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“Intriguing Heroines and Scheming Servants.
Unconventional Female and Lower-Class Characters
in Selected Plays by
Susanna Centlivre and Mary Davys”

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my partner, Michael Schmid, and to the fulfilment of our dreams,

to my parents, Silvia and Alfred,

to my siblings Gabriele, Gerhard, and Günter Grossberger,

and to my second family, Roswitha and Peter Schmid.

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I. SETTING THE PLAYS AND THEIR PLAYWRIGHTS IN CONTEXT

1. Introduction

Late seventeenth-century England saw the emergence of the first professional female playwrights. Its male-dominated society regarded women as socially as well as intellectually inferior to men, thus they were not expected to write. If they did write, religious works of private meditation or stories of personal faith, cookery books, and works of advice directed to other women or children were considered most appropriate. Apart from these non-literary genres, poetry offered women another acceptable genre to write in. There were only few exceptional, almost exclusively aristocratic women, who ventured to write scientific and philosophical treatises.

The first female dramatists were also gentlewomen. Their closet dramas were supposed to be performed in private in their homes. Until the Restoration of the monarchy, women's participation in the public theatre was limited to being passive spectators. The introduction of the first actresses onto the English stage was revolutionary, as hitherto all female parts had been performed by boys.

Just like an actress, a woman who wrote for the public stage and thus made her work and herself public, was considered only little better than a prostitute. The first professional female dramatists had to face prejudice, misogyny, and heavy accusations of plagiarism. It was unthinkable that any woman could write a good play.

The best-known female pioneer who penetrated the male domain of playwriting is Aphra Behn. Her audacity, impertinence, and sound self-confidence paved the way for many women writers to follow. While students of English literature will probably encounter the name of Aphra Behn in the course of their studies, that of Susanna Centlivre will only come up if they specialise in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama. However, even if they specialise in this genre and period, it is highly unlikely that they will happen upon the name of Mary Davys. While Behn and Centlivre are considered 'major playwrights,' Davys, if mentioned at all, is only referred to as one of the 'minor playwrights.' There is an abundance of secondary literature on both Behn and Centlivre, but little has been written about Davys. If her works are discussed, it is mostly her novels

that are of importance; her dramatic works are rarely treated and have not been republished since their first publication.

Restoration and early-eighteenth century England underwent continuous social, cultural, and political changes. These changes are best displayed in the theatre of the period. Especially the social shifts were overwhelming. There was a shift of power and wealth from the aristocracy and nobility to the upper middle class. The newly rising bourgeoisie and the figure of the merchant successfully established their position in the social order. The first feminists evolved and, even if more often covertly than overtly, voiced their views and sentiments on the status of women.

Plays by female dramatists of the period reflect their awareness of their precarious position in a male-dominated society and their image of women is embodied by their heroines. Generally, women writers adopted a more sensitive writing style and managed to portray fuller and more complex characters than their male counterparts. Thus their plays and characters are more vivacious and true-to-life, even though they are *not at all* realistic depictions of real life.

The first part of this thesis will establish the historical, political, and social context of the plays and playwrights. Particular attention will be paid to the status of women and the structure of class society. Thereafter vital information about theatrical conventions as well as prevailing dramatic and theatrical genres and their representatives will be provided. These topics will be dealt with in detail, as the four plays have to be analysed against this background. In addition, differences between Centlivre and Davys as well as more general differences in plays by male and female dramatists will be highlighted.

The second, more extensive, part is dedicated to the analysis of the four plays and will start out with a brief description of the male characters in the plays. The next section will focus on the sympathetic and tolerant treatment and portrayal of female stock characters.

After this, the perception and depiction of unconventional heroines, their ambiguous sentiments on their status as women, and their social values and conceptions of interpersonal relations will be dealt with. Furthermore, the portrayal of middle- and lower-class characters transgressing their social boundaries as well as their treatment by other characters in the plays will be

discussed. Finally, the significance of the representation of female political involvement will be examined.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse parallels and differences in the four plays with the main focus of attention on unconventional characters, in order to establish reasons for modern critics' treatment and evaluation of Centlivre and Davys on unequal levels, i.e. as a minor and a major playwright. Indeed, this unequal distribution of esteem will be reconsidered.

Davys' two plays will be quoted from the first and only edition: *The Northern Heiress: or, The Humours of York*¹ (1716) and *The Self-Rival*² (1725). Centlivre's *A Gotham Election* will be quoted from Richard Frushell's facsimile edition *The Plays of Susanna Centlivre. Volume 3.* (1982) and *The Busie Body* from the edition by Lyons and Morgan (1991).³

¹ Hereafter the play will be referred to as *The Northern Heiress*.

² Published in *The Works of Mrs. Mary Davys. Consisting of Plays, Novel, Poems, and Familiar Letters. In Two Volumes. Vol. I. Containing The Self-Rival, The Northern Heiress, The Merry Wanderer, The Modern Poet.* Hereafter the collection will be referred to as *Works I*.

³ All primary texts will be referred to by title and page number. The title will not be stated, if it is clear from the context. References will be given to page numbers, not acts, scenes, and lines. As all quotations, page numbers, and names will be quoted verbatim from the editions used, differences in spelling and capitalisation might occur. Secondary literature will be referred to by author and page number, if ambiguity makes it necessary, a keyword from the title will be added.

2. Establishing the historical and political context⁴

During the century between the English Civil War and the reign of George II, England underwent a transformation in political, social and religious life. There was a slow but steady accumulation of national wealth, refinement in the arts of parliamentary government and acceptance of new lines of thought.

The mid-seventeenth century was violent, authoritarian, credulous, poverty-stricken, and absorbed in religious fundamentalism. People of all social classes were confident that virtue and responsibility were inherited by gentlemen and monarchs only. Mid-eighteenth century England, in contrast, seems much more familiar to our own world, with newspapers, tea-tables, concerts, and public parks. This more modern world held a place for newly rising categories such as “the ladies,” “the consumer,” “the citizen,” and the “the middle class” (Spurr 3). Civility as an ideal way of conduct for the elite was put into practice in the form of sociability, urbanity, and politeness in drawing rooms as well as in the public.

2.1. End of the Interregnum and Restoration of the Stuart monarchy⁵

In 1649 the Civil War ended in the trial and execution of King Charles I and the exile of his son, Charles II. The English monarchy was replaced with the Commonwealth of England (1649–1653), which was then followed by a Protectorate (1653–1658) under Oliver Cromwell. This period of parliamentary and military rule is called the English Interregnum.

During the Interregnum the Puritan values of Parliament and its supporters were imposed on the rest of the country. An austere lifestyle was advocated and the excesses of the previous regime were to be severely restricted. Holidays such as Christmas and Easter were seen as pagan elements; hence their celebration was outlawed. Pastimes such as the theatre and gambling were also banned. Only those forms of art that were thought to be virtuous, such as opera, were encouraged.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Spurr 3, 27; Ashley 1

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Spurr 7; Sutherland, *English Literature* 3f, 6-10, 12-15, 20; Young 8f.

After Oliver Cromwell's death his son and designated successor failed to follow in his father's footsteps. As a consequence an elected Convention Parliament proclaimed Charles II King and restored the monarchy in 1660. Along with the restoration of the monarchy came the re-establishment of the Church of England. "Dissent," the new category created, was an uneasy combination of all the dissident religious groups in England (Spurr 7). Anglicanism was regarded as a sign of loyalty and trustworthiness, while dissent was synonymous with Puritanism and regicide. A large number of Englishmen of all classes had now grown sick and tired of the Puritan well-doing, dreariness, graft, and hypocrisy. The re-establishment of the Church of England offered the community security and stability. The uncompromising treatment of dissenters (being convicted, hanged, drawn, and quartered) was extended to all who could be suspected of favouring the old regime. The influence of the Church on the community was beyond question. The country clergy was one of the main supporters of the Tory party after the historical division into Whigs⁶ (opponents of the Roman Catholic James Stuart and his succession to the throne, defending Protestantism) and Tories⁷ (supporters of the monarchy and James) became established.⁸

The satirizing and ridiculing of Puritan hypocrites was a stock theme for the new Restoration comedy. There was also much heroic poetry welcoming the young King. Throughout the reigns of Charles II and James II the "deification of kingship remained a constant theme of the Tory poets" (Sutherland, *English Literature* 4).

Having spent many years in exile in France, Charles II regarded himself as a sort of English Louis XIV. He indisputably possessed clemency, tact, and charm, but he was not able to give his nation a lead. Charles was a schemer and a politician with courage, political adroitness, and genius for postponement, but he left the nation divided in politics and religion. The only areas in which he did give a genuine lead to his subjects were culture, art, and architecture. In spite of the political uncertainty, London was a modern capital steadily growing in power and importance, with most of the recognized facilities of amusement and dissipation, and the cultivation of the arts.

⁶ „a colloquial Scottish term for Presbyterian rebels“ cf. Spurr 9

⁷ „after Irish Catholic brigands of that name“ cf. Spurr 9

⁸ Cf. Spurr 9

Charles II, the so-called *Merrie Monarch*, must at least partly be held responsible for the immorality that pervaded the upper class during his reign. Even though it was publicly known that several of his predecessors also had had mistresses, Charles's overt amours were the talk of town. One of the king's favourites, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, wrote of Charles: "Restless he rolls about from whore to whore/ A merry monarch, scandalous and poor" (31).⁹ Charles's general attitude towards life set the tone for the court and a great part of upper-class society. He was frank and not dissembling, had unshakable self-confidence, and saw the pursuit of pleasure as his highest duty. His hedonistic and libertine values were the complete opposite of the Puritan way of life and its moral strictures. The exiled King and court came back to England disillusioned by past events and deeds done in the name of religion. This disillusionment and uncertainty of the future manifested itself in the debauched social life at court. The celebration of and dedication to pleasure was rooted in deep scepticism and defiance of the strict Puritan ethic. Hence the debauched lifestyle of Charles and his courtiers is not to be considered as immoral, but rather as amoral.

After Charles's rather sudden death in 1685, his brother James succeeded to the throne. James II of England was the last Roman Catholic English monarch. He believed in absolute monarchy and religious liberty and his reign was a constant struggle of supremacy between Parliament and the crown. James had two Protestant daughters by his first wife. In 1688 his second, Roman Catholic, wife unexpectedly gave birth to a son. James's overt Catholicism and the birth of a Catholic prince united the hitherto loyal Tories with the Whigs in common opposition to James.

After only eight months of reign James II was replaced not by his Roman Catholic son, but by his Protestant daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange, who became joint sovereigns in 1689. James returned to France, spending the rest of his life under the protection of Louis XIV. His short reign had at least to some extent united the nation in a determined opposition to Roman Catholicism and absolute government.

⁹ Charles left no legitimate issue; he did, however, have a dozen children by seven mistresses, one of them the (in)famous actress Nell Gwyn; these mistresses and children had to be provided for; six of his many illegitimate sons were created dukes.

The events of 1688, which resulted in the dethronement of James II by the Convention Parliament and accession to the throne of William III and Mary II as joint monarchs, are referred to as the Glorious or Bloodless Revolution.

