poor, urban and provincial, all whilst adhering to the strictest of performance practices, speaks to a fierce discipline aligned with a natural and instinctive talent.

Despite the final part’s luke-warm reception, D’Urfey’s *Don Quixote* trilogy did single him out for particular criticism in Jeremy Collier’s 1698 diatribe, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage*. Three years after its initial run, Collier dedicates a whole section to his ‘remarks upon Don Quixot’, identifying in particular D’Urfey’s ‘Abuse of the Clergy’, and ‘His want of Modesty and Regard to the Audience’.[132] It was noticed at the time that the final part of the trilogy relied heavily on the coarser humour provided by Verbruggen’s character, with Collier writing that ‘Buxsome swears faster, and is more scandalous, and impertinent, than in the other two’.[133] In spite of a passionate defence of his work in his preface to *The Campaigners; or, The Pleasant Adventures at Brussels* (1698), D’Urfey subsequently chose to alter his style to accommodate the new attitude which was encouraged, if not wholly inspired, by Collier. D’Urfey wrote Verbruggen’s Homebred character as less lewd, more sympathetic, and more emotionally motivated than Mary the

[129] Stern, *Rehearsal*, p. 146.
[130] Stern, *Rehearsal*, p. 155.
[131] Stern, *Rehearsal,* p. 150.
[132] Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (London: S. Keble, 1698), p. 196.
[133] Collier, *A Short View,* p. 204.

Buxome, whilst maintaining her coarse provincialism. More importantly, Mary the Buxome is never redeemed nor designed to be exemplary. The last the audience sees of her in the play is her 'brawling' with her husband over their lost wedding purses as a clear indication to the crowd that their marriage will continue in this unhappy state due to its participants' irretrievable wickedness.[134] Homebred, however, was written with the encroaching sentimental view of a post-Collier world in mind. Although she is flawed and mockable, Homebred is a moral person whose virtues are commendable. Homebred's marriage begins with the redemption of the flawed Crab in his rejection of city life and a claim to 'love honest Thatch, Toast and Ale'.[135] Despite their many similarities, D'Urfey was careful to align Verbruggen's later character with the changing moral tastes of the time, ensuring that as a leading lady she would be sufficiently protected against accusations of impiety.

Collier, staunch defender of the clergy and early practitioner of popular literary criticism, wrote his *Short View* in response to what he felt were the outdated and corrupting influences of the stage. This inspired a pamphlet war which flared up every few years with flurries of tracts such as the anonymously authored *Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the English Stage* in 1704. Although Hume, A. H. Scouten, and many others have dismissed the long terms effects of Collier's influence on dramatic change, more recently Tony Fisher describes the Collier controversy as 'one of the first great disputes of the eighteenth-century public sphere'.[136] Hume correctly notes that even if the pamphlet war sparked by Collier's initial tract was more symptomatic than causal of any generic change which took place at the turn of the century, it did incite several angry responses from the playwrights who felt under attack, such as Congreve's *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* (1698). At least in the short term, the influence of Collier's attacks can be felt in the plays produced between 1698 and 1703.[137] These attacks were more broad denouncements of the

[134] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part III, p. 53.
[135] D'Urfey, *The Bath*, p. 54.
[136] Robert D. Hume, 'Jeremy Collier and the Future of the London Theater in 1698', *Studies in Philology*, 96.4 (1999), pp. 480-511, p. 481; A. H. Scouten, 'Notes toward a History of Restoration Comedy', *Philological Quarterly*, 45 (1966), pp. 62-70; Tony Fisher, *Theatre and Governance in Britain, 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 104.
[137] Hume, 'Jeremy Collier', p. 487.

immorality of all theatre, as opposed to an espousal of any one kind of generic shift, but they happened to coincide and align with a more public movement towards moral reform and sentimentalism. Speaking to the larger shift in taste and etiquette which marked the end of the seventeenth century, the sentimental philosophies which came about during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment had deep and lasting effects on theatrical fashions for nearly two centuries. Writing in 1773 Oliver Goldsmith compares 'the weeping sentimental comedy so much in fashion at present' to the 'laughing, and even low comedy, which seems to have been last exhibited by Vanbrugh and Cibber'. Goldsmith claims there is 'one argument in favour of sentimental comedy, which will keep it on the stage, in spite of all that can be said against it. It is, of all others, the most easily written'.[138] From a period of bold experimentation coming from within the theatre of the early 1690s, stage practice became increasingly dictated by these external influences which altered the theatrical landscape in a specifically limiting way. These changes are reflected in the development of D'Urfey's characters written for Susanna Verbruggen before and after Collier's attack. At least in the world of theatre, the time for biting satire and rude humour had passed. Collier's assertion that 'the business of Plays is to recomend Virtue, and discountenance Vice' was largely welcomed.[139] As Nicoll puts it, 'the halcyon days of the drama were dead' and sentimentalism was the order of the day.[140]

The Actors' Revolt of 1695 may have been the most important force affecting the creative output of the Patent Company for a few short years, but this was soon overtaken by a curious blend of pressures, including the moral attacks of Jeremy Collier and his ilk from 1698, together with the town's generic taste for sentimental drama, and an increasing desire for novel entertainments which forced the two competitors to focus their efforts less on attacking the other and more on keeping their businesses afloat. Consequently, the two companies shared plays and actors much more liberally in what would develop into an uneasy alliance. At the time, few thought the Patent Company could

[138] Oliver Goldsmith, 'Essay on the theatre, or, A comparison between sentimental and laughing comedy', *The Westminster Magazine*, 1.1 (London: 1773), pp. 4-6, p. 4.
[139] Collier, *A Short View,* p. 1.
[140] Nicoll, *Restoration Drama,* p. 267.

survive even to this point and Betterton's company believed they would merely need to wait out their rivals for a season or two before reclaiming a complete monopoly. With few talented actors and fewer working playwrights, Milhous claims that 'by the fall of 1696 the Patent Company was reportedly on the brink of collapse'.[141] Milhous emphasises the improbability of what happened, 'Drury Lane *survived* […] by hook and by crook Rich held his group together'.[142] It was not much later, however, that Betterton's company 'literally went to pieces'.[143] Milhous recounts that by 1701, Betterton had 'even inquired discreetly whether the Patent Company would entertain the thought of a new union'.[144] This enormous change of fortunes, a seemingly impossible leap in just a few short years, was partly down to the adaptability of Rich's Company in coming to terms with the new tastes of the town, both in the emerging desire for sentimental comedies and for displays of small entertainments which marked the eighteenth-century stage. Rich understood the merits of variety and utilised Drury Lane's capacity for large operas to entice audiences hungry for change. Another key factor to Drury Lane's relative success was their full complement of comedians. By securing the talents of comic powerhouses, Susanna Verbruggen and, later, Robert Wilks, alongside the few rising comic playwrights of the time, including Cibber and the young Irish dramatist, George Farquhar, Rich managed to turn his misfortune in losing his strong force of tragedians into Drury Lane's greatest strength. The Patent Company's aversion to tragedies during this period, tragedies making up less than a quarter of their full output from 1695 to 1701, speaks to an understanding that they should rely most heavily on comedy and light entertainments which, whether by fortune or design, matched the mood of the town.[145] It is clear that in the rapidly changing period between Verbruggen's portrayal of

---

[141] Milhous, *Betterton*, p. 109.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Milhous, *Betterton*, p. 113.
[144] Milhous, *Betterton*, p. 119.
[145] Whilst the calendars of plays produced by Van Lennep and Emmett L. Avery are far from comprehensive due to a substantial lack of information, a rough estimate of the companies' output from the period 1695 to 1701 can be drawn from the data it does provide. This estimate suggests that the output of Patent Company was 53.5% straight comedies, 21.3% mixed entertainments including tragicomedies, history plays, and large-scale operas, and only 23.2% tragedies, compared to the Player's Company's 41.4% tragedies and 10.1% mixed entertainments - Van Lennep and Emmett L. Avery, *The London Stage,* I, II.

the wild Mary the Buxome and the more appropriate characterisation of Gillian Homebred six years later, those who could adapt fastest to the new ways would gain the advantage.

Verbruggen, Farquhar, and the Rise of Sentimentalism

Despite Verbruggen being raised to the role of principal performer, this reformative change required the parts she played following the 1695 Actors' Revolt to become more limited, providing less opportunity for the creative risks she could take as a supporting comic actress. Verbruggen died in 1703, most likely due to complications following the birth of her and John Verbruggen's son. In the final years of her life Verbruggen took on large roles which would once have gone to Barry and Bracegirdle, mostly wealthy and eligible young girls cursed by modish affectations, such as Narcissa in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift,* or desperate wives trapped in unhappy marriages such as the Governor's Wife in Mary Pix's *The Spanish Wives* (1696). D'Urfey's *Bath* served as a rare moment of liberation for Verbruggen in which she could play a character who could transcend the boundaries of the London elite, if no longer those of class and decorum. Whilst these roles still provided opportunities for Verbruggen to display her talents of mimicry and exaggerated character work, the broader impact of these women as figures of disruption was limited largely due to two reasons. Firstly, the role of the female lead during the entire Restoration period had, with a few notable exceptions, been generally more defined by the restrictions of patriarchal systems such as family, class, and power which left less room for the subversion we have seen in some of Verbruggen's earlier comic roles and those enacted by her predecessors, Elizabeth Norris and Elizabeth Currer. Secondly, the times were changing at a rapid pace, and it was not only playwrights but players who felt pressure from the moral abolitionists, the reformers, and the city tastemakers. The anonymously authored tract, *Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the Stage* (1704)*,* referenced an indictment 'found against the Players of the other House, in the Term above mentioned, for the following Expressions'.[146] One of the expressions

[146] Anon, *Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the Stage* (London: J. Nutt, 1704), p. 9.

listed was a line from Verbruggen's character in George Farquhar's *The Inconstant; or, The Way to Win Him* (1702), in which her character Bisarre asks, 'if our Femality had no Business in this World, why was it sent hither? Let us dedicate our beautiful Minds to the Service of Heaven: And for our handsom Persons, they become a Box at the Play, as well as a Pew in the Church'.[147] By the time these charges were eventually dismissed, Verbruggen had already died but even though these attacks were more of a nuisance than a real judicial threat, they were enough to leave her personally open to prosecution. Verbruggen and her fellow players were being held personally accountable for the propriety of the stage.

The Inconstant's writer, George Farquhar, was one of the few successful playwrights to make a name for himself following the breakdown of the United Company. Farquhar opposed Betterton's offer of a union in 1701. In his 'Prologue on the propos'd Union of the two Houses', an allegorical commentary on the alliance between France and Spain during the War of Spanish Succession, Farquhar claimed that with unity comes 'Slav'ry' for if the audience is 'to one House confin'd, you then must praise/ Both cursed Actors, and confounded Plays'.[148] Farquhar's assertion that a theatrical monopoly would damage the quality of the productions must be met with a healthy amount of scepticism, given the recent turn in Drury Lane's fortunes following the enormous success of his comedy, *The Constant Couple*, which 'gave that house a popular as well as financial advantage' over its competitors.[149] Although both companies had suffered following the schism and were pressured by the onslaught of moral attacks following Collier's denunciation, Rich's company were finally outstripping the rebels, thanks to the contributions of Cibber, Vanbrugh, Farquhar and the comedians of Drury Lane. In his preface to *The Constant Couple*, Farquhar writes that 'all will joyn with me in commendation of the Actors, and allow (without detracting from the merit of the others) that the

[147] George Farquhar, *The Inconstant; or, The Way to Win Him* (London: J. Knapton, 1702), p. 43.
[148] George Farquhar, *The Works of the Late Ingenious Mr. George Farquhar: Containing all his Poems, Letters, Essays and Comedies, Publish'd in his Lifetime,* 2 vols. (London: John Clarke, 1760), I, p. 38.
[149] Van Lennep, *London Stage,* I, p. 513.