2.2. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 - William III and Mary II¹⁰

The issue in 1688 was as much political as it was religious. The deposition of the Roman Catholic James II put an abrupt end to the threat of Catholicism becoming re-established in England. At any rate, a deep-seated hatred of Popery was the one emotion that could unite almost the whole nation. Toleration of Nonconformist Protestants and so-called dissenters was limited, and it would take some time before they would gain full political rights. But the social and political situation of Catholics was disastrous; for over one hundred years they were denied the right to vote and sit in parliament or any other public office. In 1701 the Act of Settlement settled the succession of the crown. It excluded anybody who was Catholic or married a Catholic from inheriting or possessing the crown, thus ensuring a Protestant succession. The triumph of the Protestant cause was eventually a triumph for the Whigs and the City.¹¹

The City had enthusiastically welcomed back Charles II in 1660, had turned against James II, and had cordially received William and Mary. Mary was affable but a little austere and discouraged any vicious habits at the Court. In contrast to his predecessors, William involved England in several of the major European wars for eighteen of the twenty-three years of his reign. His regency also marked the beginning of the transition from the personal rule of the Stuarts to the more Parliament-centred rule of the House of Hanover. After Mary's death in 1694, William III continued as sole monarch until his own death in 1702. He was no favourite with the English nobility and even before his death the English upper classes were already flocking around his successor, Queen Anne.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Sutherland, *English Literature* 8, 11

¹¹ Cf. Sutherland, *English Literature* 8

2.3. Queen Anne 1702-1714¹²

Anne, James II's second daughter, succeeded her brother-in-law William and her sister Mary – the only joint monarchs in British history – and became Queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland in 1702. In 1707 Anne became the first sovereign of England and Scotland united as a single state, the Kingdom of Great Britain. She reigned for twelve years until her death in 1714.

Anne's reign and personal life were marked by many crises. By 1700 Anne had been pregnant seventeen times; she suffered twelve miscarriages and stillbirths. Those four of her children who lived did not reach the age of two years. William, her only son to survive infancy, died at the age of eleven.¹³ Since she died without surviving issue, Anne was the last monarch of the House of Stuart. The imminent end of the Stuart line with the death of Queen Anne had led to the drawing up of the Act of Settlement, which ensured Protestant succession. The next in line according to the provisions of this act was George of Hanover.

Although drunkenness, gambling, and duelling were quite common in Queen Anne's London – the Queen herself was an ardent enthusiast for card-playing and enjoyed a tippie – the debauchery practised at the court of her uncle, Charles II, was a thing of the past. At the close of the Stuart age the royal court had virtually ceased to be the centre of London society. The capital was rapidly growing in size and population, social conditions were improving, more employment became available, and trade was circulating more freely after the union between England and Scotland. All in all prosperity, in which most classes participated, was widening. The age of Queen Anne has been called “the prelude to a long era of content” (Ashley 19).

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Ashley 101f; Lodge 7f

¹³ For details on Anne's children and their early deaths cf. Gregg 36, 46f, 52, 55, 99f, 107f, 116, 120; Toone 433

2.4. George I 1714-1727¹⁴

George I was King of Great Britain and Ireland from 1714 until his death. Born in Lower Saxony, in what is now Germany, he spoke German, French, but hardly any English. He regularly visited Hanover to fulfil his duties there. Although there were over fifty Catholics bearing closer blood relations to Anne, George was Anne's closest living Protestant relative. After the death of Queen Anne, he ascended the British throne as the first monarch of the House of Hanover. In reaction, there was a Jacobite rebellion supported by those Tories who dreamt of a Stuart restoration. The attempt to dismiss George and replace him with Anne's Catholic half-brother, James Stuart, failed.

Unfamiliar with the customs of the country and lacking fluent English, George was dependent on his ministers. Especially after the Jacobite rebellion, the Whigs dominated Parliament and continued to do so during the whole of the eighteenth century. This period was one of political stability, and a constitutional monarchy led by a Prime Minister was developing. Towards the end of George's reign, actual power was held by Sir Robert Walpole, Great Britain's first de facto Prime Minister.

2.5. The problem of periodisation

There has been much confusion about the terms "Restoration drama" or "Restoration and eighteenth-century drama," their exact duration and their generous application. Mostly these rough terms have been used rather unspecifically and carelessly. Robert Hume (*Development* 9) was right when he complained about the history of drama, closely considered, being infuriatingly untidy.

The main reason why critics tend to use the term "Restoration" is that the reign which influenced the drama and theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most was that of Charles II. Many writers – especially women writers – continued to write Restoration comedies or derivatives of them well into the reigns of George I and George II.

¹⁴ Cf. The Official Web Site of the British Monarchy

The broad application of the designation “Restoration” has been discussed by Hume (3f). The first question arising from this rough periodisation is: what period does it mean? Twenty years, forty years, or seventy-seven years? The beginning of the period is clear-cut with the restoration of Charles II and the reopening of the theatres in 1660. Most commonly, the term Restoration drama includes the years 1660-1700, but extension is often made to 1707, or even 1737. However, there is no real break either in 1700 or in 1707, apart from the purely chronological break of the turn of the century. Hume (*Development* 482) also rejects the pernicious tendency to see William Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700)¹⁵ as the culmination of and its failure as the end of Restoration drama, as popular myth has it. Allardyce Nicoll supports this view, stating that “the comedy of manners was in the full flush of its highest bloom [...] when the year 1700 came” (125). Only the Licensing Act of 1737 puts an end to the natural if erratic development of English drama. It is self-evident that most early eighteenth-century drama can be viewed as an outgrowth of late seventeenth-century developments. Hume usefully considers “[t]he time between the reopening of the theatres in 1660 and the government’s interference with them in 1737 [...] as a unit of one sort in English theatre history” (5). He (*Development* 433) divides Restoration drama into the following sub-categories: old court-oriented Carolean drama (*fl.* 1665-85) and new Augustan drama (dominant in the first quarter of the eighteenth century). For many years both kinds of drama co-existed. While Southerne and Congreve were still trying to revive and carry on Carolean comedy, Shadwell already started to avoid bawdy, following the taste of the new bourgeois audience.¹⁶ Within each of these sub-categories there exists a considerable diversity of plays.

Chronologically, neither Mary Davys nor Susanna Centlivre really belongs to Restoration drama. However, like many female playwrights, they were among the last writers who wrote derivatives of these rather old-fashioned plays. Being women, they had to avoid scenes which were too bawdy anyway. But their plays tended to be a mixture of Restoration comedy of intrigue and the new Augustan modes of exemplary or sentimental comedy.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, the dates added to the plays in parentheses indicate the year of the first performance.

¹⁶ Cf. Hume, *Development* 8f

3. Social context of the playwrights

3.1. Life in early eighteenth-century England¹⁷

Early eighteenth-century England had a very complex class-structure; English society was class-conscious but not caste-ridden. Thus the peerage and the gentry can be regarded as one class. In contrast to any other kingdom on the Continent, there was some degree of freedom of movement within it and between it and the other classes. Aristocrats mixing with middle-class owners of trading companies were already familiar before the turn of the century. Even more common were wealthy businessmen buying country estates and turning themselves or their children into gentry, and possibly their grandchildren into peers. Quite often business deals were sealed by marrying one's sons and daughters across the boundaries of class. If a gentleman wanted to marry his daughter within her own class, he might have had to half ruin himself in order to provide a suitable portion for her.

English social classes were exceptionally diversified: after the few great aristocratic families, the peerage, and the gentry came the middle class(es): merchants, businessmen in the City, tradesmen, professional men (doctors, lawyers, and churchmen); next lower down comes the rural class: the small farmers, the yeomen of England, followed by the equally differentiated working class, from the skilled craftsman through the copper-miner to the weaver, the cowman, the ploughman down to the casual labourer and the squatter on the common in any village.

The complexity of English society and its highly multifaceted nature really ought to be emphasised. No one was far above or far below the next one, which was quite contrary to earlier times or other European states. The climb up was steep but its rewards were enormous and acting as an incentive; men of all levels discovered their energies, their inventive talents, and their business acumen. They started to make this miniature nation what it became later. These minute gradations in society might have made for its stability. Though social discontent existed, they might have saved England from its neighbour's fate: a revolution.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Williams 6-9

3.1.1. The court, the courtiers, and the City¹⁸

By the reign of Queen Anne, London was almost twice as populous as it had been under Queen Elizabeth I. An industrial town and busy seaport as well as the centre of the kingdom's commerce and finance, the City inevitably derived political influence from its financial strength. London was a cosmopolitan city.

During the London Season, while Parliament was in session – from some time after Christmas until June – the City was full of social whirl. There was the theatre, the opera, and more dubious hustle and bustle at masquerades and bagnios¹⁹. The latest news and gossip were picked up and spread in the sundry coffee houses, chocolate houses, taverns and clubs. Gambling was a favourite pastime: “It was the national weakness, from the Court down to the humblest ale-house” (Williams 44). “Drink was another national passion. ‘Drunk as a lord’ is an eighteenth-century phrase with a sound empirical basis” (Williams 46). When the Season was over by late June, the outdoor-life was reckoned all-important. The wealthy and noble gentleman spent many of his waking hours hunting. Tennis, cricket, and horse-racing were popular, too.

3.1.2. The upper classes: nobility and gentry²⁰

During the Stuart age the monarch, the nobility, and gentry were the most eminent figures in English life. Peers were created with lavish hands; thus only a few of the peers could claim to be of ancient ancestry, most of them being able to trace a prestigious lineage only as far back as the Restoration.²¹ More and more often they deigned to marry into families of inferior descent with fortunes from business:

Though it was sometimes claimed by contemporaries that the commercial classes were beginning to oust the landed gentry, in fact the two classes intermingled; many a landlord saved his estates from ruin by a judicious marriage. (Ashley 68f)

¹⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Ashley 76, 83f, 100f; Williams 44-46

¹⁹ Originally a word used to describe coffee houses which offered Turkish baths, but by 1740 it signified a place where rooms could be provided for the night with no questions asked. Later this term was used to refer to a house of prostitution. (Cf. description of William Hogarth's painting *Marriage A-la-Mode*: 5, *The Bagnio* ca. 1743)

²⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Ashley 61-63, 68f, 76; Williams 21f, 25-29

²¹ Cf. Ashley 61f

Most of the nobility had a tremendously extravagant lifestyle, owning several residences and having many dependants and servants. They built themselves new houses, bought jewellery, paintings, and sculpture, hunted over vast parklands, and spent enormous amounts of money on food, drink, and clothing.

Peers and the gentry had much in common: both were landlords, both accepted the rule of primogeniture and the custom of entail, and both had to find portions for their daughters and younger sons. The gentry generally accepted the ideals and the conduct of the aristocracy.²² While the peers were members of the House of Lords, the gentry were represented in the House of Commons. The gentry, like the nobility, enjoyed living in beautiful and lavish homes with herb gardens, orchards, and flower gardens. Straightforward extravagance was a common cause of debt, especially among those gentry who yielded to the prevalent fashion of rebuilding their houses in the latest style. Another typical cause of debt was drink and cards. But the greatest cause was the land-tax; small gentry could not survive paying a fifth of their income to the government. A second or third income was vital – you had to go either into politics or some form of business.²³

Hence the landed class were no longer simply passive receivers of rent, and those who were failed. They had capital in every kind of commercial and industrial undertaking: they developed scientific farming, exploited the minerals and mines on their estates, and imported goods via the East India route. They exploited what they had and generated further sources of income. The most important source was public office, “[...] a bottomless treasure-chest from which the upper class subsidised themselves and supported their dependants” (Williams 26).

Political power and influence on elections was allotted along with the estates. This meant that the more land you had, and the higher your public offices were the better was your ability to buy even more land.

During the Georgian period a steady accumulation of large estates took place. While in the Stuart age land had been the safest form of investment, in the Georgian period those who bought land invested in political power and social

²² Cf. Trevor Roper, Hugh. *The Gentry, 1540-1640* (undated) qtd. in Ashley, 68

²³ Cf. Williams 22

prestige. Land transfers induced stability as the estates went to those who already had plenty and not to upstarts.²⁴ The Georgian landed class is famous for the stability, steady enlargement, and longevity of their estates. They adopted a dynastic attitude, strictly adhering to the custom of entail. For them “[...] the land and the family were more important than the individual holder, just as the kingdom is more important than the individual monarch” (Williams 27f).

3.1.2.1. Marriage

The most representative manifestations of this attitude are the arrangements made at the marriage of the eldest son of a family. There was a system of strict settlement, where the heir became actually only a life-tenant of the estate until the whole was entailed on his eldest son. The settlement usually ensured that the heir could neither sell nor mortgage the inherited property; it also made provisions for a jointure for his wife (an annual income) and for portions (lump sums) for his daughters and younger sons when attaining full age. This system was a powerful force in holding estates together generation after generation and even contributed to their increase.²⁵ It was customary for the nobility and gentry to marry not for love but for estates. Wives brought in useful portions which were used to pay off debts, to improve estates or buy further ones, and to employ plenty of domestic servants, who were cheap enough. Marriage thus became an important method of gaining property:

As Sir William Temple put it, ‘our marriages are made, just like other common bargains and sales, by the mere consideration of interest or gain, without any love or esteem, of birth or of beauty itself.’ (Williams 29)

Marriage of an heiress was a common way of enhancing the family fortunes, many of the heiresses being daughters of middle-class businessmen. The obvious hope was to marry money and social position.

As a result of this marriage industry it is not surprising that men as well as women were seeking illicit relationships. However, according to the old tradition of a double sexual standard male adultery was more or less tolerated as a common practice in arranged marriages.

²⁴ Cf. Williams 21

²⁵ Cf. Williams 29

3.1.2.2. Education²⁶

Education in the modern sense was basically neglected in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. Even upper-class education was somehow unorganized. Girls were mostly educated at home, often by their mothers. Boys were also often educated at home by tutors, as most schools were inadequate. English public schools, which were just beginning to evolve during this period, had originally been founded to prepare local humble-born young men for university. Now some of the headmasters were discovering the financial potential of taking in fee-paying pupils and managed to make a real success of this business venture. Many noble and wealthy pupils almost did the schools a favour being there and the result was often a kind of mob-rule. The senior scholars already started practising drinking, gambling, and wenching for their later adult social life.²⁷

The Dissenting Academies were much more useful; modern subjects like science, mathematics, and geography were taught to pupils coming from the middle class. As a matter of fact, some of the public schools began to attract people by copying the Dissenting Academies' methods.²⁸

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge were even worse than the public schools. Their dons reputedly gave hardly any lectures, and if they did, few of the undergraduates attended. While the upper class lived a life apart, imitating high life in London, only the scholars of modest origin got down to their books, because they had their careers to make.²⁹

After finishing university, eighteenth-century persons of quality went on the Grand Tour to the Continent – mostly Italy and France – for a year.³⁰ The next stage in a young gentleman's life was the House of Commons, politics being the sure road to success in all walks of life. When the parliamentary session began in autumn, the high society flocked to the City. As already mentioned above, there was much more to the London Season than boring parliamentary duty.

²⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, the information for this section is taken from Williams 27, 34f, 37ff, 41, 44f

²⁷ Cf. Williams 37

²⁸ Cf. Williams 37

²⁹ Cf. Williams 37f

³⁰ Cf. Williams 39

3.1.3. Middle class and merchants³¹

It is nearly impossible to define the middle class with any degree of precision. The rising bourgeoisie – an urban business class – was expanding though in England it was never a really distinctive class. The golden age for the English yeomanry – a kind of rural middle class – was over and a purely capitalist society was taking shape.

Industry and shipping flourished during the Stuart period, foreign trade advancing at high speed. Most merchants ploughed their profits back into their own businesses until they had earned enough money to launch into further ventures. There was no end to enterprising and there are many success stories of merchants who made vast fortunes by trade. Commerce provided capital for investments of all sorts and dominated City politics. In the end, big merchants mixed on almost equal terms with the landed aristocracy.³²

The stratum of businessmen immediately below this level – country bankers, wholesale dealers, ship owners, shopkeepers etc. – was closely knit. Merchants and industrialists, big or small, usually married the daughters of their business partners or married their sons to them. In the City most merchants and tradesmen lived over their shops or on their business premises, their wives often taking an active part in their enterprises.

Whereas at the outset of the seventeenth century the big landed and the moneyed interests were still distinct, after the Stuart restoration they were increasingly mixed. In fact England was already entitled to call itself a nation of shopkeepers in the reign of Queen Anne.³³

As many grammar schools and public schools were not really compatible with business education (subjects like book-keeping, accounts, were totally neglected), the Dissenting Academies formed a much more appropriate educational basis for sons of the trading class. Their successful new subjects³⁴ and new methods attracted Anglicans as well as Dissenters, and gentlemen as

³¹ Unless otherwise indicated the information in this chapter is taken from Ashley 40, 47, 49f, 53ff; Williams 70f

³² Cf. Ashley 48

³³ Cf. Ashley 49

³⁴ Subjects taught at Philip Doddridge's Dissenting Academy are shorthand, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, logic, rhetoric, geography, metaphysics, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, conic-sections, celestial-mechanics, mechanics, statics, hydrostatics, optics, pneumatics, astronomy, history and anatomy. Cf. Williams 71

well as merchants. However, especially concerning business education, the traditional system of apprenticeship was still an integral part of middle-class education.

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge were thrown open to the wealthy sons of gentlemen who needed a higher education in order to enter professions other than the Church.

In Stuart England, the members of the middle classes became more numerous and more specialized. New types of professional men emerged, such as paid scientists, journalists, accountants, etc. The army became a new profession in itself. Throughout this age a gradual decline in amateur status can be noticed.

Doctors also formed a rising professional class, which is not surprising in view of the many epidemics and scourges that regularly swept the country. Most physicians still based their practices on the classical teachings of Hippocrates and Galen's doctrine of "the four humours."³⁵ Administering evacuants, emetics, and purgatives in high doses as well as copious bleedings were common treatments.³⁶ Childbirth was seen as directed by fate rather than by the physician.

Clergymen could till their "glebe lands"³⁷ and supplement their stipends by teaching or by looking after more than one church, which was called pluralism. After 1704 the parson was accepted as one of the leading figures in the village community.³⁸

³⁵ According to Galen (129–216 AD), the four cardinal humours were blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile), and melancholy (black bile). The mixture of the four humours in each person expressed both mental and physical characteristics. Health and illness were conceived in terms of the overall balance of the humours and qualities; therapeutics was concerned with restoring the equilibrium or healthy mixture of the humours. An excess of a humour could be eliminated by bleeding, purging, vomiting, or sweating, as could also a vitiated or unhealthy humour. Humoral medicine of the body lasted until the late seventeenth century in Europe and retained some influence in the eighteenth century. Therapeutic measures such as bleeding and purging continued to be used. The language of the humours was still employed to characterize people, and melancholy, especially, was a major category of mental illness. Cf. "humours."

³⁶ Cf. Ashley 53

³⁷ Glebe was a portion of land allocated to support a priest. Though originally it was intended as the sole support, it soon required substantial augmentation, usually through tithes. In the 18th century many glebes were enlarged, either in compensation for enclosures or in lieu of tithes. Cf. "glebe."

³⁸ Cf. Ashley 55

3.1.4. Lower classes³⁹

The ordinary people who made up most of the population of Stuart and Georgian England – labouring people, domestic servants, cottagers, common seamen and soldiers, paupers, and vagabonds, are often disregarded. In contrast to the prospering gentry, they lived on an extremely low level of income. Ordinary men and women worked all day long except on Sundays or public holidays. The church and the alehouse were their social meeting places. Even the skilled tradesman, the carpenter, the mason, or the blacksmith, usually had some land to till, a cow to milk, or hens to feed. While looking after her quiver full of children, the ordinary wife had to collect and prepare the food, and to clean the cottage. On Sundays, outside service hours, a crowd might gather to sneer at a criminal in the stocks or to watch the public whipping of some unfortunate woman who had given birth to an illegitimate child.⁴⁰

The treatment of the poor was extremely harsh. Few people in authority recognized that poverty and unemployment might be involuntary. They were usually attributed to deliberate laziness or vice. In the Stuart period, vagabonds were punished and kicked out of the parish so that they would not become a local responsibility. Poor people who could not be ejected were sent to “houses of correction” or “bridewells,” which were nothing but workhouses (Ashley 26).

Those who were in work mostly received meagre wages. As women naturally earned even less than men, it hardly paid wives to go out to work. Families worked as a unit: wives helped in the fields, gardens, or shops and children were set to work from a very early age. And, as already mentioned, nearly all cottages had a piece of land on which to grow food or feed cattle.

There was no education apart from the Charity School movement – a project typical of middle-class zeal – hoping to spread virtue among the poor by teaching them to read.⁴¹ They were taught to be useful workers and upright citizens. However, they were not supposed to be poisoned with political aspirations.

³⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Ashley 21, 24-30; Williams 120f

⁴⁰ Cf. Ashley 24f

⁴¹ Also on the curriculum were a little writing, arithmetic and a good deal of spinning, knitting and other lowly tasks. Cf. Williams 121

Ordinary men and women did not marry very young. Firstly, they simply could not afford to do so and secondly, the parish authorities took care that a marriage did not take place until the couple had a proper home to live in and so was not liable to come on to the poor rate. Young women either worked for their fathers or were employed as domestic servants or nurses in wealthier households until they married. Young men had to complete their apprenticeships. The average man married at twenty-six, the average woman at twenty-two. If the couple was lucky they had more than ten years of life together.⁴²

Even in Puritan times the village lads often got the village maidens into trouble. The authorities were extremely strict about illegitimate children – not so much because of their sinfulness as because the parish did not want to pay for their upbringing. Thus men and women regularly appeared before local courts being charged with and punished for “incontinence” (Ashley 29).

The average wife’s life of “incessant toil” and the “regular output of unwanted children” made her “old long before [her] time” (Ashley 30). According to Maurice Ashley it has been said that “the agricultural labourer himself seldom went hungry, but the ‘misery of the labourer’s lot was only felt by women’” (30).

3.2. Women

3.2.1. Social situation and education⁴³

Women were legal and social inferiors to men. Men were the measure of all things and women were generally regarded as less evolved, inferior human beings. Chastity and obedience were ancient but still valid prerequisites of the ideal woman. Especially in the eighteenth century, the supposedly female qualities of compassion, sympathy, intuition, and natural spontaneous feeling were virtually glorified.

A woman’s proper sphere was in the home with her children and at the service of her husband. This view was supported by church, state, and society in general. A husband had full power over his wife and a wife had to subject

⁴² Cf. Ashley 29

⁴³ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Young 11-14

herself to her husband in all things. A woman's lifelong occupation was being a maid, a wife, a mother, a cook, and a nurse. Genteel young ladies were well-prepared for the task which lay ahead of them as future mistresses of a household: the administration of the household, the management of the servants, and the organisation of the family.

Women did not receive much education. Those who did were instructed in the domestic arts, learned to read, to play some music and perhaps a little bit of French or Italian. Usually they did not attend schools but were trained informally in the home. There was an abundance of didactic literature teaching women how to behave. What and how much was to be learned depended entirely on the head of the household. Even aristocratic daughters were most often only trained in deportment (stressing modesty, chastity, and diligence) and housewifery. Anything beyond that was not in keeping with the general attitude of society towards the role of women.

There was a widespread practice to teach girls how to read but not how to write in the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ In general, there was a strong feeling of prejudice against the education of girls and its dreaded end-product, the "learned woman" or "learned lady" (Fraser 121). These learned ladies were of a rare breed and subject to satire in Restoration comedy, for example in *The Plain-Dealer* by Wycherley or *Love for Love* by Dryden.