Theatre Royal affords an excellent and compleat set of Comedians'.[150] Whilst the careful détente which had arisen following Collier's *Short View* had put a stop to the more overtly vicious confrontations between the houses, the boasting of a 'compleat set of Comedians' is a clear reference to the rebel company's lack of principal comedians. Drury Lane's troupe consisting of such an 'excellent' comic force was largely responsible for the 'heavy preponderance of comedies' amongst the company's new plays in the 1699 to 1700 season.[151] Following the departure of the antagonistic George Powell, who had been the Patent Company's lead player and erstwhile answer to Thomas Betterton, to Lincoln's Inn Fields, this comic strength relied primarily on company stars Susanna Verbruggen and Robert Wilks, reinforced by the supporting talents of Jane Rogers, William Pinkethman, and Henry Norris, son of the pioneering Elizabeth Norris.

Blending the traditions of manners comedy with a fresh appreciation for the sentimental, Farquhar attempted to walk the delicate line of humour, pathos, and propriety demanded by the shifting moods of an eighteenth-century audience. Louis A. Strauss, the editor of the 1914 edition of Farquhar's works, suggests that in mixing 'the essentials of character, plot, and situations in juster proportions than any previous writer of realistic comedy' Farquhar creates a 'form of comedy unsurpassed for naturalness and fidelity to life'.[152] A prime example of this being done successfully is in *The Constant Couple*'s Lady Lurewell, played by Susanna Verbruggen. The character of Lurewell relies on one of Verbruggen's many existing lines as a jilting coquette, established in John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* and the plays of William Congreve, but is greatly affected by Farquhar's acquiescence to sentimental tropes. A hugely popular play, *The Constant Couple* not only achieved an astonishing initial run, with over fifty performances in five months, but encouraged Farquhar to write a sequel, *Sir Harry Wildair* (1701), a year later.[153]. For Verbruggen, however, the existing pressures of Lurewell's characterisation as a leading lady, for example her fidelity to honour, duty, and rank,

---

[150] George Farquhar, *The Constant Couple; or, A Trip to Jubilee* (London: Ralph Smith, 1700) (sig. A3r).
[151] Milhous, *Betterton*, p. 144.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Farquhar, *The Inconstant* (sig. A3r).

were further complicated by the encroaching sentimental vein's requirement to see her as a pathetic, virtuous victim. Driven by reactive emotion as opposed to reasoned agency, the female protagonists of sentimental comedy have more in common with the heroines of she-tragedies than any wholly comic part Verbruggen had played before. Whilst Farquhar achieved great success in *The Constant Couple* and it is evident that he held great respect for Verbruggen's talents in casting her as his lead, the multiple facets required of Verbruggen in enacting Lurewell imposed a more restrictive remit on her performance, dampening the more overtly comic aspects of her character. Regardless of whether Farquhar was the last true bastion of the Restoration writers or the first in the new wave of sentimental comedians, his true gift lay in his capacity to balance the seemingly contrary demands of fidelity to human nature with an increasing desire for staged, reformative gentility. In attempting to strike this balance, however, Farquhar necessarily diminishes the subversive capacity of his performers, in particular the women who are not only bound to propriety by convention but an absolute social expectation.

Whilst it is impossible to ascertain whether all playwrights reacted to Collier and the anti-theatrical propagandists, Farquhar went so far as to name-check Collier in both his 'Discourse Upon Comedy' (1702) and in the preface to his play *The Twin Rivals* (1703). Farquhar acknowledged that Collier could be doing drama a service if only he were 'not to take away it's Life', suggesting that Farquhar was at least capable of meeting the reformers halfway, even whilst defending the essence of 'Poetical Justice'.[154] To judge by Collier's own standards, Farquhar's plays are certainly guilty of a 'smuttiness of expression' and making 'their Top Characters Libertines' but the author stops short of 'giving them Success in their Debauchery', allowing instead for a reformative ending for the libertines and would-be adulterers.[155] Despite this compliance, Farquhar lamented his inability to please the broad spectrum of his audience in his essay, 'Discourse', writing 'the Scholar cries out for decorums and oeconnomy; the Courtier crys out for wit, and purity of Stile; the citizen for humour and ridicule;

[154] George Farquhar, *The Twin Rivals* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703) (sig. A1r).
[155] Collier, *A Short View,* p. 2.

the divines threaten us for Immodesty; and the ladies will have an intreague'.[156] After first demonstrating the high regard Farquhar held for Verbruggen's skills as a comic actor by altering her role in *The Inconstant*, an adaptation of John Fletcher's *The Wild Goose Chase* (1652) first performed in 1621, to more appropriately use her talents, this section will go on to examine two of Farquhar's plays which exemplify the company's efforts to balance the myriad demands of the town, *The Constant Couple* and *Sir Harry Wildair*. Starring Verbruggen in the same role, both plays dance along this line of decorum to varying degrees of commercial success, suggesting that even the master of the new form struggled to contend with the changing times and that even the most successful actress could find failure for contravening an increasingly strict and limiting form of performed morality. Farquhar's blazing triumph, *The Constant Couple,* and its more risqué sequel *Sir Harry Wildair*, serve to exemplify the fragility of audience reaction to Verbruggen's shifting roles as a central female comedian. Despite following several of the same characters and exploring similar themes, the latter did not garner the mass appreciation of its predecessor, largely due to the alteration of its two main characters, Verbruggen's Lurewell and Wilks's Wildair. In the preface to *Twin Rivals,* Farquhar controversially claims that 'the business of Comedy is chiefly to Ridicule Folly; and that the Punishment of Vice falls rather into the Province of Tragedy'.[157] In straying too far from the safe realm of 'folly' and into the forbidden realm of 'vice', Verbruggen's character in *Sir Harry Wildair* was deemed untenable and judged accordingly. In changing Verbuggen's characterisation to better suit her comic skills for embellished performance in the sequel, the production lost the appreciation of the audience, indicating that the increased demand for reform was detrimental to her performative freedom.

George Farquhar wrote his tirade, 'A Discourse Upon Comedy' in which he berates the fickleness of the capricious town shortly after the town's negative response to *Sir Harry Wildair*.

[156] George Farquhar, 'A Discourse Upon Comedy' (1702) in *A Discourse Upon Comedy: The Recruiting Office and The Beaux Stratagem by George Farquhar* ed. by Louis A. Strauss (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1914), p. 5.
[157] Farquhar, *Twin Rivals* (sig. A2r).

Within his essay, Farquhar develops the conceit of a sparkish gentleman who believes he can write a play perfectly in keeping with the Aristotelian ideals of drama. This gentleman 'scorns all application to the vulgar, and will please the better sort, as he calls his own sort'.[158] Once he has finished the writing, 'the players go to work on a piece of hard, knotty stuff, where they can no more show their art than a carpenter can upon a piece of steel'.[159] Though the work produced 'be as regular as Aristotle, and modest as Mr Collier cou'd wish', its audience grow distracted not finding in it the 'true genius of poetry'.[160] Farquhar's frustration speaks to a contemporary feeling that there was little to no way of appeasing the numerous contrary demands for morally impeccable yet entertaining, challenging, experimental theatre. Farquhar's argument boils down to the need to trust poets and players to 'show their art' in providing entertainment and it is clear he puts a great deal of trust in his players. This is particularly noticeable in the next play Farquhar produced after his 'Discourse', *The Inconstant* in which Verbruggen plays the 'whimsical lady' Bisarre, a part which was specifically adapted to make greater use of Verbruggen's comic range. Following his own advice and looking to the modern English poets for inspiration, *The Inconstant* borrows very heavily from John Fletcher's comedy *The Wild Goose Chase*. Farquhar's play follows two couples, Oriana and Young Mirabel, played by Rogers and Wilks, and Bisarre and Captain Duretete, played by Verbruggen and William Bullock. One plot of *The Inconstant* remains more or less the same as Fletcher's original. Oriana attempts to convince Young Mirabel to honour their lapsed engagement through a series of deceits, such as feigning madness and pretending to run off to a nunnery, aided by her friends and family. The marriage-hating Mirabel falls for these tricks each time, vowing to marry Oriana to save her from these awful fates, only to renege on the deal once he learns she is lying. Verbruggen's character is one of the largest changes Farquhar makes to the play, as he amalgamates two characters, Rosalura and Lilia Bianca in the single character of Bisarre. In the original, these two sisters, both of whom have 'a great minde to be marryed', appear to switch personalities whilst in company and act otherwise erratic as a manoeuvre to entice potential husbands, acting under tutelage from a love expert Lugier.[161] At the

[158] Farquhar, 'Discourse', p. 8
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] John Fletcher, *The Wild Goose Chase* (London: Humpherey Molseley,1652), p. 26.

beginning, Rosalura is boisterous and merry whilst Lilia Bianca is serious and philosophical but then they swap thereby confusing their would-be partners, Pinac and Belleur. In *The Inconstant*, Verbruggen plays a single woman, flitting between these disparate states, acting 'sometimes splenatick and heavy, then gay and frolicksome', confounding the dour Captain Duretete, Belleur's counterpart.[162] In 1918, W. Heldt wrote that 'Farquhar shows his good dramatic insight in dropping Pinac and retaining Belleur […] when Pinac was dropped, one of Nantolet's daughters also became superfluous'.[163] Given the stark similarities between Bisarre and the numerous coquette parts Verbruggen had previously played, including Farquhar's own Lurewell, it seems more likely that Farquhar consciously forged Fletcher's ill-defined characters, Rosalura and Lilia-Bianca, into one, enticing character, dropping Pinac as the superfluous part. Whilst in *The Wild Goose Chase* the contrarian actions of Rosalura and Lilia-Bianca acting 'Now close, Now Publick, Still up and down' is due to the instructions of Lugier, Farquhar turns Bisarre into a 'whimsical lady' who acts in this manner for the joy of it.[164] When speaking to Oriana on marriage, Bisarre says 'my business shou'd be to break Gold with my Lover one hour, and crack my Promise the next […] He shou'd have my consent to buy the Wedding Ring, and the next moment wou'd I Laugh in his face'.[165] Lurewell, a character who once proclaimed that 'dissembling to the prejudice of Men is Virtue: and every Look, or Sigh, or Smile, or Tear that can deceive is Meritorious', would be proud to hear Bisarre's plans to confound her lovers.[166]

Not only does Bisarre oscillate between moods whilst in character, but Farquhar alters a scene from Fletcher's original to highlight Verbruggen's perfect command over her performance. In act four of *The Wild Goose Chase,* Belleur, believing he has the upper hand for once, demands Rosalura follow his instructions to cringe and curtsey and generally act the demure, little woman so as to earn

[162] Farquhar, *The Inconstant*, p. 25.
[163] W. Heldt, 'Fletcher's "Wild-Goose Chase" and Farquhar's "Inconstant"', *Neophilologus*, 3.2 (1918), pp. 144-148, p.144.
[164] Fletcher, *The Wild Goose Chase*, p. 25.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 53.

his forgiveness. Belleur orders Rosalura to 'Look on me stedfastly; and whatsoe'er I say to ye, Move not, nor alter in your face'.[167] Relishing in his newfound power, Belleur forces Rosalura to admit to her arrogance and pride in teasing him and commands that she 'Cry now instantly; Cry monstrously'.[168] Just as Belleur's cruelty seems to reach its zenith, 'Lilia *and four women'* enter and they all 'laugh most heartily' at him, abusing him for threatening gentlewomen and frightening maids and scaring him until he vows to never 'talk again of beating Women'.[169] Farquhar copies the bones of this scene by setting Duretete in Bisarre's trap and having her feign penitence and humility. Instead of the outright viciousness enacted by Belleur, however, Farquhar has Duretete and Bisarre engage in a strange comic display of stage direction. Duretete says:

> Confirm it then, by your Obedience stand there; and Ogle me now, as if your Heart, Blood, and Soul, were like to fly out at your Eyes—First, the direct surprise. *She looks full upon him.* Right, next the *Deux yeux par oblique*. *She gives him the side Glance*. Right, now depart, and Languish. *She turns from him, and looks over her Shoulder*. Very well, now Sigh. *She Sighs* Now drop your Fan a purpose. *She drops her Fan*.[170]

Farquhar then alters the line, 'cry instantly, cry monstrously' to 'cry then, handsomely; cry like a queen in a Tragedy' before a stage direction which reads, '*She pretending to Cry, burst out a Laughing*'.[171] In a scene which was already designed to mock performative emotion through its terminal descent into laughter, Farquhar emphasises Verbruggen's physical reactions to instruction to the point where she is intentionally aping herself as the embodied actor. This scene acts as the perfect example of Verbruggen's immaculate control as a performer demonstrating that just as she 'transformed her whole being' into the broad country wench Gillian Homebred or the vivacious Sir

[167] Fletcher, *Wild Goose Chase*, p. 40.
[168] Fletcher, *Wild Goose Chase*, p. 41.
[169] Fletcher, *Wild Goose Chase*, pp. 41-42.
[170] Farquhar, *The Inconstant*, p. 50.
[171] Ibid.

Anthony Love, so too could she hilariously transform into the flawless actress, perfectly affecting every motion and gesture whilst simultaneously heightening it for the amusement of the crowd, both within and without the play-world.

Farquhar had good reason to entrust Verbruggen with this creative challenge, given the success of *The Constant Couple* two years previously. In his preface to *The Inconstant*, Farquhar reflects that 'about two Years ago, I had a Gentleman from France that brought the Play-house some fifty Audiences in five months'.[172] The gentleman in question is the eminent rogue Sir Harry Wildair, whose first outing in *The Constant Couple* incited this renewed period of attendance from London theatre-goers and no doubt provided 'an enormous boost to company spirit'.[173] Despite having the usual flurry of minor characters, such as the bumbling servant Dicky played by Henry Norris, inheritor to the Norris acting dynasty, and the genuinely virtuous young maid Angelica, played by Rogers, the primary plot of Farquhar's play is simplicity itself. Seduced and abandoned at a young age, the attractive Lurewell vows to become the world's greatest jilt and throughout the course of the play, ensnares no fewer than five men. Driven by her 'hatred of the Whole Sex', Lurewell manipulates their affections to trick them into various farcical encounters, including swapping clothes with a servant, being chased by the watch, and duelling one another over false accusations.[174] The majority of the play's comedy derives from Lurewell's abuse of these men, including the rakish Sir Harry, the wicked Vizard, and the heroic Colonel Standard, played by George Powell. Whilst this farcical comedy was no doubt entertaining, moral reform and the trend of sentimentalism demanded that characters' actions must be rooted in feeling and that protagonists must be overarchingly virtuous. A large part of act three is dedicated to Lurewell's expositional lamentation that her honour was taken by a visiting stranger to her father's estate who promised to marry her and was never to be seen again. The delightful revelation early in the play that Lurewell is cheating all her dishonest and corrupt

[172] Farquhar, *The Inconstant* (sig. A3r).
[173] Milhous, *Betterton*, p. 143.
[174] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 32.

lovers is marred by her mid-play evolution into a pathetic heroine. No doubt the versatile Verbruggen was more than capable of flitting between the vicious arrogance of a woman who asserts, 'I hate all that don't love me, And slight all that do' and the unconcealed histrionics of a damsel who '*weeps*' as she remembers the man who 'vow'd, and swore, and wep't, and sigh'd, -- and conquere'd' and yet the creeping necessity of a pitiable backstory for his heroine speaks to Farquhar's acquiescence to the rising tide of sentimentalism.[175] Lurewell's ending, too, is entirely proper. Abandoned by Wildair and having had all her trickery revealed, Lurewell is in the midst of an impassioned rant against 'Woman's Weakness, Man's Falshood, my own Shame, and Love's Disdain', when Colonel Standard enters to upbraid her and instead reveals himself, not Wildair, to be the man who promised to marry her twelve years ago, proven by the aid of a handy ring imparted to him by the young Lurewell.[176] Standard explains that his Father sent him away to travel following a dispute with his brother and on his return to England found that Lurewell had herself moved abroad. In an almost painful display of female-born disruption being transposed into patriarchal conformity, Lurewell offers these final remarks to her re-found betrothed, 'Men are still most Generous and Brave—and to reward your Truth, an Estate of Three Thousand Pounds a Year waits your acceptance'.[177] The titular Wildair is likewise coupled off with the eligible Angelica whilst the truly morally corrupt of the cast, Lurewell's erstwhile lovers Vizard, Smuggler, and Clincher Sr, are appropriately punished for their misdeeds, in keeping with the moral standards of a post-Collier world.

Whilst the return of Sir Harry Wildair was not met with outright disgust, with Farquhar picking up at least one benefit night, the reaction to his sequel in 1702 was a far cry from the fifty-night reception its predecessor received.[178] Described as an 'indifferent composition', *Sir Harry Wildair* has been dismissed as a passable but altogether forgettable follow up to Farquhar's surprise

[175] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 7, p. 31.
[176] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 49.
[177] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 51.
[178] Elisabeth J. Heard, *Experimentation on the English Stage, 1695-1708, The Career of George Farquhar* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 36.

success.[179] In his attempts to reanimate the roguishness which attracted audiences to Wilks's Wildair, Farquhar has the character widowed prior to the action of *Sir Harry Wildair* in a move reminiscent of Behn's *Second Part of the Rover*. Just as in Behn's play, the gallant protagonist returns without a wife, all the more interested in pursuing the pleasures of bachelorhood having briefly endured the strictures of matrimony, most noticeably with the now married Lurewell. Wildair was, at least by the account of his servant Dicky, an abysmal husband. Wildair abandoned his wife to roam Europe and on hearing of her death promptly locked himself away in a nunnery and 'in the matter of five Days he got six Nuns with Child, and left 'em to provide for their Heretick Bastards' as revenge against the French Catholics for refusing to bury his wife honourably.[180] This sexual aggression is a long way from the laissez-faire mischief of the pre-marital Wildair and is more reminiscent of the bitter, satirical characters found in Southerne's experimental comedies of the early 1690s. One reason for the underwhelming response to *Sir Harry Wildair* is because Farquhar took the risk of making his characters enactors of overt as opposed to performative immorality. In *The Constant Couple*, Lurewell merely feigns licentious behaviour to entice and trick her men, whilst her true intention is to 'play my last Scene; then retire to my Country-House, live solitary, and die a Penitent'.[181] In her one real transgression, in the form of pre-marital sex, she presents herself as a sympathetic victim of a villainous man rather than an agent of her own downfall, describing how she was 'blest with Innocence, the ornamental, but weak Guard of blooming Beauty'.[182] As for Wildair, despite his ostensible appearance as a rake of the old guard, he is hardly a paragon of libertinism. Prior to his arrival in London at the beginning of *The Constant Couple,* there is no evidence of Wildair having had any former mistresses. He shies away from fighting, he has a taste for French fashions, and is duped by his rival Vizard into believing Angelica is a prostitute. These are not the actions of a libertine. In fact, as Shirley Strum Kenny so aptly puts it, 'no earlier rake came so close to becoming a fop', easily wooed by individuals rather than driven by undifferentiated sexual desire.[183] It is easy to

[179] W. H. Davenport Adams, *Good Queen Anne*, 2 vols. (London: Remington, 1886), I, p. 27.
[180] George Farquhar, *Sir Harry Wildair* (London: James Knapton, 1701), p. 10.
[181] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 31.
[182] Farquhar, *Constant Couple*, p. 30.
[183] Shirley Strum Kenny, 'Farquhar, Wilks and Wildair; or, the Metamorphosis of the "Fine Gentleman"', *Philological Quarterly,* 57.1 (1978), pp. 46-66, p. 51.

see how this amalgam, indebted to the entertaining heroes of the past but, more importantly, entrenched in the new-fangled sentiment of the time, would appeal to an audience during such a pivotal shift in tastes. In *Sir Harry Wildair*, however, Lurewell and Wildair have crossed a threshold, becoming the very characters they were only appearing to be in the previous production. They spend the majority of the play attempting, albeit unsuccessfully, to engage in an affair. In returning Wildair as a debauching reprobate and turning Lurewell from coquette to adulterer, neither character having learnt anything from their past adventures, Farquhar appears to have taken too high a risk in creating characters of vice, rather than characters of folly.

Little to Wildair's knowledge, the real reason for Angelica's lack of burial is that she is completely healthy and also newly arrived in London in the guise of Beau Banter, estranged younger brother of Sir Harry Wildair and inheritor of his estate. Operating under the assumption that 'the Power of Grief perhaps might change [his] Humour', Angelica faked her own death and set about following Sir Harry through Europe.[184] Angelica also appears as a ghost in the final act to scare off Lurewell, leading to Jane Rogers holding the notable privilege of appearing in the cast list three times, as each of the her play-world identities. The Lurewell of *Sir Harry Wildair* is a far cry from the sympathetic heroine of Farquhar's *Constant Couple*. Lurewell's exaggerated affectations in *Sir Harry Wildair* are reminiscent of the heightened comedy parts Verbruggen acted in William Congreve's manners comedies written prior to the schism, such as Belinda in *The Old Batchelour*. This effort to make greater use of Verbruggen's comic talents as a character actor, rather than relying on the pathos of the first play, suggests a conscious choice by Farquhar to distance himself from the encroaching sentimental genre in recognition of the now waning experimental period of the early 1690s. The marital bliss which appeared inevitable following Lurewell and Standard's fateful reunion fails to materialise at the beginning of Farquhar's sequel. Instead, Lurewell's hatred of men appears to have flourished into a universal disdain of everyone, bar her newly reunited lover, Wildair. Lurewell's

[184] Farquhar, *Sir Harry Wildair*, p. 46.

behaviour careens from rude petulance to unscrupulous passion to unconcealed violence. The audience are introduced to the married Lurewell in a toilette scene in which she firmly upbraids her two obviously fearful chambermaids and shouts at a servant that 'if thou touch my Cloaths with that Tobacco breath of thine, I shall poyson the whole Drawing-Room'.[185] Her once promising relationship with Colonel Standard has seemingly deteriorated, evidently due to Lurewell's appetite for pleasure and finery, not to mention her disinclination to acquiesce to the fidelity of marriage. Where before Lurewell's passions were feigned, in act three of *Sir Harry* the audience are treated to an overtly physical display of sexual desire between her and Wildair. According to the stage directions, Wilks repeatedly '*Pulls*' Verbruggen off stage to a 'Repose' in 'the next room' as the two mockingly belittle the English affection for the tragic mode and 'rail at Love'.[186] Their departure is only 'prevented' by the entrance of Banter, really Angelica, who is clearly aware of their infidelity given his/her arch statement to Standard earlier in the play, 'You may have the Honour of being call'd the Lady *Lurewell'*s Husband; but you will never find in any Author, either Ancient or Modern, that she's call'd Mr. *Standard*'s Wife'.[187]

Whilst Lurewell's desire to jilt her suitors and Wildair's ambitions to bed Angelica whilst he believed her to be a prostitute were suitable enough foibles to require reform by the end of *The Constant Couple*, their actual attempts at sexual transgression in Farquhar's sequel were a step too far for a refined audience. Coming from a woman, this so-called depravity would have been even more egregious in Lurewell than her lover, Wildair. The hypocrisy of this position is best exemplified by William Hazlitt's remarks on 'the manner in which the character of the gay, wild, free-hearted, but not altogether profligate or unfeeling Sir Harry Wildair, is played off against the designing, vindictive, imperious, uncontrollable, and unreasonable humours of Lurewell'.[188] Holland points out that the

---

[185] Farquhar, *Sir Harry Wildair*, pp. 12-13.
[186] Farquhar, *Sir Harry Wildair*, p. 26.
[187] Farquhar, *Sir Harry Wildair*, p. 16.
[188] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 3rd ed. (London, Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 110.

changes we see in the character of Standard in the sequel, a 'greater placidity' and generally doleful acceptance of his misfortunes, is due to a cast change caused by the notoriously difficult Powell leaving Drury Lane and needing to be replaced by John Mills. Mills was a 'laboriously diligent' actor, described by Cibber as having been 'an honest, quiet, careful Man, of as few Faults, as Excellencies', a description which lends itself as an explanation to Farquhar's adjustments to Standard's character.[189] Whilst this change can be readily excused by the departure of its primary actor, the same cannot be said for Wilks's Wildair and Verbruggen's Lurewell. Given how popular *The Constant Couple* turned out to be, it seems strange that Farquhar should make the misstep of turning his popular leads into what, at the time, must have seemed outmoded character types. No doubt, Farquhar hoped to pull off the same trick as John Vanbrugh did when he wrote *The Relapse* as the anti-reform sequel to Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*. A key change Vanbrugh made in his *Relapse* was in recasting Verbruggen from the affected but virginal Narcissa into the sexually knowing temptress Berinthia, a risky but ultimately profitable decision. Naturally, Farquhar believed this adaptation could work again but chose not to change Verbruggen's characters, instead altering the personality and incentives of the original. Whether because of this, the shift in moral standards, or the denunciations of Collier, Farquhar was mistaken, and the experimentation of his sequel was ill-received. There was no space in reform theatre for Verbruggen's particular brand of strong incorrigible female characters.