3.2.2. Legal situation⁴⁵

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries "when two became one in marriage, the one was the husband" (Young 12). Before the law a husband and wife were one person. A woman's legal existence was thus extinguished by marriage. This meant when a woman married she was placed, along with underage children, "in the same legal category as wards, lunatics, idiots and outlaws" (Greenberg⁴⁶ qtd. in Hill 196). By marriage a woman became a *feme covert* implying that she was "under the protection and influence of her

⁴⁴ Cf. Burnett 145; Mendelson 182

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, information for this section is taken from Hill 196ff

⁴⁶ Cf. Greenberg, Janelle. "The legal status of the English woman in early eighteenth-century common law and equity." In *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 4. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve UP, 1975. 171-81.

husband, her *baron* or lord” and was entirely subjected to his authority (Blackstone⁴⁷ qtd. in Hill 196). Married women could not own property. Everything they possessed prior to marriage or obtained during the marriage – any income from land and real estate, any future legacies, and all earnings – would automatically become their husbands’ property.⁴⁸

Furthermore, a wife could not sue or be sued. Neither did a wife possess any legal power in relation to her children. A husband had total control over his children and could even take them away from his wife and deny her any contact with them. This control continued even after his death, as he could appoint a guardian for his children in his will. A wife was supposed to be completely subject to her husband and any misbehaviour could be amended by domestic chastisement, as a man’s right to chastise his wife was enshrined in common law.⁴⁹

3.2.3. Marriage⁵⁰

Marriage for the upper and middle classes was a process of financial bargaining. Normally, neither sex had much voice in the choice of a mate. Vast wealth was exchanged when the English nobility married and fathers established an appropriate price for their sons and daughters. A girl was provided with a dowry, over which her future husband would maintain complete control. A son in return would have to sustain his future wife and family with a jointure, an estate settled on a wife to sustain her in case of his death. Of course, a daughter was expected to be a virgin, for “[l]egally, a woman’s chastity was considered the property of either her father or her husband” (Goreau 10). Virginity was thus considered an indispensable part of a young woman’s dowry. A father could sue his daughter’s seducer for damages as could a husband sue his wife’s lover for damaging his property – this was actually practised, and successfully so. This absolute insistence on chastity in women had its roots in concrete economic and social circumstance. Under the

⁴⁷ Cf. Blackstone, William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England in four books. Vol II.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1765-1769.

⁴⁸ Cf. Stone 161

⁴⁹ Cf. Vickery 86

⁵⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this chapter is taken from Goreau 9f; Hill 210f, 215ff; Young 10-19

primogenital inheritance system the matter of paternity was very important. There was high danger that “women might bring forth branches from the wrong stock” (Goreau 9).

The sole purpose of upper-class and middle-class marriages was to preserve and expand estates and wealth. Matchmaking amongst the propertied was a lengthy and complicated business demanding great skill and hard bargaining. Engagements which collapsed tainted the woman’s reputation, so the process of negotiation often involved a range of family and friends.

However,

[a]fter the excitements of the wedding came the monotony of the marriage; for ‘Wedding puts and end to wooing [...]’ as the *Ladies Dictionary* dismally put it. Men got up off their knees, and, metaphorically at least, women got down to theirs.⁵¹ (Vickery 59)

Pamela, the eponymous heroine of Richardson’s 1740 epistolary novel, was appalled at the “strange and shocking difference” in husbands when “fond lovers, prostrate at their [ladies’] feet,” were transformed into “surly husbands, trampling upon their necks!” (*Pamela II* 446).

These arranged marriages lasted for life; divorce could only be granted by Act of Parliament, was prohibitively expensive, and extremely rare. Between 1670 and 1857 there were only 325 divorces in England, all but four of them obtained by men.⁵² For a woman, legal exit from a marriage was virtually impossible. She had to prove not only adultery but also life-threatening cruelty, bigamy, rape, incest, or sodomy in the church courts to gain legal separation.⁵³ There was absolutely no privacy in case of a divorce, it would definitely cause public scandal and condemnation from society. If the husband was found guilty, approximately one third of his land and immovable goods would be given to the wife as alimony. If the wife’s infidelity was proved, her husband would be required to provide her with separate maintenance while suffering from the social stigma of being a cuckolded husband.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Cf. N.H. *The Ladies Dictionary, Being a General Entertainment for the Fair Sex*. London: 1694, 505.

⁵² Cf. Vickery 73

⁵³ Cf. Hill 211

⁵⁴ Cf. Young 12

The monotony of marriage was not the worst a wife had to fear. Often there was also violence and cruelty, physical as well as mental. In the Chester Church Court women who filed for separate maintenance in the later eighteenth century made familiar allegations of their husbands' barbarous behaviour,

[...] denying them sufficient victuals, clothing and other necessaries of life: showing hatred, aversion and physical brutality; threatening to murder or maim; and keeping company with prostitutes and adulteresses. Indeed, [...] in [many] cases, husbands had threatened to commit their wives to a house of correction or the madhouse. (Vickery 81)

Among the labouring class a special kind of alternative to divorce by Act of Parliament was in use: wife-sale, which bore many resemblances to slave trade.⁵⁵

However, most often women were released by death not divorce. As Amanda Vickery aptly put it in *The Gentleman's Daughter*, “[t]he keys to earthly paradise were not given to all, and those without might endure thirty years or more in matrimonial purgatory” (39f).

3.2.4. Motherhood and childbirth⁵⁶

In the eighteenth century motherhood along with the novel bourgeois concept of womanhood redefined women as asexual beings. Domestic nurturance and emotional warmth gave a wife and mother her place in society; women became “‘natural’ mothers” (Vickery 91). Motherhood as a social role and as “a woman’s *raison d’être*” (Vickery 90) was an eighteenth-century invention, but all this praise of female purity and softness as well as the idealization of women was nothing new. Visions of female nature had oscillated for centuries between

⁵⁵ This official event was announced beforehand and took place in markets with enough space for a large audience. Wives were led into the market like cattle, by a halter round their necks or tied to an arm, and went to the highest bidder. This outrageous and inhuman custom was retained from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and seems to have been a common way of legitimately ending a marriage, the initiative coming from the husband. Only in few cases adultery of the wife was the reason for wife-sale. Most often a sold wife faced a total stranger as her purchaser. However wife-sale was perhaps the only chance to a better life for a lower-class woman in an unhappy marriage and without any financial support. A husband was thus not only released from a marriage with an unwanted wife, but also from any further financial responsibility for her. Cf. Hill 215ff

⁵⁶ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this chapter is taken from Vickery 92ff, 96ff, 117f, 121ff, 124

the virtuous and the vicious, between the Madonna and the Magdalene.⁵⁷ However, the sentimentality and romanticism of the eighteenth century accessorised the image of tender motherhood with sheer glamour.⁵⁸ This newly fashionable maternalism was even exploited by eighteenth-century actresses who “carefully accentuated their maternity to refurbish their reputations” (Vickery 94).

However, when a woman conceived she met her fate. She never knew how easily she would bear pregnancy, how safely she would deliver, how robust would be her infant, or how long and healthy its life. Christian stoicism was the philosophy of many a mother.⁵⁹ For healthy, fertile women motherhood could absorb almost all reserves of physical and emotional energy for at least a decade. Despite the measureless emotion and energy spent on child-bearing and child-rearing, women never described motherhood in terms of work. However, especially for genteel women, motherhood was one of the dominant employments. The “average’ mother in this period bore six to seven live children” (Vickery 97). Every pregnant woman knew of someone who had died in childbed and knew she could be next. Indeed, it was not uncommon for pregnant women to prepare themselves for death.⁶⁰ As a consequence of women’s lack of knowledge concerning methods of birth control, the frequent pregnancies weakened the constitution of both mother and child. This was one of the reasons for the short life expectancy.⁶¹

After childbirth itself, contagion circulated all about eighteenth-century parents. Epidemics of dysentery, typhoid, various kinds of fevers, and smallpox scourged the cities and towns of England in summer; diphtheria and typhus raged in winter. Of course, the full burden of nursing fell to the mother. Helpless parents witnessing the acute suffering of their children went through a virtually universal ordeal. Obviously it was most extreme in London, but illness also scythed through the provinces.⁶² The death of a child was a grievous loss, in the face of which parents had little choice but to submit like proper Christians.

⁵⁷ Cf. Vickery 92f

⁵⁸ Cf. Vickery 93

⁵⁹ Cf. Vickery 96

⁶⁰ Cf. Vickery 98

⁶¹ Cf. Young 14

⁶² Cf. Vickery 117

Nevertheless, child-rearing was not unremitting misery. Especially among the middle and upper classes it was widely recognized that raising children, a completely maternal performance, could be rewarding as well as amusing. Many of the genteel parents of Georgian England expressed their abundant affection for their offspring. This is also demonstrated by Samuel Johnson who listed “tenderness; parental care” as one of the definitions of love in his *Dictionary of the English Language*. (387)

3.2.5. Widows⁶³ and spinsters⁶⁴

According to Bridget Hill (240) there was a trend towards more women – unmarried and widows – heading households from the end of the seventeenth century. Widows were predominating and less likely to remarry than widowers; older widows were less likely to remarry than younger ones. There also seems to have been a crisis in marriage at the end of the seventeenth and in the early eighteenth century, some sort of scarcity of husbands for widows and unmarried women, the latter ones resenting the former ones in competition for husbands.

Around the turn of the century many a widow carried on her husband’s farm, shop, or trade and managed the household on her own – especially if there was no son to take over – and often successfully so. This was unthinkable a century later. A widow was highly reliant upon her husband’s will and its provisions. Even if she was left with adequate provision, her children had prior claims to her husband’s estate. A remarriage might also cut across her children’s interests, which needed to be protected. Apart from this, when she remarried, a widow gave up her legal identity, and, again becoming a *feme covert*, lost all control over her property.⁶⁵

A wealthy widow found herself suddenly released from legal and marital bondage, living an independent life free from financial worries and “that guardianship and control to which the sex are subject while virgins, and while wives” (Alexander⁶⁶ qtd. in Hill 250). If she wanted to marry again, she had a lot

⁶³ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Hill 240-243, 249f

⁶⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Hill 221, 226, 228-231, 236-239

⁶⁵ Cf. Hill 196

⁶⁶ Cf. Alexander, William. *The History of Women Vol. II*. London: Strahan & Cadell, 1779. 309f.

more to offer than natural charms now. The extensive comic possibilities of the pursuit of wealthy widows by eligible gallants have been made use of by Restoration playwrights. But in the real world many a well-provided widow preferred the independence and “comfortable state” of widowhood to remarriage (*The Beggar’s Opera* I.x.21). Regarding the way their husbands had been chosen for them, it is hardly shocking that some aristocratic women were looking forward to the death of their husbands and the independence and pleasure of widowhood. This fact is also commented on in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) by Mrs. Peachum:

PEACHUM. Parting with him! Why, that is the whole scheme and intention of all marriage articles. The comfortable state of widowhood is the only hope that keeps up a wife’s spirits. Where is the woman who would scruple to be a wife, if she had it in her power to be a widow whenever she pleased? (I.x.20-25)

Due to the high death rate, this was reasonable enough, and especially so in London.⁶⁷ In this respect widowhood, particularly among the well-to-do, was a woman’s reward for her father’s hard bargaining and negotiating.

Spinsters deserve separate treatment from married women; having a legal identity – as *femes soles*⁶⁸ – they enjoyed many rights withheld from married women. They could own property and trade independently. At a time when women were either married or to be married, spinsters belonged to an exclusive as well as excluded category. When to be a ‘maid’ was an essentially temporary state on the way to marriage, unmarried women were an anomaly. Like widows, they were a popular focus of malice and scorn. Society regarded them as social failures, their families felt nothing but shame for them. Sometimes, when parents left their unmarried daughter unprovided for, she fell to the bounty of her brother, which of course, was utterly humiliating. If and when the brother married, his unmarried sister was considered an intruder and a burden, and, sometimes sent away with a small stipend.