In his *History of the English Stage*, Charles Dibdin wrote that Verbruggen, 'had every species of native humour at command' and that 'that no actress ever performed so variously as' her.[190] Farquhar's decision in *The Inconstant* to have Verbruggen become one character capable of flitting between multiple character types, much as she did in *Constant Couple* when she merged from jilting coquette to sympathetic heroine, and moods, as she did in *Harry Wildair,* is a testament to his faith in her skill. Farquhar seemingly enjoyed writing parts for Verbruggen which oscillated wildly between serious, pathetic, now likeable, now selfish, making use of the full range of her emotional variety. To

[189] Holland, *Ornament*, p. 68; Cibber, *Apology,* p. 151.
[190] Dibdin, *History of the English Stage*, IV, p. 243.

distil this variety into a single character in Bisarre, first feigning joviality, then waxing philosophical, sometimes sneering in disdain at her lover, other times chasing him about the room in playful abandon, Farquhar managed to do in one play what other playwrights took several to succeed at: create a wild, playful character capable of showing off Verbruggen's startling range. Comic skill was not enough, however, to temper the reactions from a capricious town. The softer aspects of Lady Lurewell in Faquhar's *The Constant Couple* won her great admiration from an increasingly reformist audience whilst the transgressive morals which might have delighted audiences only a few years prior were too much to bear in Farquhar's risqué sequel. Whilst we cannot know for sure what the rest of Verbruggen's career would have looked like had she lived, possibly following the trajectory of her successor, Anne Oldfield, it seems unlikely that the rising tide of sentimentalism which limited women back to their sexually and morally confined ideals, would have encouraged the types of characters which remain Verbruggen's best, the daring Sir Anthony, the hoydenish Mary the Buxome, and the coquettish Lurewell.

Conclusion

Whilst the reopening of the theatres following Charles II's ascension to the throne in 1660 was a triumphant step forward for woman's place in the public sphere, the creeping reformation of the early eighteenth century was its stumbling block. Whilst actresses remained vital enticements for the theatre of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the particular environment of the Restoration stage with its lewdness, provocative sex comedies, politically charged drama, and penchant for subversive female characters was gone. Generally speaking, the purpose of theatre began to shift towards instruction. Dawn Lewcock puts the change down to the audience becoming 'more middle class, with more bourgeois tastes and preoccupations'.[1] Lewcock goes on observe that there 'was no longer the interest in conversational witticisms, or in salacious plots', which so guided the development of female characters played by actresses such as Elizabeth Norris, Elizabeth Currer, and, in her early roles, Susanna Verbruggen.[2] When discussing the contributions of the first professional women in English theatre, no-one has managed a more comprehensive examination than Elizabeth Howe. In exploring the multiple lines specifically designed for several actresses throughout the period both in comedy and tragedy, Howe offers the first thorough actress-focused examination of Restoration players in the modern age. However, Howe's approach and overwhelming focus towards these women can be summarised in her introduction to chapter two, 'as performers, the first English actresses were used, above all, as sexual objects, confirming, rather than challenging the attitudes to gender of their society'.[3] Whilst Howe successfully demonstrates that some 'outstanding plays' of the period utilised the sexuality of the female player in a 'more challenging and exciting way' than in the purely pornographic sense, her preoccupation is entrenched within the bodily exploitation of the actress.[4] Viewed through this sexual lens, Howe's conclusion that actresses 'faced prejudice, antagonism and a variety of patriarchal laws and traditions, all of which made sexual equality in the theatre (as

---

[1] Lewcock, *Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene,* p. 203.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Howe, *First English Actresses*, p. 37.
[4] Ibid.

elsewhere) an impossibility', might be read as the bleak reality of the Restoration stage.[5] However, as the work of Gilli Bush-Bailey demonstrates through her study of Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle, by examining actresses' contributions through 'new contexts', particularly their work in collaboration with the playwrights who wrote for them, we can begin to understand that these women allowed for a specifically feminised approach towards contemporary political, social, and religious issues both through and beyond their bodily and often sexualised presence.[6] By examining the roles and lives of actresses often neglected by scholars of Restoration players, in this case the bit-player Elizabeth Norris, the habitual mistress Elizabeth Currer, and the character-actress Susanna Verbruggen, this study continues the work of Bush-Bailey in challenging the predominant historiographical practice of relegating these professional working women to no more than overtly sexualised and exploited victims of a patriarchal theatrical system.

Elizabeth Norris, as one of the first actresses on the English Stage, brought attention to and won great applause in the depiction of women who are all too often neglected from our cultural awareness. Despite engaging in the Restoration period's harmful predilection for abusing the elderly, Norris, in collaboration with Aphra Behn, brought a consciousness and deliberation to her representations of ageing, poor, neglected women which provided the possibility, in plays such as *The City Heiress,* to imbue in her characters an enormous narrative power far beyond the limited sexual appeal of her gender. By examining the roles of Elizabeth Currer, a performer whose very identity was intrinsically tied to sex appeal, we find that in fact her many bawdy roles can be used to unearth a much deeper understanding of contemporary attitudes towards religious and political anxieties and that female sexuality was not the strict dominion of voyeuristic audience members but a tool which could be used by the performer to challenge, promote, satirise, and entertain in equal measure. The inimitable Widow Ranter alone demonstrates that there was a space in the theatre of the 1680s for an independent, flawed, lower-born woman to thrive whilst challenging gendered expectations of

[5] Howe, *First English Actresses,* p. 176.
[6] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 16.

theatrical archetypes. In fact, perhaps no character in the Restoration canon did more to defy the limitations of gender boundaries than Sir Anthony Love, 'most Masterly play'd by *Mrs. Montfort'* two years later.[7] In the career of Susanna Verbruggen, we see the results of what can be achieved in just a few decades of promoting women's contributions in theatrical spaces. Although less often remembered today, Verbruggen was one of the greatest comedians of her age and her ability to play comic characters high and low, young and old, urban and provincial, demonstrates that given the opportunity, female comic characters could transcend the specific lines which dominated their performance at the beginning of the Restoration. Through this expansion, actresses invoked a greater breadth and a more deeply complex representation of women within the comic sphere. As writers, managers, and performers, the women of Restoration and late seventeenth-century theatre proved they were capable of creating, innovating, and collaborating in the traditionally masculine theatrical space to generate fascinating, complex, hilarious, frustrating and often contradictory illustrations of the female experience.

Whilst there is still so much of women's stage history to be uncovered and re-examined, it cannot be denied that the changes which occurred during the early eighteenth century had a profound effect on comedy for generations of writers and performers. Writing on the relationship between Congreve and his successors, Farquhar and Vanbrugh, G. S. Street posits that 'when those colleagues died, English comedy took to her bed'.[8] Street goes on to explain that the 'demise' in English comedy was 'not a matter of decency, of alteration or improvement in manners' but rather due to the shift away from the 'sceptical humour and ironical smiles' of Charles II's influential court, an influence which was 'a foe to sentimentality and gush and virtuously happy endings'.[9] William Hazlitt claims the eighteenth century brought about 'those *do-me-good* lackadaisical, whining, make-believe comedies in the next age […] which are enough to set one to sleep, and where the author tries in vain

[7] Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (sig. Oo4v).
[8] G. S. Street, 'Introduction' to *The Old Batchelor* in *The Comedies of William Congreve in two volumes,* 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1895), I, p. 31.
[9] Street, 'Introduction', pp. 31-32.

to be merry and wise in the same breath; in which the utmost stretch of licentiousness goes no farther than the gallant's being suspected of keeping a mistress'.[10] As Hazlitt points out, the noticeable change in English comedy no doubt had 'several causes' including moral reform, changing audience demographics, the development of new technologies, lack of royal patronage, and the brief relaxation of theatrical monopolies.[11] As with all generic shifts, the 1690s' move towards sentimentalism and reformative drama was not sudden, nor was it unchallenged. As we know, Farquhar played deftly with the traditions of manners comedy and the new sentimental vein whilst Cibber, whose play *Love's Last Shift* has long been lauded as the vanguard of sentimental comedy, still insisted on satirising the behaviours of the fop Sir Novelty Fashion, if for no reason other than to give himself a meaty comic role. David Roberts has attributed *Love's Last Shift*'s popularity to 'its mixing of styles, to a happy resolution of the old and new comic ideologies that had produced a frustrating dead end for Southerne'.[12] During the 1690s and its shift towards moral reform and middle class tastes, one playwright stands out for his refusal to bend to the wills of the theatrical reformers and in no play is this more apparent than in John Vanbrugh's comedy, *The Relapse* (1696) first performed at Drury Lane. *The Relapse* recognises and emulates several female archetypes which were contrived, condemned, and celebrated throughout the theatre of the late seventeenth century and due to the play's treatment of each of these characters, it serves as an indispensable vehicle through which to end this study. Devised as an anti-reform sequel to Cibber's successful *Love's Last Shift,* John Vanbrugh's first performed play was written 'in less than three months' in order to capitalise on the success of its predecessor and provide a much needed boost to the Patent Company's reputation during the difficult years following the schism.[13] As evidenced by the viciously self-deprecating preface in which Vanbrugh lampoons the play, it wanting 'every thing – but length', *The Relapse* was designed in the sardonic image of early Restoration comedy, opposed to the tearful sincerity of Cibber's virtuous sentimentalism.[14] If Cibber's play was successful because it managed to demonstrate that fidelity and

[10] Hazlitt, *Lectures,* p. 115.
[11] Hazlitt, *Lectures,* p. 114.
[12] Roberts, *Restoration Plays and Players*, p. 177.
[13] For details of the schism look at pp. 142-144; Cibber, *Apology*, p. 126.
[14] John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger* (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1697) (sig. A2r).

propriety could find its place in seventeenth-century stage comedy, Vanbrugh's response remains popular to this day for its playful insistence on destabilising the very idea of virtue.

Vanbrugh's 1696 sequel is an appropriate text with which to conclude this study for many reasons. Firstly, *The Relapse* follows four female characters in their attempts to either acquiesce to or overcome the various trials and obstacles set against their sex. These four characters, and the actresses who inhabited them, are useful illustrations of the varied female character types developed throughout the Restoration and will serve to demonstrate how indebted later generations of female comedians were to their theatrical forebears in the development of these lines. Furthermore, it provides a brief opportunity to explore the lives and works of actresses beyond the scope of this study, actresses who inherited the stage from their pioneering predecessors and went on to forge new roles in the changing theatrical scene of the eighteenth century. Lastly, *The Relapse* is an important play as it can be used as a later exemplary model of the Restoration comedy in its heyday. Unlike its contemporaries, *The Constant Couple* and *Love's Last Shift,* which danced around new ideas of theatrical purpose and propriety, Vanbrugh's work plays off motifs and character dynamics more familiar to the 1670s than the 1690s. *The Relapse* is an apt name for a play which rehashes familiar, even outdated, tropes into an exciting and fresh comedy.

Vanbrugh wrote *A Short Vindication of The Relapse and The Provok'd Wife from Immorality and Profaneness* as a defence against Collier's similarly titled essay which, much like the work of his predecessor D'Urfey, specifically called out Vanbrugh's plays as demonstrably immoral texts. Amongst the lengthy defence, which in its essence denounces Collier for his hypocrisy and myopic critical analysis, lies Vanbrugh's thoughts on the purpose and requirements of comedy. Vanbrugh writes that 'the Business of Comedy is to shew People what they shou'd do, by representing them

upon the Stage, doing what they shou'd not'.[15] This stands in opposition to the prevailing sentiment of the time, adopted by Cibber and Farquhar, that comedy ought largely to recommend behaviours whilst punishing and reforming minor follies. Vanbrugh's approach, whilst still promoting the basic credo that comedy should be morally instructive, allows that vice can be instructive in its execution as well as its condemnation. This argument is particularly important to consider when examining his female characters and the women who played them. As this study has demonstrated, throughout the Restoration period it is often those characters who are given the freedom of folly, as opposed to the responsibility of instruction, that can subvert the expectations and restrictions of their sex. Recognising this, Vanbrugh defends two of his female characters in his comedy, *The Provok'd Wife* (1697), writing that, when alone, they 'let fall a Word between Jest and Earnest, as if now and then they found themselves cramp'd by their Modesty'.[16] By insisting that his female characters be judged on their capacity for entertainment, as opposed to their exemplary morality, he is providing the space for actresses, specifically comic actresses, to perform unrestrained by the pressures of reformation.

The primary plot of *Love's Last Shift*, and the one which is carried through by Vanbrugh into his sequel, follows the trials of an abandoned wife, the virtuous Amanda first played by Jane Rogers, who attempts to re-seduce her newly returned husband, Loveless, by disguising herself as an attractive courtesan. By the end of the play Loveless promises to cast aside his philandering ways, asserting that 'sure the nearest to the Joys above,/ Is the chast Rapture of a Vertuous Love'.[17] Were it not for Vanbrugh, the audience could have left the reunited lovers there, happy in the knowledge that Loveless was a truly reformed gentleman in keeping with the growing trend towards exemplary, as opposed to cautionary, heroes. Vanbrugh, however, picks up the story of the newly married couple in their idyllic country house where Amanda is fretting over their returning to London should Loveless face the temptations of his past indulgences. In London, this temptation arrives in the form of the

---

[15] John Vanbrugh, *A Short Vindication of The Relapse and the Provok'd Wife, from Immorality and Profaneness* (London: H. Walwyn, 1698), p. 45.
[16] Vanbrugh, *A Short Vindication,* p. 9.
[17] Colley Cibber, *Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion* (London: H. Rhodes, 1696), p. 103.

young, attractive widow, Berinthia played by Susanna Verbruggen, cousin to Amanda and a self-declared fan of intrigues. In Vanbrugh's sequel, it is not just Loveless who finds himself the victim of extra-marital temptation. Worthy, played by George Powell, is introduced as Berinthia's counterpart, a romantic opportunity for Amanda to test the steadfast virtue she holds in such high regard. Understanding how they can help one another achieve their goals, Worthy and Berinthia plot to separate and conquer the married couple. Much of the play's action centres around the various successes and failures of their scheming. The supplementary subplot, devised by Vanbrugh as a comic interlude and set apart from the more serious examination of adultery and moral reform, was largely written as a chance to reanimate Cibber's popular Sir Novelty Fashion, the surprise success of *Love's Last Shift.* Ennobled into Lord Foppington, Cibber's fop plans to find himself a wife with a dowry to suit the new lifestyle which accompanies his purchased peerage. At this time, Young Tom Fashion arrives in London in the hopes of leaning on an older brother's generosity. After being wholly rebuffed by Foppington, Fashion schemes with the matchmaker, Coupler, to steal away his brother's bride and her large dowry. Set outside of London, the Tom Fashion storyline introduces such amusing characters as the eccentric Sir Tunbelly Clumsey, played by William Bullock, and his daughter Hoyden, played by the young Leticia Cross, not to mention Hoyden's Nurse, played by Mary Powell. Vanbrugh's subplot relies on some of the defining tropes and characteristics of the early Restoration stage, including intergenerational conflict, intelligent and headstrong female leads, hypocritical clergymen, and the overt and audacious circumvention of contemporary morality.

Amanda and the Tragicomic Actress

The ostensible heroine of this play, played by Jane Rogers in both *Love's Last Shift* and *The Relapse*, serves as the proverbial 'straight' woman to the other three varied female comic roles of Berinthia, Hoyden, and the Nurse. Amanda is a sincere romantic, the altogether tragic wife of a man whom Vanbrugh reveals to be incapable of fidelity. As was briefly touched upon in the introduction to this

study, the part of the sympathetic, sexually knowledgeable, tragic woman in a comic play was once the popular domain of Restoration favourite Elizabeth Barry. Inspired by her work in the she-tragedies of Otway and Southerne, several writers chose to create these decidedly uncomic roles for Barry to make use of her talent for pitiable histrionics. Cibber wrote of Barry, that 'in the Art of exciting Pity she had a Power beyond all the Actresses I have yet seen' and it would no doubt have been a pleasure to see her in the role of Amanda had circumstances allowed.[18] However, with Barry working hard for a rival company, the part of the she-tragedian was awarded instead to Jane Rogers. A member of London's theatrical community since at least 1692, Jane Rogers rose to prominence following the Actors' Revolt, performing many leading parts that would otherwise have gone to Barry, such as Imoinda in Southerne's *Oroonoko* in 1696. According to Cibber, Rogers actively contributed to the correlation between her private life and images of the virtuous, sympathetic women she played on stage, writing that she took 'Theatrical Prudery to such a height, that she was very near keeping herself chaste by It: Her Fondness for Virtue on the Stage she began to think might perswade the World that it had made an Impression on her private Life'.[19] If this was true, no doubt the addition of Amanda to her repertoire, a woman who declares that 'My Love, my Duty, and my Vertue, are such faithful Guards, I need not fear my Heart shou'd e'er betray me', was a powerful boon to the public image Rogers attempted to convey.[20] Amanda's whole characterisation revolves around her purity of character and her virtue. Although she is tempted by Worthy's charms, she resists to the point where Worthy is reformed by the pure force of her goodness, attesting that 'The Coarser Appetite of Nature's gone, and 'tis methinks the Food of Angels I require'.[21] Whilst this may appear to be Vanbrugh's idea of acquiescence to the reformist attitudes of the day, Amanda's purity and Worthy's startling act five redemption are more likely the culmination of Vanbrugh's tongue in cheek attacks on these heroic standards which have been scattered throughout the play. Whereas in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift,* Amanda's virtue winning the heart of Loveless can be taken in good faith, in Vanbrugh's cynical production it is a change which has already been demonstrably proven to be unreliable. This is

[18] Cibber, *Apology*, p. 95.
[19] Cibber, *Apology,* p. 81.
[20] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 37.
[21] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 100.

compounded by Worthy's own admittance, that 'how long this influence may last, Heaven knows'.[22] Within Vanbrugh's sardonic anti-reform text, Rogers's character is both the embodiment of the tragic, virtuous heroine as well as the chief enactor of that same archetype's mockery. This double use of character is highlighted in the second act in which Amanda and Loveless discuss the playhouse and Amanda remarks, 'The Plays, I must confess, have some small Charms, and wou'd have more, wou'd they restrain that loose obscene encouragement to Vice, which shocks, if not the Virtue of some Women, at least the Modesty of all'.[23] The condemnation of the theatricalization of such vices to the very man who is responsible for abusing her with them demonstrates that in Amanda we find all that is to be pitied and mocked in how sentimentalism treats its virtuous female characters.

Berinthia and the Mistresses of the Restoration

Berinthia was played by Susanna Verbruggen, a casting which demonstrated her rising place within the Patent Company. From the supporting character of Narcissa, an affected young lover, in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, Verbruggen landed the role of the salacious, alluring mistress. In many ways Berinthia is an overtly simple character. As she summarises herself, 'I'm a young Widow, and I care not what any body thinks. Ah, *Amanda,* it's a delicious thing to be a young Widow'.[24] Unlike her archetypal forebears, the complex and mercantile mistresses played by the United Company's inimitable Elizabeth Currer two decades earlier, Berinthia has only one very simple goal, a romantic and/or sexual affair which is not restricted to matrimony. She explains, 'I never had but one intrigue yet: But I confess I long to have another'.[25] Having been easily seduced by Loveless in the first instance, the rest of her actions in the play are largely guided by other people. Upon catching her with Loveless, Worthy half blackmails and half persuades Berinthia to help him 'hoodwink Amanda' so

[22] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, pp. 100-101.
[23] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 23.
[24] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 39.
[25] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 49.

that both may carry on with their desired intrigues.[26] As Berinthia points out, Worthy would 'have ruin'd me if I had refus'd him', but she appears none too upset about the situation, happily going along with the plan to separate and conquer the couple. Although the scheming between the lovers-turned-confederates is a humorous conceit, reminiscent of Sir Anthony Love and Valentine's machinations in Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love* (1690) six years previously, Berinthia's character lacks the agency and complexity of some of the Restoration's great mistress roles. Indicative of Verbruggen's characters becoming more limited representations of womanhood following the departure of the rebels and her ascension to leading lady, Berinthia is a fairly one-dimensional portrayal of the mistress archetype. Whilst Berinthia owes a lot to Verbruggen's past roles and is no doubt the stencil upon which Farquhar's Lurewell is drawn, it is in the many roles of Elizabeth Currer where we find a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the positions of the mistress and unfaithful wives as enactors of economised sexuality, authoritative agents of patriarchal disruption, and the victims of a stigmatising and degrading attitude. Often culminating in a compromising ending for the mistress and/or wife, one in which she gains financial security at the cost of happiness, Currer's provocative, sexualised characters such as Betty Frisque, Mrs Tricksy, and Lady Fancy demonstrated the capacity of Restoration female characters to be understood both within and beyond the constraints of their sexuality. In comparison, although Verbruggen's vivacious widow was no doubt a delightful portrayal of the enduringly popular coquette character, she is used by Vanbrugh as a temptation for Loveless and embodies very little beyond the limited significations of her character. Unlike Lady Fancy, whose ending Behn manipulated beyond the boundaries of realism in order to offer an escapist fantasy for her female audience, Berinthia's fate is completely neglected. After Berinthia convinces Amanda of Loveless's inconstancy, she does not speak another word, but appears, silently, at Lord Foppington's ball. Once her narrative purpose is fulfilled, Berinthia is relegated to the side-lines.

[26] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 51.

Having said this, whilst the written character of Berinthia does little to extend or challenge the representation of supposedly unvirtuous women who either choose or are forced into adulterous relationships, the role itself represents a particularly engaging acting challenge for the Patent Company's star performer. Given that most of the dramatic agency is robbed from Berinthia, a lot of her onstage time is taken up by her either being persuaded into doing something, or into rationalising her desire to do it. It does not take long for Worthy to talk her into his scheme, especially once she realises that 'there may be as much pleasure in carrying on another Bodies Intriegue, as ones own' because 'It exercises almost all the entertaining Faculties of a Woman. For there's employment for Hypocrisie, Invention, Deceit, Flattery, Mischief, and Lying', all qualities Berinthia uses with great abandon.[27] Despite the moments in which she finds herself '*sola*' and readily admits to enjoying the intrigue, there's a significant disparity between Berinthia's dialogue and her actions whilst in the company of her suitor. Berinthia feigns resistance towards Loveless's advances whilst actively pursuing the path of the willing adulterer. After knowingly setting up Worthy to be alone with Amanda, Berinthia retires to her room in the hope that she will find Loveless there. Having found her wishes granted she cries, 'Help, help, I'm Ravish'd, ruin'd, undone. O Lord, I shall never be able to bear it', accompanied by the stage direction '*Very softly*'.[28] This false coyness, a protest designed to encourage as opposed to halt the recipient, is a dangerous staple of the Restoration stage, one which would be employed by Lurewell four years later in one of Verbruggen's ongoing string of coquette characters. It is a theatrical device which both encourages male insistence and sexual aggression in the face of rejection and promotes the idea of false modesty as the feminine ideal, superseding a healthy expression of female desire. Because of the disparity between her dialogue and her actions, Berinthia is a very hard character to read. She is changeable and it is unclear how much she wants to be an active participant in the deception. Given this incongruity, the meaning of the character depends largely on the performance of the actor playing it. The understanding of the character could be drastically altered depending on Verbruggen's performance, once again underpinning the importance

[27] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 52.
[28] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 74.

of reading the performative aspect of the character, through stage directions, alongside its readily appreciable dialogue.