Spinsters, especially single women of the middle class who were deprived of their ability to work, were often reproached for refusing “to be used to that end

⁶⁷ Cf. Wrigley 63f

⁶⁸ Cf. Hill 7

for which they were only made" viz. to propagate the species (Burton⁶⁹ qtd. in Hill 229). Their lives were thought useless and valueless, their virginity was regarded a wasted asset. Such attitudes and the total denial by society of any identity made women fear staying unmarried; hence they often married just to be married, even if they despised their husbands. Spinsters were also seen as a challenge and threat to authority, male authority that is, and to society in general. The only socially accepted reason for remaining unmarried was having failed to hook a husband. It was inconceivable that any woman would choose spinsterhood. During the eighteenth century especially middle-class spinsters were stigmatised by having to earn a living.⁷⁰ At the end of the century Mary Wollstonecraft even suggested that the attempts of middle-class women "to earn their own subsistence," even if they were most laudable, sank them almost "to the level of those poor abandoned creatures who live by prostitution" (218).

Being employed in domestic service often killed two birds with one stone for unmarried women, as it provided them with a roof over the head and board. This was vital for spinsters with no home and with parents who could not afford to support them any longer. Especially in rural areas, unmarried woman without children could barely survive. For involuntary spinsters who faced unemployment and starvation, the only escape was to become pregnant and thus obtain a husband. Even if no husband resulted, the mother of an illegitimate child received a higher allowance than a single woman.⁷¹ "[M]arriage at any price, or even illegitimate relations, seemed to some women the only solution to life" (Hampson⁷² qtd. in Hill 239). Numerous marriages were thus concluded purely out of economic necessity, any husband being better than none; the luxury of love was hardly affordable.

However, there were some women who chose to remain single, many of them living both useful and fulfilled lives. Those we know most about are scholars and writers such as Mary Astell, Elisabeth Elstob, Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Talbot, Jane Collier, or Sarah Fielding.⁷³

⁶⁹ Cf. Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Vol. 2. 1621. 49.

⁷⁰ Cf. Hill 231

⁷¹ In the late eighteenth century this might have been a reason for the increase in illegitimacy, rather than a decline in moral standards. Cf. Hill 239

⁷² Cf. Hampson, E.M. *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire 1597-1834*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1934. 218.

⁷³ Cf. Hill 231

3.2.6. Work⁷⁴

In the first half of the eighteenth century the majority of English households were rural and dependent on the cultivation of a small parcel of land. Except for the upper classes, it was taken for granted that women worked. Female labour was universal and often vital for the sheer subsistence of the family, women working both waged and unwaged, in the home and outside of it.

The term “housework” in the eighteenth century involved cooking, baking and brewing, the usual chores of fetching water, cleaning, washing and smoothing or ironing clothes, collecting fuel for heating and cooking, lightening and tending of fire as well as cleaning the hearth, sewing and mending clothes etc. and sometimes also spinning, and thus clothing the family. Eighteenth-century housework was not at all confined to the house; behind the ordinary tasks of cooking, baking, washing and cleaning lay a great deal of preparatory work. Middle- and upper-class women seemed only too anxious to shift this work on to domestic servants. As they occupied bigger houses, coal for heating, more furniture, curtains, and carpets, the amount of cleaning necessary was much higher than in lower-class houses.

In addition to housework and bearing and rearing children, women worked in their husbands’ farms, trades, crafts, or shops. Often they also took up a different sideline. The poorer a woman the less her work differed from that of a man.

Some traditional areas of farm work were female monopolies: the dairy, the poultry, the vegetable garden, the orchard and preparing and selling of produce at the local market. It was usually women who did the sowing, the weeding, the hoeing, and the harvesting of crops and took any surplus produce to the market. The smaller the area of land possessed, the bigger was the importance of its cultivation for the family’s self-sufficiency; common rights⁷⁵ also played a decisive role in a family’s maintenance, especially for landless families.

Urban households were generally much less self-sufficient than rural ones and depended more on the shops and markets. While rural women tended

⁷⁴ Unless indicated otherwise the information in this section is taken from Hill 27, 33-36, 38, 41, 45f, 115, 149ff, 153, 160f, 172f

⁷⁵ Such as grazing, gathering wood, herbs, nuts, wild fruit and berries. Sometimes hunting rabbits, hares, pigeons and deer was also allowed. Cf. Hill 37

vegetables, baked bread and made clothes, urban women had to go shopping. They also worked in the crafts, trades or shops of their husbands.

In towns a combination of manufacturing and agriculture was quite often carried on: Textiles (cotton-spinning and weaving) combined with stock-keeping and running a dairy often formed the basis for a certain degree of prosperity. Wives also contributed to the family budget in the form of home-grown food (vegetables, milk, butter, cheese, eggs) which was also sold at the market, and of clothes of their making from raw material. At hay-time and harvest they also earned money to contribute to the family budget.

The professional guild in which by far most women were employed was domestic service. Many daughters were sent into the towns to become domestic servants as less agricultural work was left for women in the countryside. Washerwoman and charwoman were the sole traditional women-only occupations for married women and widows. They might be seen as an extension of domestic service for women who used to be living-in domestic servants prior to marriage.

There were also other conventional women's trades like mantua-makers, milliners, seamstresses, as well as all branches of textiles (wool, linen, silk, and cotton). Some women also worked as teachers, schoolmistresses, or governesses. There were far more women who kept lodging-houses than men and also many female shopkeepers, hawkers, peddlers, and milk-sellers.

Wives of shopkeepers and tradesmen (such as bakers, butchers, grocers, shoemakers etc.) were usually engaged in their husbands' businesses, often as virtual partners in the business, but of course on an informal basis and without pay. Research about seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century women's occupations proves to be difficult, because in most local listings of inhabitants of a parish and burial registers, women are only identified by their marital status.⁷⁶ Such omissions account for anomalies like nobody making a living from spinning the yarn that employed so many male weavers.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "Women were identified mainly by marital status-as wives, widows, and spinsters-and by their husbands' names. Male clerks apparently considered this a more valid identification for a woman than her occupation." (Lindert 691)

⁷⁷ Cf. Lindert 691

Where no doctor was available, which was quite often the case, women worked as physicians, surgeons, nurses, and of course as midwives.

In the early eighteenth century a growing number of wives were employed in printing, publishing, and bookselling, many of them continuing to run the business on their husbands' death. Female hawkers and peddlers played an important role in making reading matter accessible to the rural population in the provincial towns.

Especially in times of underemployment or unemployment and low wages, prostitution presented an opportunity of employment for women. London was obviously its centre, but it also spread to other towns during the eighteenth century. What contributed to its increase was its part-time, seasonal, and transitional nature. Needless to say, earnings were higher than in most other occupations for women. As a consequence women ran the high risk of infection and took the hazards of social stigma; many single mothers supplemented their inadequate wages, working in the evenings.

In contrast to popular belief it was not the manufacturing industry which mainly provided employment for women, but service occupations, more precisely the servicing of a newly prosperous middle class. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women's work was generally disregarded; partly because of its ill-defined, isolated, and hidden nature (being performed in the home), and because it simply was not paid; partly because women were often employed part-time, in several different jobs or as seasonal labourers; and partly because of its downright unglamorous nature.

This very vagueness of delineation of women's work role – the way in which their work as mothers of children, as trainers of the young, as working assistants to their husbands on farms or in workshops, as seasonal hired labour at hay-time and harvest, as part-time spinners for the local master weaver merged together in this economy – was a source of weakness and of disadvantage to women. (Hill 45f)

Nevertheless it is obvious that women did not miss any opportunity in order to earn a living. They constituted a huge, productive, adaptable, and flexible if disdained labour force.

3.2.7. Political involvement⁷⁸

In opposition to current opinion women, though they were not allowed to vote until 1918, were already politically active long before the beginning of the nineteenth century. As Tim Harris's recent collection of essays *The Politics of the Excluded* reveals, the disenfranchised were far from a passive, sub-political mass. Like other members of this politically excluded underclass, women were also actively involved in the process of electioneering despite being unable to cast a vote themselves.

Hilda Smith (4) argues that women during the seventeenth century had a broad understanding of politics; for them local office holding, political obligations of families among the governing class, as well as voting and political rights constituted the whole of politics. Although women's public economic activities were broadly accepted, they were not used to reinforce their public standing. Despite often performing similar or even the same functions as men, women were excluded from the validation of public recognition, and symbolic expressions of economic independence as well as the qualities of citizenship. Women seemed to have failed in connecting the public and political roles of their group, gaining recognition in neither role.

Recent studies of women's engagement with party politics in the late eighteenth century have revealed that elite women were closely involved in canvassing through political patronage, writing, and lobbying efforts to advance the men of their families or their male political allies. Likewise, non-elite women were engaged in political life already during the early part of the century. In contrast to the historians' readings, their action in protest, demonstration, or campaigning was not at all apolitical. Their spheres of interest exceeded the "female purview" which they were thought limited to (Milling 75).

However, non-élite women were not only interested in politics understood as the social and economic relations of everyday life but also in parliamentary politics and institutional authority at local and national levels and how those who governed were supposed to exercise that authority. (Milling 75)

⁷⁸ Unless indicated otherwise the information in this section is taken from Milling 74-78; Schwoerer 57-60, 73f; H. Smith 4, 11;

Especially during election campaigns non-elite women also publicly expressed their political views in the street or the theatre. This can be observed in Jonathan Swift's description of a by-election in Leicester in 1707,

there is not a chambermaid, prentice or schoolboy in this whole town but what is warmly engaged on one side or the other. (qtd. in Jackson 574)

Women also often appeared as symbolical figures in parades and celebrations; even if they simply represented civic or community identity, rather than acting as politically motivated individuals.

Lois Schwoerer (57) especially emphasises the importance of the printing press and its use for women, making their ideas on a variety of political, religious, administrative, social, and economic issues public, somewhat permanent, and available to a wider audience. She also comments on women's significant role in the printing industry as publishers, printers, bookbinders, and booksellers as well as distributors (mercuries, hawkers, and criers). Schwoerer advocates an enlarged concept of politics, suggesting that political participation may take many forms, such as

dispensing patronage, influencing decision makers and elections, petitioning, demonstrating, gift-giving, entertaining, haranguing, reporting seditious conduct, writing and disseminating ideas in printed form. (57f)

Attention is thus extended from elite political structures to women as well as men from all classes. In Stuart society, women were most often inhibited from participating in public affairs let alone printing their views, as they were regarded as unsuited for political activity. Their education did not comprise any training in political ideas. If women violated the norm, they were punished by men who demeaned and humiliated them, or even by the government. There are only few rare exceptions like Delarivière Manley⁷⁹ or Eliza Haywood⁸⁰, who wrote for and even edited political journals like *The Examiner* or *The Female Spectator*. Manley also wrote *The New Atlantis* (1709), a roman à clef in which she directly attacked Whig politicians.⁸¹ Politically active women were often cruelly satirized in deeply misogynist tracts, their own new weapon, the press, now being used against them. Yet some women were not discouraged by these

⁷⁹ Cf. "Manley, Mrs Delarivière."

⁸⁰ Cf. "Haywood, Eliza."

⁸¹ The full title is *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, of both Sexes, from the New Atlantis*.

powerful deterrents. However, even those women who publicly complained about the social status of women or the legal condition of English wives did not enter a specific claim. In sum, these women, many of them belonging to the middle and lower classes, defied the stereotypical image of women as confined to the home and silent there without interest in, knowledge of, or influence over public affairs.

Another medium utilised to make a public performance of women's party politics was the stage. Thus actors and actresses came to be identified with a party. Actress Anne Oldfield delivered prologues and epilogues by Whig sympathisers such as Arthur Maynwaring, Nicholas Rowe, Colley Cibber, or Susanna Centlivre, which reflected her own political views. For example Maynwaring's epilogue to Charles Johnson's *The Wife's Relief* (1711): "Cou'd we a Parliament of Women call/ We'd vote such Statutes as shou'd Tame you all." (qtd. in Danchin 492)

Until the Licensing Act of 1737 put an abrupt end to all political drama, the theatre was thus not only a place where to find any desired entertainment, but also a political platform for male and female playwrights, actors, and actresses.

4. Theatrical conventions and context

4.1. Theatres⁸²

After eighteen years of shutdown during the Interregnum, two courtiers of Charles II revived London public theatre in 1660. Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant were granted the patents to run the only official theatres in London: The King's Company (Killigrew) and the Duke's Company (Davenant). They are largely responsible for what early Restoration theatres were like, who came to them, and what kind of drama was encouraged. Both had lived on the Continent for some time and mixed characteristics of the old court theatre with French mainstream theatrical developments, for instance roofed playhouses, moveable scenery, machinery, mechanical effects, and, most important of all, actresses playing female roles. The companies were businesses earning money to invest by selling their shares to the actors themselves as well as to non-theatrical speculators; if the troupe thrived, the actors prospered. Each company had a permanent cadre of performers for the theatrical season from September to June. Their repertory system was full of variety, different productions being offered each day; long runs were scarce. A play that "took" with the crowd might run for several days in succession.

After Davenant's death his wife continued to run his theatre together with the famous actor Thomas Betterton. As Killigrew proved an inept manager, his players were absorbed by the Duke's Company and for over ten years London only had one patent troupe, the United Company.

The Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre was originally used by the Duke's Company. After the 1682 merger of the Duke's Company and the King's Company, Thomas Betterton and the United Company used the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, which was designed by Christopher Wren. The theatre in Dorset Garden was mainly used for opera, music, and other entertainments until it was demolished in 1709. It is said to have been the most elegant of all Restoration playhouses. Unhappy with the United Company, its management, and its money grubbing monopoly position, Betterton led the actor's rebellion. In 1695, together with some of the top actors, he formed a new company at the old

⁸² Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Langhans 1, 3ff, 7-12

theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The newly built Queen's Theatre in Haymarket, designed by John Vanbrugh, was also used as an opera house.

At the turn of the century the two London theatrical companies were struggling to survive and their competition was bitterly destructive. Singers, dancers, vaulting acts, jugglers, and tumblers were interpolated between acts of a play. This fashion of distracting entr'actes and afterpieces was a symptom for serious trouble in the legitimate theatre. The fierce competition between the two patent troupes resulted in imitating or mocking the other company's success and the production of novelties as counter-attractions. When one company landed a hit, the other one suffered and retaliated. Hume states that the cheerful stealing, imitation, parody, and combination of elements of recent successes constituted half the history of the theatre in this period.⁸³

An important characteristic of all Restoration playhouses and unique to England was an apron or forestage. The acting area was situated in front of the curtain thrusting well into audience space, with permanent proscenium entrance doors on each side. This forestage linked the auditorium and the stage, the playgoers and the play. The performers were thus standing right in front of rather than in the scenic area, which resulted in a special closeness to the audience. Playwrights therefore often included soliloquies and asides to the audience, this intimacy being ideal for plays which relied on verbal wit. In order to increase seating capacity, the forestage was later cut back. The actors lost their forward acting area and had to retreat into the scenic stage, which in time led to more realism in staging and acting, but also to a loss of public intimacy in the theatre.

Another feature developed during the late seventeenth century were the first special effects in theatrical productions. Wings and shutters which were painted into perspective were pulled on and off by stagehands to provide scenery, e.g. a deep forest, a seascape, or a street. They could be changed within seconds and were employed in many different plays, as Restoration plays tended to use stock settings. Different mechanical effects were used to make performers appear from above or below (cranes for aerial flight, trap doors, etc.). As there was no electricity yet, lighting was not so easily changeable, but the stage candles could be dimmed for darkness and chandeliers could be pulled higher.

⁸³ Cf. Hume, *Development* 23

There were no historical costumes, performers acted in “modern” i.e. contemporary dress, which again contributed to the audience’s sense of rapport with the words of the play. Despite the availability of many new special effects, some of the best Restoration plays did not require much in way of scenery and machines but used mostly standard scenery. Apparently, Restoration playwrights of merit did not want their plays to be upstaged by scenery. However, plays of melodramatic or operatic nature were expected to be scenic feasts.

4.2. Audiences⁸⁴

The composition, character, and tastes of the potential theatre-going audience were of high importance for the playwrights and the companies, and have been a major cause of discord among modern critics.⁸⁵ Hume concludes that there never really was a “genuinely *dominant* court coterie,” even though Court patronage was important and its decline caused severe difficulties for the two patent companies (28). The composition and taste of this court-oriented audience changed greatly by the 1690s. The merchant class increased its attendance of the theatres, and criticism of the bawdy Restoration comedies as well as pleas for the reform of the English stage came to be heard. A successful writer had to please a rather small potential audience which now was more socially varied in itself and had a heterogeneous taste. The two theatre groups competed for this same single audience, instead of attracting separate and distinct coteries.⁸⁶

The fact that the drama of this period was “popular entertainment, not for the masses [...], but for a relatively small group of Londoners for whom the plays provided a frequent diversion” ought not to be forgotten (Hume, *Development* 29). Hume (*Development* 30) compares late seventeenth-century theatre-going with turning on a television when bored, and wandering from one playhouse to the other to flipping from channel to channel. Moreover he equates the casual entertainment offered by the drama of this period with everyday television fare;

⁸⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Langhans 5, 12f, 15-17; Hume, *Development* 22f

⁸⁵ Cf. Hume, *Development* 24-28

⁸⁶ Cf. Hume, *Development* 28

some writers were serious and ambitious, but those who wanted to be commercially successful had to adapt to the audience's entertainment demands.⁸⁷

The seventeenth-century audience came from the leisure class, was quite conscious of itself, and felt to be part of the play. In contrast to modern theatres, the whole playhouse was well-illuminated and the spectators could see each other perfectly well. The audience did not remain quiet and so the performers had to strain for its attention. Many playgoers already knew the plays and their plots, especially if old plays were revived. They were far more interested in the actors' performances and the productions, comparing them, and coming to see them again and again. The whole theatre experience was a social adventure and many spectators were simply stage-struck.

There was much interaction going on between the actors and the audience. Spectators might answer back to spoken lines or let out cries of disbelief; they were able to move around freely during acts, buying fruit and meeting acquaintances; if a play was not good enough to warrant polite attention, interruptions by the audience would be the consequence. Only the very best actors, like Thomas Betterton, could completely capture the attention of the crowd and take the audience's breath away. Actors and actresses being placed almost in the midst of spectators generated theatrical magic. Restoration theatre was emphatically performative and presentational.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century royal patronage was declining, as Queen Anne showed little interest in the theatre. In a period of moral soul-searching, times were also changing for the theatre and its audience. The tone of playwriting had to be adapted to the audience's rising criticism of bawdiness and indecent language; moral edification rather than wit was expected of a good play. More and more middle-class patrons, who now formed a larger but less sophisticated audience, were attracted to the playhouses, demanding greater variety and visual spectacle as well as more song, dance, and entr'actes.

⁸⁷ Cf. Hume, *Development* 28ff

4.3. Acting⁸⁸

Acting was hard work, performances taking place during eight to nine months per season, on about two hundred afternoons a year; rehearsing was done in the morning and at night. The repertory system demanded a lot from players, they had to know dozens of roles and be ready to play any of them at short notice. This was necessary as flops were dropped in a hurry and the bill could be switched quickly. The same roles had to be sustained in memory over years, sometimes even over the players' whole professional lifetimes. Actors and actresses supplied a highly skilled service – the performance. Their task was to embody characters sometimes merely sketched by the playwrights and bring them to life.

English Restoration actors and actresses were objects of public fantasy and the first modern celebrities; however, their profession was placed at the periphery of social respectability. Analogous to modern celebrities, this paradoxically rendered those strong and popularly recognized public figures vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Performers' most important tools were their voices, their movements, an excellent memory, and histrionic sensibility i.e. being capable of expressing a wide range of emotions. Actors and actresses "opened out," they faced the audience during their performance (Roach, 23). Even when they were addressing each other, they would only turn their heads to the side to do so, still facing the audience. Although performance was somehow stylized, it was not perceived as artificial by the contemporary audience. Set gestures and facial expressions were used to convey specific emotions like anger (a stamp of the foot), guilt (eyes cast to one side and head bent low), or bashfulness (covering one's mouth with one hand).⁸⁹ The total absence of furniture properties facilitated free movement of actors and actresses and rapid shifting of painted scenery.

Grouping, the assembly of particular characters on stage at a particular moment, was a dominant scening element and very important. Performance of a Restoration play was a series of continuous groupings: solos, duets, trios,

⁸⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, the information for this section is taken from Langhans 5; Roach 19f, 23, 25ff, 31f, 35f

⁸⁹ Cf. Rubik 189

quartets, also including silent characters.⁹⁰ There was a constant ebbing and flowing of groupings until the end of a play; entrances and exits were marked by formal salutations and valedictions; a cleared stage implied a change of scene or the end of an act. A good actor or actress had to exploit the dramatic opportunities provided by these rapid changes.

The revolutionary introduction of actresses onto the English stage was a deliberate act of King Charles II, who thereby wanted to bring about moral reform in the theatre; female performers and their heteroerotic appeal were supposed to function as a bulwark against sodomy. Many plays also included “breeches”⁹¹ parts in which an actress appeared in male clothing. Actresses cross-dressing and showing off their legs in tight pants were a sensation and immediately took the audience. Nearly a quarter of the 375 new plays or adaptations staged between 1660 and 1700, contained one or more breeches parts (Roach 32). Practically every Restoration actress appeared in trousers at some stage in her career, breeches roles also being inserted in revivals of older plays.⁹²

Actresses who appeared on the public stage most often had a scandalous reputation for immorality. The most renowned actresses were Anne Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Barry. Anne Bracegirdle was an unusual case, as she had a reputation for a strictly moral life; she was considered as the model of English beauty with her dark-brown hair and famous blush and specialised in the role of the chaste and virtuous heroine, e.g. “the Maid” or “the romantic Virgin” (Pearson 26). To be perfectly convincing in acting these roles, she kept her love life “discreetly but tantalizingly veiled” (Roach, 36). Congreve is said to have loved her passionately though platonically, and wrote fabulous roles for her, e.g. Millamant in *The Way of the World*.⁹³ Elizabeth Barry in contrast, had the reputation of being almost a prostitute. There exists an anecdote that the Earl of Rochester made a Pygmalion-style bet on transforming her into “the finest Player on the Stage” after she had bombed on her first three

⁹⁰ Especially when reading these plays, one has to concentrate on silent characters still present on stage and the whole by-play between the characters.

⁹¹ “short trousers fastened just below the knee, now chiefly worn for riding or as part of ceremonial dress.” Cf. “breeches.”

⁹² Cf. Pearson 29f

⁹³ Cf. Roach 36

appearances, and coached her during over thirty rehearsals (Betterton⁹⁴ qtd. in Roach 35). He won his bet and Barry finally became the co-star of Thomas Betterton in many productions.