Nurses, Bawds, and Confidantes

The addition of the country scenes in *The Relapse* represents a marked departure from the London-centric comic environment set out in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* and was a notable problem for Collier in his denunciation of Vanbrugh's sequel.[29] The humorous subplot in which Young Fashion sets out to scam his less than generous brother of a wealthy heiress takes place in a 'lonely old' country house 'Fifty Miles off' from London.[30] Despite disrupting the unity of place so strictly insisted upon by Collier, Young Fashion's scheming with the bold, presumptuous Hoyden provides some much needed comic pacing to the play.[31] Having arrived at the country seat, Young Fashion discovers the eccentric Sir Tunbelly protecting his house, and his only daughter, as though he were defending a military encampment. Much to her chagrin, upon the stranger's arrival Hoyden is swiftly locked away in the ale-cellar, for fear an enemy interloper might break down Tunbelly's defences. Once Young Fashion assures the guards and Tunbelly that he is really Lord Foppington, arrived early to sooner meet his betrothed, he is warmly welcomed inside. Whilst Tunbelly insists on waiting out the week until the agreed upon date for his daughter's nuptials, Young Fashion knows he needs to marry Hoyden quickly if he is to steal her from under his brother. Fortunately, Hoyden is as desperate to get married as soon as possible in order to escape her father's overprotective sanctions, swearing that if it were not for Foppington's proposal, 'I cod I'de Marry the Baker, I wou'd so'.[32] The two hatch a plan to get married quickly by Tunbelly's chaplain, aided by the help of Hoyden's Nurse after some brief cajoling. To win the Nurse's support, Hoyden tells Fashion to 'tell her she's a wholsom Comely

[29] Collier, *A Short View,* p. 228.
[30] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 18.
[31] Collier, *A Short View*, p.228
[32] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 59.

Woman— and give her half a Crown'.[33] By manipulating her older companion and making use of the Nurse's less than honourable relationship with the chaplain, Hoyden orchestrates an early marriage for herself, and Fashion wins his brother's dowry. All is looking up for the pragmatic young lovers until the real Lord Foppington arrives and Fashion is discovered as a fraud. The young spark must flee the country house, leaving his new bride in the awkward predicament of needing to marry another husband.

A young woman desperate for a freedom denied by an officious guardian, grudgingly assisted by an unscrupulous governess, must seem a familiar trope given its popularity throughout the Restoration period and, indeed, even earlier. Recalling the early partnerships of Norris and Barry, the relationship between the Nurse and Hoyden reflects the time-honoured seventeenth-century tradition of marking youthful wit and intelligence against an elderly foil, easily manipulated and prone to panic. After the real Lord Foppington is kindly welcomed by Sir Tunbelly as his future son-in-law, the chaplain and the nurse immediately begin '*Crying*' and catastrophising over their dubious plan to secretly marry off their charge.[34] Hoyden maintains her calm, ruminating that 'I have often thought old folks fools, and now I'm sure they are so', before announcing her intention to marry this second husband as well.[35] After some hesitant rationalising from the chaplain, 'to prevent a parent's wrath, is to avoid the sin of disobedience', Hoyden firmly announces, 'I will marry again then, and so there's an end of the Story'.[36] The relationship between Hoyden and her nurse is reflective of the partnership between Norris and Barry but it is more reminiscent of the earlier dynamic which played off the heroine/confidante connection, such as Phillipa and Cornelia, as opposed to the more vicious, economised pairing we see in *The Revenge* and *The Second Part of the Rover*. The Nurse is kind and foolish, presented in terms of bodily lowness, demonstrated by her introductory comments to Young

---

[33] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 64.
[34] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 85.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 86.

Fashion about nursing Hoyden, 'till the Belly on't was so full, it would drop off like a Leech'.[37] In his *Vindication,* Vanbrugh writes that the characters in the Young Fashion subplot 'are the Inferior Persons of the Play (I mean as to their business) and what they do, is more to divert the Audience, by something particular and whimsical in their Humours, than to instruct 'em in any thing that may be drawn from their Morals'.[38] Given this caveat, it is no surprise that the Nurse character is simply taking on the role as cheerful foil to Hoyden's heroine as opposed to a genuinely obstructive representation of threatening old age, the kind described by Worthy in the main plot when he says 'An Old Woman has something so terrible in her looks, that whilst she is perswading your Mistress to forget she has a Soul, she stares Hell and Damnation full in her face'.[39] Worthy's attitude and the pairing of the Nurse character with Hoyden demonstrates that the enduring capacity of pitting mockable, elderly figures against youthful protagonists was still alive and well at the turn of the century.

It is no surprise that the part of the Nurse went to Mary Powell, wife of George Powell, who had appeared on the stage in her first named role a decade earlier as the much-abused landlady Gammer Grime in Aphra Behn's *The Luckey Chance*. Were it not for her disappearance from the stage only a few years earlier, the company's resident elderly woman, Elizabeth Norris, would no doubt have taken on the role of Gammer Grime. Although no sign of Mrs Powell appears again in the cast lists until 1695, it is clear that on her return to the stage the still relatively young actress had inherited Norris's line of ageing, desexualised women. Over the coming years Powell would go on to play Celia's governess in a revival of Fletcher's *The Humorous Lieutenant* (1647) at Drury Lane during the summer of 1697, the 'old lady, Mother' Darling in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple,* and Mrs Goodfellow, a 'Lady who loves her bottle', in Thomas Baker's *Tunbridge Walks; or, The*

[37] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 65.
[38] Vanbrugh, *Vindication*, pp. 59-60.
[39] Vanbrugh, *Relapse*, p. 90.

Yeoman of Kent (1703).[40] Notably, Powell also inherited some parts written for Norris, including Mrs Clacket in the 1707 production of *The City Heiress* and Lady Dupe in Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-all* the same year, both of which were performed at the newly built Queen's Theatre at Haymarket, an architectural triumph for John Vanbrugh. Whilst demonstrating that holding a specific, if somewhat archetypal, comic line was of immense use to a working secondary performer, particularly for those not deemed young or attractive enough to be cast in the highly sexualised main roles, the parts taken on by Norris, and later by Powell, were fundamental to the construction and performance of Restoration theatre. They provided thematic balance, narrative obstacles, intergenerational conflict, and much of the low humour throughout the period. More importantly, in collaboration with particularly exceptional and thoughtful writers, these actresses had the capacity to demonstrate that complex portrayals of womanhood exist above and beyond the limited parameters of the sexualised masculine gaze.

Hoyden as Heroine

The part of the boisterous country heiress was performed by the young singer, Leticia Cross, who had joined the United Company shortly before its demise in 1695. Cross had stayed on with the Patent Company, having not been considered a worthwhile proposition for the departing rebels. Highfill writes of Cross that 'Hoydenish characters seem to be her speciality, and Vanbrugh may have tailored her role in *The Relapse* for her special talents'.[41] Whilst this may very well have been the case, there can be no doubt that Cross and Hoyden owed a lot to the earlier comic creations of Susanna Verbruggen, particularly the 'Rude, laughing, Clownish Hoyden', Mary the Buxome.[42] Collier himself remarked on the similarity, writing 'This Young Lady swears, talks smut, and is upon the

[40] Farquhar, *Constant Couple* (sig. A4v); Thomas Baker, *Tunbridge Walks; or, The Yeoman of Kent* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703).
[41] Highfill, *Biography*, IV, p. 63.
[42] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part I (sig. A4v).

matter just as ragmanner'd as *Mary the Buxsome.* 'Tis plain the *Relapser* copyed Mr. *Durfey's* Original'.[43] Performed between Verbruggen's Mary the Buxome and her Gillian Homebred, it may come as a slight surprise Verbruggen was not asked to take on this part and no doubt she would have excelled, but due to the pressing needs of the Patent Company for this play to succeed, the newly appointed star comedian's talents were required for the more prominent, alluring role of Berinthia. The casting of *The Relapse* is perhaps the best example of what the schism did for Verbruggen's career. Whilst she undoubtedly won more stage time and secured parts which were potentially more readily appreciated by the audience, after 1695 Verbruggen's characters remained more entrenched within the limited contexts of sexually appealing young women with little overtly comic or subversive to recommend them. With the fate of the Patent Company still on shaky ground, it was better the humorous but altogether minor character of Hoyden be given to the relatively untested skills of Leticia Cross. Although more financially viable than her Spanish counterpart, the character of Hoyden practises the same brand of provincial jocularity, peppering her speech with 'I cods' and promising to 'care not a fig' for her visitors.[44] Hoyden readily admits to holding similar goals to Mary: marriage and, through it, preferment to a better way of living. Mary's immediate assertion that, once her plans of marriage for the sake of betterment come to fruition, she will 'learn to be Proud, and look Scornfully' are echoed in Hoyden's incredulity when she replies, 'Love him? why do you think I love him, *Nurse*? I Cod I wou'd not care if he were hang'd, so I were but once Married to him—No—that which pleases me, is to think what work I'll make when I get to *London*; for when I am a Wife and a Lady both Nurse, I Cod I'll flant it with the best of 'em'.[45]

For all their rural quirks, there is a stark difference between Mary and Hoyden accounted for perhaps by their altered financial standing. Collier condemned the character of Hoyden precisely because she was of nobler stock than Mary, writing 'this *Character* was no great Beauty in *Buxsome;*

[43] Collier, *A Short View,* p. 220.
[44] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 60.
[45] D'Urfey, *Don Quixote,* part I, p. 9; Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 62.

But it becomes the Knights Daughter much worse. *Buxsome* was a poor Pesant, which made her Rudeness more natural, and expected. But *Deputy Lieutenants* Children don't use to appear with the Behaviour of Beggars'.[46] What Collier fails to consider, however, is how much more developed Hoyden is as a character, a trait no doubt permissible by her increased standing. Whilst Mrs Hoyden is a comic character with her humorous oaths and penchant for graphic, ungenteel imagery, she is also quick, intelligent, and vastly capable of directing her own narrative. Unlike Mary the Buxome who is tricked and cajoled throughout the first two parts of her trilogy, Hoyden acts decisively upon hearing her plans with Young Fashion have fallen through, announcing 'I have found a way my self to secure us all'.[47] It is only in the third part of *Don Quixote*, in which Buxome learns that in order to trick her husband into marriage she must act the demure wife until it is too late, that we see a true precursor to Hoyden's cunning, a woman who will happily commit the sin of bigamy to get herself out of a scrape. What is remarkable about Hoyden is that she is not a single archetypical line, but rather a blend of the resourceful heroine, familiar in *The Rover*'s Hellena and Wycherley's Fidelia in *The Plain Dealer* (1677); the naïve country girl whose innocence reflects the sordid nature of the knowing London elite, such as Margery Pinchwife in Wycherley's *Country Wife*; and the boorish hoyden, recognisable in D'Urfey's Mary the Buxome. Just as D'Urfey wrote Gillian Homebred to be the sympathetic companion to his boisterous farm girl, Vanbrugh wrote Hoyden as a strong-willed, intelligent counterpart to the stereotypical naïve country lass.

The character of Hoyden is a prime example of how female characterisation altered throughout the Restoration period and towards the end of the seventeenth century, before and in many ways in opposition to, the influences of reform and sentimentalism which firmly took hold within the theatres. This blending of archetypes combined with the insistence of maintaining the funny, coarse, personality of the provincial hoyden, demonstrates that the female characters developed in this period embodied more complex representations of womanhood in a specifically comic context than has been

[46] Collier, *A Short View*, pp. 220-221.
[47] Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, p. 85.

appreciated. When assessing the depiction of women during a time marked for its potentially harmful libertine ideologies, it is important to examine the function that comedy is playing in both the empowerment and ridicule of the female experience. To focus too heavily on the representation of the hardships of women, for example those found in the male-written she-tragedies of the 1680s, promotes the generalisation that women's past victimisation is the sole focus in the fight for gender equity. To claim that women's admittance and contributions to the development of comedy did no harm for their representation could lead to the dangerous omission of the ways in which, all too often, female performers are required to take part in the perpetuation of a self-degrading form of misogyny. To suggest that women, having once found a secure space for themselves on the English stage, were free to develop their art in peace cannot account for the still pervasive discrimination and under-representation faced by female comedians today. Instead, it is necessary to closely examine and dismantle the multiple ways in which comedy, as a powerful tool of persuasion and rhetoric, both aided and frustrated women's progression in the public sphere. Through the careers of individual actresses, it is possible to explore the ways in which the first female performers on the English stage, whilst working within an inherently patriarchal framework, actively and collaboratively worked to challenge the limitations set against their gender and make the best advantage of their positions.

As has been realised by critics such as Howe and Bush-Bailey, approaching the intangible study of historical performance through the individual actress is a useful starting point in the process of demystifying the subtlety of contemporary performance and the various powers and influences which held sway. However, as Bush-Bailey points out, this really is just the starting point.[48] Beyond combatting the erasure of women from theatrical history, particularly those individuals who do not comply with our cultural memory of what Restoration actresses and artists were supposed to be, this study serves to demonstrate that women's comic history cannot be attributed to a pattern of a few remarkable women capable of competing with the male coteries who dominated the industry. Once

---

[48] Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds,* p. 204.

one considers the careers of all the women working at the time, not just those whom history has remembered for their beauty, fame, and celebrity, a broader picture of theatrical production is revealed, one which accounts for the multiple women of varied successes and talents who have been working collaboratively and industriously since they had a legitimate space within which to do so. Because of the sudden legal introduction of women to the professional English stage in the 1660s, there is a temptation to look at this period as distinct and whole. However, within the Restoration period and the time leading up to the eighteenth century, there were myriad changes in what constituted popular theatre, not to mention alterations in the practical conditions of the company members' employment and the external pressures which so greatly affected production and reception of new plays. The theatre companies whose very survival depended on appropriately responding to these everchanging requirements could not rely on the strength of any one individual but on each member, working collectively in whatever way was required of them and it would be dangerous, not to mention dismissive, to view this progression in lesser terms. It is also important not to view this period in a vacuum. One needs only to look to the next generation of comic actresses, including Anne Oldfield, Peg Woffington, Kitty Clive, and Lavinia Fenton, and the growing number of female playwrights who wrote for them such as Susanna Centlivre and Mary Pix, to determine that in spite of changing fashions and the often challenging restrictions of propriety placed upon women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, work continued to be produced which relied heavily on the contributions of its female artists. However, the particularly heady, boisterous world of Restoration theatre oversaw both a huge shift in the practical conditions of the stage and the development of a distinct form of comedy. Scholars of later periods would do well to consider the pioneering work of Elizabeth Norris, Elizabeth Currer, and Susanna Verbruggen as three important but representative performers. In many ways the process of broadening women's comic history is still in its infancy and there is still much work to be done on unearthing and codifying women's contributions to the development of comedy. The women explored in this study were by no means the beginning nor the end of women's comic legacy in English theatre history nor are they intended to be read as exceptional, although they were undoubtedly talented and valuable additions to their respective

companies. By assessing the theatre of this period through the actress, this study prioritises a reading of theatre history which takes as read the primacy of women's place within it.

Bibliography

All first editions of Early Modern texts have been obtained from online databases including Early Modern Books Online, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, and Literature Online.

Adams, Joseph Quincy (Editor), *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623-1673* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917)

Baker, Thomas, *Tunbridge Walks; or, The Yeoman of Kent* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703)

Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher, *The Woman Hater; or, The Hungry Courtier* (London: John Hodgets, 1607)

Behn, Aphra, *The City Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-all* (London: D. Brown, 1682)

- *The False Count; or, A New Way to Play and Old Game* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1682)
- *The Feign'd Curtizans; or, A Nights Intrigue* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1679)
- *The Luckey Chance; or, An Alderman's Bargain* (London: W. Canning, 1687)
- *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause* (London: D. Brown, 1682)
- *The Rover; or, The Banish'd Cavaliers* (London: John Amery, 1677)
- *The Second Part of the Rover* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1681)
- *Sir Patient Fancy* (London: Richard Tonson, 1678)
- *The Town Fopp; or, Sir Timothy Tawdrey* (London: J Magnes, 1677)
- *The Widdow Ranter; or, The History of Bacon in Virginia* (London: James Knapton, 1690)

Behn, Aphra and Thomas Betterton, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or, The Defeated Widow* (London: Langley Curtis, 1677)

Borgman, Albert S., *The Life and Death of William Mountfort* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935)

British Film Institute Filmography Index, 'The Gender Imbalance in UK Film Casts' found at https://data-viz.nesta.org.uk/bfi-onscreen/index.html [last accessed 16/12/21]

Brome, Richard, *A Jovial Crewe; or, The Merry Beggars* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1684)

Brown, John, *Quakerisme: The path-way to Paganisme* (Edinburgh: John Cairns, 1678)

Bush-Bailey, Gilli, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late-Stuart Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006)

Canfield, J. Douglas, *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997)

Comedian Database at https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/

Copeland, Nancy, 'Review: *The Relapse', Theatre Journal,* 42.2 (1990), pp. 266-267

Chetwood, William Rufus, *A General History of the Stage* (London: W. Owen, 1749)

Cibber, Colley, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (London: John Watts, 1704)

- *Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion* (London: H. Rhodes, 1696)
- *Woman's Wit; or, The Lady in Fashion* (London: John Surton, 1697)

Collier, Jeremy, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (London: S. Keble, 1698)

Curran, John Philpot, *A New and Enlarged Collection of Speeches by the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran, Late Master of the Rolls in Ireland* (London: William Hone, 1819)

Davenport Adams, W. H., *Good Queen Anne*, 2 vols. (London: Remington,1886)

Davies, Stevie, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London: The Women's press, 1998)

Davies, Thomas, *Dramatic Miscellanies: Consisting of Critical Observations*, 3 vols (London: Thomas Davies, 1784)

Davis, James Colin, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

Dearing, Vinton A., and Alan Roper, *The Works of John Dryden,* 20 vols. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992)

De Angelis, April, *Playhouse Creatures* (London: Samuel French, 1993)

Dibdin, Charles, *A History of the English Stage*, 5 vols. (London: Charles Dibdin, 1800)

Dolan, Frances E., *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999)

Doran, John, *Annals of the English Stage from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean* (New York: Armstrong, 1880)

Downes, John, *Roscius Anglicanus,* ed. by Montague Summers (London: Fortune Press, 1928)

Drage, William, *Diamonomageia: a small treatise of sicknesses and diseases from witchcraft* (London: John Dover, 1665)

Drougge, Helga,'Love, Death and Mrs Barry in Thomas Southerne's Plays', *Comparative Drama*, 2.24 (1994), pp. 408-425

- '"We'll Learn That of the Men": Female Sexuality in Southerne's Comedies', *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, 33.3 (1993), pp. 545-563

Dryden, John, *Mr Limberham; or The Kind Keeper* (London: R. Bentley, 1680)

- *The Letters of John Dryden: With Letters Addressed to Him* ed. by Charles E. Ward (Durham, N.C.: Seeman Printery, 1942)
- *Sir Martin Mar-all; or, The Feign'd Innocence* (London: H. Herringman, 1668)

D'Urfey, Thomas, *Barnaby Whig; or, No Wit Like a Womans* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1681)

- *The Bath; or, The Western Lass* (London: Peter Buck, 1701)
- *The Comical History of Don Quixote,* part I (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1694)
- *The Comical History of Don Quixote,* part II (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1694)
- *The Comical History of Don Quixote,* part III (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1696)
- *A Fond Husband; or, The Plotting Sisters* (London: James Magnes, 1676)
- *Squire Oldsapp; or, The Night-Adventurers* (London: James Magnus, 1679)

Etherege, George, *The Letterbook of Sir George Etherege, ed. by Sybil Rosenfeld* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928)

- *The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (London: Henry Herringman, 1676)

Ezell, Margaret J.M., *The Oxford English Literary History: The Later Seventeenth Century*, 5 vols. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017)

Farquhar, George, *The Constant Couple; or, A Trip to Jubilee* (London: Ralph Smith, 1700)

- 'A Discourse Upon Comedy' (1702) in *A Discourse Upon Comedy: The Recruiting Office and The Beaux Stratagem by George Farquhar* ed. by Louis A. Strauss (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1914)
- *The Inconstant; or, The Way to Win Him* (London: J. Knapton, 1702)
- *Sir Harry Wildair* (London: James Knapton, 1701)
- *The Twin Rivals* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703)
- *The Works of the Late Ingenious Mr. George Farquhar: Containing all his Poems, Letters, Essays and Comedies, Publish'd in his Lifetime,* 2 vols. (London: John Clarke, 1760)

The Female Wits; or, The Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal, 1704 (London: William Turner)

Ferguson, Margaret, 'News from the New World: Miscegenous Romance in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*', *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* ed. by David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair and Harold Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 151-180

- 'New World Scenes from a Female Pen', *Dido's Daughters: Literary, Gender and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 333-373

Fisher, Tony, *Theatre and Governance in Britain, 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Flecknoe, Richard, *The Damoiselles a la Mode* (London: R. Flecknoe, 1667)

Fletcher, John, *The Wild Goose Chase* (London: Humpherey Molseley, 1652)

Frangos, Jennifer, 'The Early Modern Queer Atlantic: Narratives of Sex and Gender on New World Soil', *The Edinburgh Companion to Atlantic Literary Studies*, ed. by Leslie Eckel and Clare Elliott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 163 – 175

Freeman, Lisa A, *Character's Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)

Gilder, Rosamond, *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre*, 1931 (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1961)

Gildon, Charles, *A Comparison Between the Two Stages* (London: 1702)

- *The Life of Thomas Betterton* (London: Robert Gosling, 1710)

Goldsmith, Oliver, 'Essay on the theatre; or, A comparison between sentimental and laughing comedy', *The Westminster Magazine*, 1.1 (London: 1773)

Gould, Robert, *The Playhouse: A Satyr* (1689)

Hamilton, Kate C., 'The "Famous Mrs Barry": Elizabeth Barry and Restoration Celebrity', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 42 (2013), pp. 291-320

Harris, Tim, *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdoms* (London: Penguin Books, 2006)

Hartley, Cathy, *A Historical Dictionary of British Women*, 2nd ed. (London: Europa Publications, 2003)

Hazlitt, William*, Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 3rd ed. (London, Oxford University Press, 1951)

Heard, Elisabeth J., *Experimentation on the English Stage, 1695-1708, The Career of George Farquhar* (London: Routledge, 2008)

Heldt, W., 'Fletcher's "Wild-Goose Chase" and Farquhar's "Inconstant", *Neophilologus*, 3.2 (1918), pp. 144-148

Herman, Peter, '"We all Smoke Here": Behn's *The Widdow Ranter* and the Invention of American Identity', *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 254-274

Highfill, Philip H., A *Biographical Dictionary of actors, actresses, musicians, dancers, managers & other stage personnel in London, 1660-1800,* 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987)

Hill, John, *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing* (London: R. Griffiths, 1750)

Hobby, Elaine, 'No Stolen Object, But Her Own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6.1 (1999), pp. 113-127,

- '"The World Was Never Without Some Mad Men": Aphra Behn, Jane Sharp, and the body', *Women's Writing,* 19.2 (2012), pp. 177-191.

Holland, Peter, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Hook, Lucyle, 'Introduction', *The Female Wits*, ed. by George Robert Guffey, Earl Miner, Maximillian E. Novak & Robert Vosper (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967)

Hotson, Leslie, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928)

Howe, Elizabeth, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Hughes, Derek, 'Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 35-37

- *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Baskingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)

Hughes, Derek, and Janet Todd (Editors), *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

- 'Tragedy and tragicomedy', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 83-97

Hume, Robert D., *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth-Century* (London, Oxford University Press, 1976)

- 'Jeremy Collier and the Future of the London Theater in 1698', *Studies in Philology*, 96.4 (1999), pp. 480-511
- 'The Origins of the Actor Benefit in London', *Theatre Research International,* 9.2 (1984), pp. 99-111
- 'Review: The Importance of Thomas Southerne', *Modern Philology*, 87.3 (1990), pp. 275-290
- 'The Uses of Montague Summers: A Pioneer Reconsidered', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 3.2 (1979), pp. 59-65.