4.4. The craft of playwriting⁹⁵

Playwrights received the profits of the third performance or third night, if it took place; ten consecutive performances were a box-office hit. If a play failed it was instantly dropped and the author did not receive any pay. This system allowed successful plays to support weak ones and encouraged managers to take the risk of running new plays. New playwrights got a fair chance of being produced – even if it might be only one chance. Most new plays were lucky to have a good audience for three or four successive nights. If a play was run more than eight or ten times, even if it was run intermittently, this meant that it had to draw a lot of repeat attenders. As the size of the potential theatre-going audience was limited and rather small, there was little hope of more than a week's steady run for any play. This in turn resulted in a high turnover in repertory, the staging of a relatively large number of new plays, and rapid changes in theatrical fashion.

As previously mentioned, most often plays were written just for the amusement and pleasure of the public. Writers tried to flatter their audience, their smartest and most attractive characters bonding with their spectators (for example frequently inserting asides) against the fops and fools of the plays. Closeness to the audience had to be reinforced by prologues and epilogues, soliloquies and, as aforementioned, asides, directly addressing the audience, trying to win its sympathetic participation. Hoping to draw a crowd, experienced playwrights often wrote specifically for one company, with its actors and actresses in mind and adapted roles and characters to them. Sometimes a play's success was so firmly associated with particular actors and actresses as the main protagonists that it could not be revived without them. This reflects the playwrights' dependence on the public's favourite performers.

⁹⁴ Cf. Betterton, Thomas. *The History of the English Stage from the Restoration to the Present Time*. London: 1741.

⁹⁵ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Roach 32f; Hume, *Development 23*

To satisfy the audience's demand for novelty new plays were tried, but often lasted only for a handful of performances. For a playwright, the failure of a play implied not only loss of pay and of time but also the frustration of his or her substantial investment in rehearsals and private labour of memorisation. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was common practice that playwrights not only wrote their plays but also had to act as directors in their productions. They had to rehearse with the performers and provide them with stage directions, if they were not explicit in the text. This posed a problem especially for women writers, who faced the difficulty of giving their leading actors instructions. There is a famous anecdote about a rehearsal of Susanna Centlivre's play *The Busie Body*. The actor Robert Wilks disliked his role of Sir George Airy so much that during rehearsal "in a Passion he threw it off the Stage into the Pit, and swore that no body would bear to sit to hear such Stuff," as "it was a silly thing wrote by a Woman" and the players "had no opinion of it" (Bowyer 96). On this account, the audience came prejudiced against the play on the first night, but quite contrary to public expectations, the play was a success and forced a run of thirteen nights.

5. Popular dramatic genres and their “major” and “minor” representatives

5.1. Serious drama

As already mentioned (cf. 2.1. End of Interregnum and Restoration of the Stuart monarchy), heroic drama and poetry flourished after the return of Charles II. The heroic drama of the 1660s and 1670s was built around a titanic hero from the highest social ranks – a prince, a king, or a duke – who determined the fates of nations. While the hero was exemplary and totally admirable, the villain was quintessentially vicious. The action of the play always centred on a conflict between love and duty or honour. Of course, the hero was supposed to choose duty or honour, and to be totally loyal to the king. The subjects of the plays were usually taken from classical myth like Homer and Virgil or other older English sources like Shakespeare’s plays.⁹⁶ This sort of play was written in a highly artificial language, most often in heroic couplets.⁹⁷ Its regular and strict metre did not allow for emotion. The plot was usually as artificial as the play’s language and its structure was strictly symmetrical. The setting was often exotic, like in John Dryden’s *The Indian Emperour* (1665; set in Mexico), *Aureng-Zebe* (1675; set in Persia) and *The Conquest of Granada* (1670; set in Spain), or Elkanah Settle’s *The Empress of Morocco* (1673) and Nathaniel Lee’s *Sophonisba* (1676; set in Carthage) and *The Rival Queens* (1677; set in Egypt). Lee is seen as a key figure in the literary movement away from heroic drama toward pathetic or affective tragedy. *The Rival Queens* is regarded as a transitional play and one of the first heroic plays in blank verse.⁹⁸

At the end of the seventeenth century there was a shift in tragedy away from the moral instruction toward the experience of emotion⁹⁹: the “agitation of the soul by the passions became an end in itself, and the greater the agitation, the better” (Wheatley 77). The characters in a play as well as the audience should

⁹⁶ Cf. Whatley 75

⁹⁷ i.e. rhymed iambic pentameter; from the later 1670s onwards, blank verse was also used. Cf. Hume, *Development* 193

⁹⁸ Cf. “Lee, Nathaniel.”

⁹⁹ In his essay, Wheatley describes the two prevalent types of tragedy following different classical concepts of tragedy. While Horatio commends a “morally instructive plot” and stresses the didactic capacity of tragedy through poetic justice, Aristotle emphasizes the “affective nature of tragedy” and believes that “members of an audience enjoy tragedy because of the experience of emotion.” (75f)

experience as many powerful emotions as possible. The titanic hero of heroic plays who could only be admired was transformed into a still admirable hero who had one tragic fault and therefore aroused the audience's pity. The "increasing importance of emotional expression as the reason for tragedy" led to a "shift in the sphere and topics of tragedy from the public to the private. Affairs of state [were] replaced by affairs of the heart" (Wheatley 75). Apart from the action being moved to a more private or domestic setting, this new genre employed blank verse instead of heroic couplets. In order to arouse the most powerful tragic emotions, the weak and passive victims are sometimes even completely innocent and entirely blameless, often suffering undeservedly but excessively through evil fate.¹⁰⁰ Of course women perfectly combined all these characteristics and were the ideal victims for many writers. As a result of the total absence of personal responsibility on the part of the victim, such plays must totally rely on cruel villains and evil fate; the passive characters simply cannot get the action going. Character inconsistencies which manifest themselves in unconvincing and implausible twists in the plot are the consequence. In addition to the shift in setting and milieu from exotic to local and from political to domestic, there was also a shift from royalty i.e. high upper-class to middle-class characters and ordinary citizens.

Though it features characters from the highest social class, Dryden's *All for Love* (1678) is considered one of the first pathetic or affective tragedies and his best play. Like Lee's *The Rival Queens*, it is a transition play, still partly heroic but already with many pathetic features. Other examples of pathetic tragedy are Otway's *The Orphan* (1680), Southerne's *Venice Preserv'd* (1682) and *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), and Trotter's *The Fatal Friendship* (1698).

According to Hume (*Development*, 149) "she-tragedy," a sub-genre of pathetic tragedy, is "leading into dramatic degeneracy." In its centre is always 'virtue in distress' i.e. a woman who suffers either innocently or who committed a small sin but is punished exaggeratedly severely. Examples of she-tragedies are John Banks' *The Unhappy Favourite* (1682) and *Virtue Betrayed, or Ann Bullen* (1692), Southerne's Behn-adaptation *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* (1696), or Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703) and *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Shore* (1714).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Wheatley 74, 78

There were two chief forms of reaction to the high-flown action and speech of heroic tragedy: burlesque and bourgeois or domestic tragedy.¹⁰¹ The two best-known domestic tragedies of the time, both written in prose, are Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731) and Moore's *The Gamester* (1753). Lillo employs the first lower middle-class hero, an apprentice, thus re-evaluating the figure of the merchant. Moore's *The Gamester* focuses on the prevalent problem of gambling and is heavily moralising. Its message is also in tune with the values of the rising middle class, "Thou shalt not gamble" (Nettleton, *English Drama* 210). These domestic tragedies both mirror the bourgeois values entering the English play-world.

An example of the sub-genre of tragicomedy, which also flourished in the late seventeenth century, is Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697). It mingles serious and comic elements, finally rewarding virtue and punishing vice in a classic heroic bent.¹⁰²

5.2. Italian opera and ballad-opera

The newly imported Italian grand opera experienced enormous popularity after 1705.¹⁰³ It was a spectacular form of theatre, bringing with it new stage machines and effects. Many a dramatist feared that foreign opera would drive English drama from the stage as this type of opera not only took up rehearsal time and space, but also took away dramatic subject matter. However, the fashion for such entertainment proved short-lived and waned after the first decade of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁴

Ballad-opera, introduced by John Rich, the new manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields, proved another powerful rival to regular drama. According to Nettleton (*English Drama* 189), John Gay's mock-heroic *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), the most famous ballad-opera of the time, achieved "one of the most conspicuous stage triumphs in English dramatic history." Over sixty performances during the season "made Gay rich and Rich gay" (Nettleton, *English Drama* 189). Instead of the pompous music and themes of the serious Italian operas, it used familiar

¹⁰¹ Cf. Boas 239

¹⁰² Cf. Hume, *Development* 214, 216

¹⁰³ Cf. Hume, *Development* 209

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Nettleton, *English Drama* 184; "Opera in England."

music of folk tunes, so the audience could hum along with the songs. It was light entertainment, dealing with life in low society. The piece satirises not only the absurdities of Italian opera and sentimental drama, but also politics (openly attacking England's most important politician, Robert Walpole), poverty and social injustice.¹⁰⁵ Setting a popular fashion, it anticipates dramatic burlesque and political satire.

5.3. Other forms of entertainment

There were also other forms of public entertainment which were seen as unrefined and less evolved. In times of dire financial straits, the competing theatres sought the highest appeal with the lowest cost. As mounting plays produced costs during rehearsal time (for cast, property masters, stage hands) and dramatists received money from each third night of box office or extra benefit nights, these costs of plays and actors had to be minimised. The theatre managers John Rich and Colley Cibber duelled over new special effects and put on plays that were outright spectacles, the texts being added almost as an afterthought. Spectacles also had the advantage that they could be written quickly in answer to the public's whims or the rival theatre's triumphs. Furthermore, they were less vulnerable to the frequent attacks and legal harassment from moral reformers.¹⁰⁶ Rich specialized in pantomime and was a famous character in harlequin presentations.¹⁰⁷ On pantomime nights, receipts doubled those from regular drama, and scarce a pantomime failed to please the public, many running forty or fifty nights successively. The monopoly position of the plays of this manner infuriated established literary authors like Pope or Addison.¹⁰⁸ Shifting the blame to market pressures, Colley Cibber in his autobiography even apologized for taking an active part in the special-effects war and using dance and pantomime instead of more respectable plays.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, pantomime was firmly established on the English stage.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Nettleton, *English Drama* 194; "Beggars' Opera, *The* (1728)."

¹⁰⁶ Managers, authors, actors, and publishers were actually indicted for their parts in publicising plays which "profanely and jestingly [used] the sacred name of God." (Hume, *Development* 434)

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Nettleton, *English Drama* 184

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *The Spectator* No. 18 Wednesday, March 21, 1711 and No. 29 Tuesday, April 3, 1711.

¹⁰⁹ Excerpt from *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740) Cf. Nettleton, *English Drama*

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¹¹⁰ Cf. Nettleton, *English Drama* 189

Even though the forces of spectacle, pantomime, burlesque, farce, Italian opera, and ballad-opera partly managed to oust the regular drama, a strong repertory of stock plays and ingenious actors triumphing “even in the mediocre productions of contemporary drama,” sustained the vitality of the theatre (Nettleton, *English Drama* 227). “It was the age of the player, not of the playwright” (Nettleton, *English Drama* 227).

5.4. Farce¹¹¹

The term “farce” used to characterise a particular part of a play which involves “physical action, practical jokes or the gulling of the gullible” and was tantamount to brevity (Holland 111). It took some time until it came to denote a whole theatrical genre. Having its roots in popular rather than aristocratic culture, farce has traditionally been regarded as trivial and of little literary merit. The low literary value of farces is reflected by slow publication or even non-publication.¹¹² Despite the low aesthetic value ascribed to this genre, its success speaks for itself. Even though Dryden frequently attacked farce and denounced it as “the Extremitie of bad Poetry”, he wrote farces himself ¹¹³ (Dryden, *Works XVI 77*).