Hutner, Heidi, *Colonial Women: Race and Culture in Stuart Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Jacquart, D. and C. Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Adamson (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988)

Jonson, Ben, *Bartholmew Fayre* (London: Robert Allott, 1631)

Jordan, Robert, 'Mrs Behn and *Sir Anthony Love*', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, 12.1 (1973), pp. 58-59

Jung, Youmi, "Cou'd You Put On Our Sex With Your Breeches": Destabilising Libertine Performance in Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love: Or, The Rambling Lady', English Studies,* 101.3 (2020), pp. 312-326

Keating, Erin M., 'Envious Productions: Actresses, Audiences, and Affect in the Restoration Playhouse', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 37.2 (2013), pp. 37-53

Keenan, Tim, *Restoration Staging, 1660-1674* (London: Routledge, 2016)

Kenyon, John, *The Popish Plot* (London: Heinemann, 1972)

Kewes, Paulina, 'Dryden's theatre and the passions of politics', *A Cambridge Companion to John Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 131-155

King, Thomas A. ''As if (she) were made on purpose to put the whole world into good humour': Reconstructing the First English Actresses', *Drama Review,* 36 (1992), pp. 78-102

Knight, Joseph, *David Garrick* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1894)

Kraegar, Alexis, and Stephen Follows, 'Gender Inequality and Screenwriters: A study of the impact of gender on equality of opportunity for screenwriters and key creatives in the UK film and television industries' (London: The Writers Guild of Great Britain / Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society, 2018)

Kreis-Schnick, Annette, *Women, Writing, and the Theatre in the Early Modern Period: The Plays of Aphra Behn and Susannah Centlivre* (London: Associated University Press, 2001)

Lafler, Joanne, 'Theatre and the female presence', *The Cambridge History of British Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 71-89

Langbaine, Gerard, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford: George West, 1691)

Langhans, Edward A., *Restoration Promptbooks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981)

Lauzen, Martha M., 'The Celluloid Ceiling, Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2019' (Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, 2020)

Lewcock, Dawn, *Aphra Behn Stages the Social Scene* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008)

Lowe, Robert, *Thomas Betterton* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1891)

Lowe, Stuart. 'UK Panel Show Gender Breakdown' found at https://strudel.org.uk/panelshows/index.html (2020)

Lowenthal, Cynthia, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003)

Maidwell, Lewis, *The Loving Enemies* (London: John Guy, 1680)

Mangan, Michael, *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance and the Narrative of Decline* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013)

Markley, Robert, 'Behn and the Unstable Traditions of Social Comedy', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn,* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 98-117

Marsden, Jean, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English State, 1660–1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006)

Maus, Katharine, '"Playhouse Flesh and Blood": Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress', *ELH*, 46.4 (1979) pp. 595-617

McGirr, Elaine, 'Authorial Performances: Actress, Author, Critic', *Women's Writing: 1660-1830*: *Feminisms and Futures,* ed. by Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 97- 115

Mendelson, Sarah, and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Milhous, Judith, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979)

- 'United Company Finances, 1682-1692', *Theatre Research International*, 1 (1981–1982), pp. 37–53

Milhous, Judith and Robert D Hume, 'An Annotated Guide to the Theatrical Documents in PRO LC 7/1, 7/2 and 7/3', *Theatre Notebook*, 35.2 (1981), pp. 77-86

Milling, Jane, '"For Without Vanity, I'm Better Known": Restoration Actors and Metatheatre on the London Stage', *Theatre Survey*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2011), pp. 59-82

Mills, Brett and Sarah Ralph, '"I Think Women are Possibly Judged More Harshly with Comedy": Women and British Television Comedy Production', *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 10, no.2 (2015), pp. 102-117

Mignon, Elisabeth, *Crabbed Age and Youth: The Old men and Women in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1947)

'Mrs Behn's Dramatic Writings', *The Retrospective Review*, 1853 (London: John Russel Smith)

Mr Turbulent; or, The Melanchollicks, 1682 (London: Simon Neal)

Musselwhite, Paul, '"What Town's this Boy?": English Civic Politics, Virginia's Urban Debate, and Aphra Behn's *The Widow Ranter', Atlantic Studies,* 8.3 (2011), pp. 279-299

National Archive LC 7/3

Nevitt, Marcus, *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England, 1640 – 1660* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)

Nicoll, Allardyce, *A History of Restoration Drama 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923)

Nussbaum, Felicity, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010)

O'Donnell, Mary Ann,'Myth and Myth making in the Works of Aphra Behn', *Aphra Behn (1640-1689) Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity* ed. by Mary Ann O'Donnell (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 101-110

O'Donnell, Mary Ann, Bernard Dhuicq, and Guyonne Ludoc (Editors), *Aphra Behn (1640-1689) Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000)

Owen, Susan J., 'Drama and Political Crisis', *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 158 – 173

- 'Response to Restoration Politics', *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* ed. by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 68-82

- *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996)
- ‘Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's drama, 1678-83’, *Aphra Behn Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 15-29

Oxberry, William, *The Actor’s Budget,* 2 vols. (London: W. Hildyard, 1811)

Pacheco, Anita, ‘Festive Comedy in “The Widdow Ranter”: Behn’s Clowns and Falstaff’, *Restoration Studies in English Literary Culture*, *1660-1700,* 38.2 (2014), pp. 43-61

- ‘Reading Toryism in Aphra Behn’s cit-cuckolding comedies’, *The Review of English Studies*, 55 (2004), pp. 690-708

Payne, Deborah C., ‘Reified Object or Emergent Professional? Retheorizing the Restoration Actress’, *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*, ed. by Deborah C. Payne and J. Douglas Canfield (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 13-38

- ‘The Restoration Actress’, *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. by Susan J. Owen, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 69-91

Pearson, Jacqueline, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988)

Pepys, Samuel, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, 10 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)

The Posthumous Works of Mr. Samuel Butler, (author of Hudibras) Compleat in One Volume: Written in the Time of the Grand Rebellion, and in the Reign of King Charles II.: Being a Collection of Satires, Speeches, and Reflections Upon Those Times (1715) 3rd ed. (London: R. Reilly, 1730)

Price, C. A., *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

Pullen, Kirsten, ‘Betty Boutell, ‘‘‘Whom all the Town Fucks’’: constructing the actress/whore’, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 22-54.

Pulsipher, Jennifer Hale, ‘*The Widow Ranter* and Royalist Culture in Colonial Virginia’, *Early American* Literature, 39.1 (2004), pp. 44-66

Quinsey, Katherine, M. (Editor) *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996)

Ravenscroft, Edward, *Prologue to Dame Dobson the cunning woman spoken by Mrs. Currer. Epilogue to the same: spoken by Mr. Jevorn.* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1683)

- *Dame Dobson; or, The Cunning Woman* (London: Joseph Hindmarsh, 1684)

Ray, Robert H., *An Andrew Marvell Companion* (London: Garland Publishing, 1998)

A Report of all the Cases Determined by Sir John Holt, Knt. From 1688 to 1710 (London: J. Harzard, T. Osborne etc., 1738)

Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the Stage, 1704 (London: J. Nutt)

The Revenge; or, A Match in Newgate, 1680 (London: W.Cademan)

Revet, Edward, *The Town Shifts; or, The Suburb-Justice* (London: Thomas Dring, 1671)

Roberts, David, *Restoration Plays and Players* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Rosenthal, Laura J.,'"Counterfeit Scrubbado": Women Actors in the Restoration', *Eighteenth Century Theory and Interpretation,* 34.1 (1993) pp. 3-22

- *The Ways of the World: Theater and Cosmopolitanism in the Restoration and Beyond* (London: Cornell University Press, 2020)

Rowe, Nicholas, *The Plays and Poems of Nicholas Rowe, Volume III: The Late Plays*, ed. by Stephen Bernard and Claudine van Hensbergen, 5 vols. (London: Routledge, 2017)

'A Satyr on the Players' (c.1682) *Satyrs and Lampoons,* British Library (Harley MS 1717)

Sawyer, Paul, *Christopher Rich of Drury Lane: The Biography of a Theatre Manager* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986)

Shahar, Shulamith, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain,* trans. by Yael Lotan (London: Routledge, 1997)

Schneider, Ben Ross, 'The Coquette-Prude as an Actress's Line in Restoration Comedy During the Time of Mrs Oldfield', *Theatre Notebook,* 22.4 (1968), pp. 143-156

Scouten, A. H., 'Notes toward a History of Restoration Comedy', *Philological Quarterly*, 45 (1966), pp. 62-70

Sharma, R. C., *Themes and Conventions in the Comedy of Manners* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1965)

Solomon, Diana, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013)

Southerne, Thomas, *The Fatal Marriage; or, The Innocent Adultery* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1694)

- *The Maids Last Prayer; or, Any Rather Than Fail* (London: R. Bentley, 1693)
- *Oroonoko* (London: H. Playford, 1696)
- *Sir Anthony Love; or, The Rambling Lady* (London: Joseph Fox, 1691)
- *The Wives Excuse; or, Cuckolds Make Themselves* (London: W. Freeman, 1692)

Spencer, Jane, *Aphra Behn's Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

- '"Deceit, Dissembling, all that's Woman": Comic Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesans',* in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theatre and Criticism* ed. by Heidi Hunter (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 86-101

Spurr, John, 'Shaftesbury and the Seventeenth Century', *Anthony Ashley Cooper: First Earl of Shaftsbury 1621- 1683,* ed. by John Spurr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011)

Staves, Susan, *A Literary History of Women's Writing 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Steele, Richard, *A Discourse Concerning Old Age* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1688)

Stern, Tiffany, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000)

Stevens, Laura M., '"Healing a Whorish Heart": The Whore of Babylon and Protestant Interiority in Restoration and Eighteenth- Century Britain', *European Studies*, 31 (2013), pp. 71-84

Stewart, Ann Marie, *The Ravishing Restoration: Aphra Behn, Violence, and Comedy* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010)

St-Martin-In-The-Fields, Westminster, London (UK) Parish Records 1529-1900

Street, G. S., 'Introduction' to *The Old Batchelor* in *The Comedies of William Congreve in two volumes,* 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1895)

Strum Kenny, Shirley, 'Farquhar, Wilks and Wildair; or, the Metamorphosis of the "Fine Gentleman"', *Philological Quarterly,* 57.1 (1978), pp. 46-66

Styan, J. L., *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

Summers, Montague, *The Restoration Theatre* (New York: Macmillan, 1934)

- *The Works of Aphra Behn*, 6 vols. (London: W. Heinemann, 1915)

Tate, Nahum, *The Loyal General* (London: Henry Bowicke, 1680)

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Stark Young (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1911)

Thompson, Peggy, *Coyness and Crime in Restoration Comedy* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2012)

- 'Facing the Void in *The Wives Excuse;* or Characters Make Themselves', *Papers on Language and Literature,* 31 (1995), pp. 78 – 98

Todd, Janet, 'Introduction' to *Aphra Behn: Oroonoko, The Rover and Other Works* (St Ives: Penguin Publishing, 1992)

- *Aphra Behn: A Secret Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017)

Tuite, Patrick*, Theatre of Crisis: The Performance of Power in the Kingdom of Ireland: 1641-1691* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010)

To the Supreme Authority of this Nation, the Commons Assembled in Parliament, The Humble Petition of divers Wel-affected Women, 1649 (London)

'A True Narrative of the Rise, Progresse, and Cessation of the Late Rebellion in Virginia, Most Humbly and Impartially Reported by His Majestyes Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affaires of the Said Colony' (1676) reprinted in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 4.2 (1896), pp. 117-154

Tuckett, Jennifer, 'Women in Theatre Forum Report' (London: Arts Council England, 2020)

Vanbrugh, John, *The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger* (London: Samuel Briscoe, 1697)

- *A Short Vindication of The Relapse and the Provok'd Wife, from Immorality and Profaneness* (London: H. Walwyn, 1698)

Van Lennep, William, *The London Stage 1660-1800, part 1: 1660-1700* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965)

Van Renen, Denys, *The Other Exchange: Women, Servants, and the Urban Underclass in Early Modern English Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017)

Wiley, Autrey Nell, 'Female Prologues and Epilogues in English Plays', *PMLA*, 48.4 (1933), pp. 1060-1079

Wilson, John Harold, *All the King's Ladies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958)

Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2019)

Wycherley, William, *The Country Wife* (London: Thomas Dring, 1675)

- *Love in a Wood; or, St James's Park* (London: H. Herringman, 1672)