English farce has its roots in medieval France. Like the English, French dramatists, first and foremost Molière, were also ill at ease using the term “farce” for their works and preferred more fashionable expressions like “petit divertissement” or “petite comédie” (Holland 110). The genre’s French tinge and the old-established dislike of anything French did not exactly ameliorate its reputation.

During the closure of the theatres a number of farces – mostly comic scenes taken from pre-Restoration English plays – was performed by travelling troupes and collected by Francis Kirkman in *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport. Being a Curious Collection of several Drols and Farces* (1673), but these short pieces

¹¹¹ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this chapter is taken from Holland 107-111, 113f, 116-119, 123f

¹¹² Cf. Hume, *Development* 473

¹¹³ Cf. *Sir Martin Mar-All* (1667)

were rather popular entertainments than real plays. Their harmless “amateur” status had the big advantage of sparing them from any sort of censorship.¹¹⁴

The total reliance of early farces on English, French, and Italian sources also did not raise them in contemporary critics’ esteem, however, their quintessential physicality rendered them prone to borrow situations from different sources.

As indicated above, Restoration playwrights were careful to define their work as *not* being farce. Holland put this attitude in a nutshell, “the naming of a work as a farce is [...] likely to be accompanied by an apology” (107). Although quite some authors wrote farces because of their popularity with the audience and the ensuing financial rewards, few dramatists took on the burden of defending farce, and some even declined having their works published, thus rendering farce vulnerable in spite of its success.¹¹⁵ After the staging of Davenant’s *The Playhouse to be Let* (1663) the label of “farce” was more precise, even if it also included burlesques and travesties as well as any other kind of interlude. Although the word had now entered the English theatrical vocabulary, the genre did not gain any more acceptability.¹¹⁶

Restoration farce actually is trivial, conventional, and heavily relying on stereotypical characters and physical action. It often features lower-class characters like servants who are transformed socially by use of disguise and are therefore allowed more freedom and presence than in any other area of Restoration drama, sometimes even outwitting their dull masters.¹¹⁷ Scaramouch and Harlequin¹¹⁸, who tremendously successfully occupied the Restoration stage, are such servant-figures. The centrality and prominence of servants and lower-class characters also contributed to the disparagement of farce, because it unsettled their social superiors in the audience, for whom this class was effectively invisible.¹¹⁹

Farce can do without realism in the representation of society and can even afford to employ fantasy and magic, deliberately distorting the norm. This

¹¹⁴ Cf. Holland 113

¹¹⁵ E.g. *Squire Trelooby* (1704) written or rather translated from the French in collaboration by Congreve, Farquhar, and Walsh, who did not wish their work to be published. Cf. Holland 107f ; Hume, *Development* 473

¹¹⁶ Cf. Holland 111

¹¹⁷ Cf. Holland 108, 119

¹¹⁸ i.e. stock characters derived from Italian commedia dell’arte Cf. “Harlequin.” and “Scaramouch.”

¹¹⁹ Cf. Holland 119

physical type of theatre completely depends on its actors and actresses and their brilliance and skills. In the 1660s and 1670s Robert Cox and Robert Parker led two companies, highly successfully writing farces and starring in them.¹²⁰ It is striking, though not really surprising, that many farces were written by actors turned playwrights.

Before 1700 farces tended to be short, comprising two or three acts, and were in need of accompaniment of some sort. This made it difficult to establish them in the organisation of theatre entertainment. After the turn of the century the professional theatres in London, which had up to then only performed one play per evening accompanied by entr'acte performances of song and dance, adapted the French habit of mounting a main play plus an afterpiece.¹²¹ Although this format was already introduced after 1703, it was only by the 1714/15 season and with Rich as Lincoln Inn's Field's new manager that farce finally succeeded in establishing its place in the English theatre.

Some popular Restoration farces are Ravenscroft's *The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman* (1672), *Scaramouch a Philosopher* (1677) and *The Anatomist* (1697), Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1677), Behn's *The False Count* (1681) and *The Emperour of the Moon* (1687), Tate's *A Duke and No Duke* (1684), Cibber's *The School-Boy* (1702), Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* (1703) and *The Bickerstaff's Burying* (1710), Farquhar's *The Stage-Coach* (1704), aforementioned *Squire Trelooby*¹²² (1704), Motteux' *Farewel Folly* (1705) and Swiny's *The Quacks* (1705).¹²³

Holland composed a concise résumé about Restoration farce saying,

[t]heatrically awkward in its dramatic form and length, damned for coming from France, socially disturbing for its interest in servants, aesthetically unacceptable for its fascination with the body, farce succeeded nonetheless being popular. (124)

Farce does not ask for much, the only reaction it hopes to provoke from its audience is laughter, uproarious laughter without thought.

¹²⁰ Cf. Holland 113f

¹²¹ Cf. Holland 123f

¹²² Written, or rather translated from French, in collaboration by Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Walsh; the authors did not want this work to be published. Cf. Hume, *Development* 473

¹²³ Cf. Holland 116ff; Hume, *Development* 472f

5.5. Comic drama and its sub-genres¹²⁴

Most Restoration dramatists shared the common view that the drama, like all other literature, should fulfil the Horatian requirements, namely to delight and instruct.¹²⁵ Comedy was generally supposed to have a moral function, either rendering “Figures of *Vice* and *Folly* so ugly and detestable” as to make the audience laugh at them as well as “hate and despise them” (Shadwell 154) or by getting the audience to listen to “the conversation of Gentlemen” (Dryden, *Works X* 207) and to observe the behaviour of high society. This general distinction between two sub-genres of early Restoration comedy – manners vs. humours – has its basis in the examples it works with; while manners or wit comedy teaches by positive example, humours comedy uses negative examples.¹²⁶

The comedy of humours¹²⁷ satirizes human nature by focusing on one humour which completely dominates a protagonist’s personality and conduct. Ben Jonson is closely associated with the comedy of humours, he was the first to characterise protagonists according to their humours and to give them names pointing to these humours, a practice which was often copied later on. Many of Shadwell’s and some of Congreve’s characters are reminiscent of Jonson.

The comedy of manners provokes laughter by exaggerating fashionable and civilised behaviour and absurdities. It can therefore only flourish in a highly developed society which attaches primary importance to standards of politeness in social life.

Hume (37) also distinguishes between the “low, crudely instructive ‘comedy of humours’, and the gay, witty, refined ‘comedy of manners’” and paraphrases Dryden, stating that there is a difference between “comedy regarded as the vehicle of corrective satire” (i.e. humours) and “an almost exemplary display of social grace and witty refinement” (i.e. manners). Unfortunately, when looking at comic drama of the period, there is no neat and tidy distinction between wit and

¹²⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this chapter is taken from Corman 52f, 56; Hume, *Development* 61f, 66ff, 70ff;

¹²⁵ Cf. Corman 52

¹²⁶ Cf. Corman 53

¹²⁷ The term was coined by Galen’s doctrine of the four humours which were applied to people’s temperaments (sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic). Cf. “Humours, Comedy of.”

humour and no single clear-cut formula for comic drama. However, for many critics the point of late seventeenth-century comedy is to display manners:

The typical writers of Restoration comedy had aimed at humorously reflecting and criticizing the actual social scene. For the most part they had accepted the moral code actually operative in their day and been content to permit it to express itself in their plays. Only Wycherley and Southerne can be said to have been outraged by it (though neither Congreve nor Vanbrugh was insensible of its faults).
(Smith¹²⁸ qtd. in Hume, *Development* 66)

Many comedies of manners criticise marriage, the relations between the sexes, and women's role and position in society. Their sexually explicit and bawdy character in time gave rise to criticism and protest on the part of moralists and social reformers, which in turn led to the development of a "reformed" type of comedy. The comedy of manners is not really a pure variety of drama, but is described as a "framework for plays with a witty, satiric atmosphere, and social comment, which may also contain other elements" such as Spanish intrigue, humours, or reform ("Manners, Comedy of."). According to Hume, different comic dramatists employed the ingredients of satire, humour, wit, and example to various degrees. He cautiously adds that example and satire are not any more mutually exclusive than are humour and wit.¹²⁹

Most comedies share one or more common features, using the same goals (courtship, seduction, cuckolding, and gulling), plots and familiar character types again and again.¹³⁰ Young lovers have to devise an outwitting plot, the rake wins the heroine and usually reforms in the process, or the young heroine tests and wins the rake and reforms him in the process; fortune is most often won en passant. The following characters are typically used: heavy fathers, fops and fools, bullies, country boors and country innocents, Frenchmen and tradesmen (partly as subjects of satire), cuckolds, jealous or lecherous old men and husbands, lusting old maids and widows, religious hypocrites, social pretenders, young spendthrifts, witty young ladies and rakes, young men of wit and little money, bawds and whores as well as stupid or tricky servants. Restoration comedy tends to use highly repetitive patterns of events and

¹²⁸ Cf. Smith, John Harrington. *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948. 224.

¹²⁹ Cf. Hume, *Development* 61f

¹³⁰ Cf. Corman 56

situations as well as stock plots and characters.¹³¹ Sub-plots usually consist of further marriage plots involving a second or even third couple aspiring wedlock, cuckolding plots, or a fop wooing the wrong woman. Most Restoration comedies end in the marriage of at least one or two couples.

The preferred setting is London, especially its fashionable parts, like the court, the theatre, St. James's Park, Rosamond's Pond, but also coffee houses, taverns, or lavish homes; to put it in a nutshell, places of pleasure and leisure. The time frame is most often a span of twenty-four hours.

In the general disagreement about the objective and function of comic drama¹³², there has been a tendency to regard the comedies as "aimless trifles" (Hume, *Development* 68). Again, many critics made the mistake of studying only a handful of writers or works when trying to characterise Restoration comedy, which might result in inadequate or even misleading conclusions. One has to be aware of the "immense variety of options open to the writers of late seventeenth-century comedy" (Hume, *Development* 62). Instead of frantically trying to categorise them, critics had better be sensitive to their subtle differences. This leads to a particularized and more sensitive characterisation of comic drama, which orientates itself to the respective play instead of trying to pigeonhole plays into artificially formulated genres. A given comedy might completely belong to and fit in one sub-genre, but most often it will be a mixture of various characteristics of different sub-genres.

5.5.1. The development of Restoration comedy¹³³

Apart from being famous for its wit, urbanity, and sophistication, Restoration comedy is also notorious for its sexual explicitness, bawdiness, and licentiousness. In *Restoration Comedy* Bonamy Dobrée (20) explains that the Restoration period was an age of inquiry and curiosity. Men and women were experimenting in social and human relationships, their rationalisations leading them to the insight that for them affection and sexual desire were two separate things and love, the fusion of the two feelings, scarcely existed. Man was

¹³¹ Cf. Hume, *Development* 71f

¹³² Cf. Hume, *Development* 66f

¹³³ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this chapter is taken from Dobrée, *Comedy* 20-23; Hume, *Development* 376-9, 382; Palmer 42

accepted as a “licentious animal” (20). “Men and women of the Restoration saw nothing sacred or romantic in the act of sex,” it was simply an impersonal need and instinct (Palmer 42). The pursuit of mistresses was seen as an amusement. Jealously, the product of a society in which monogamy is the moral standard, was regarded as a ridiculous absurdity and jealous husbands were the “butts of the comic stage”¹³⁴ (Dobrée, *Comedy* 21). Dobrée perceives “the bawdry” of Restoration comedy as “an attempt to be frank and honest,” as an expression of a deep curiosity and a desire to try new ways of living (Dobrée, *Comedy* 22). This concept is in tune with the perception of Restoration comedy as amoral rather than immoral.

However, there can be no doubt about the “impurity” especially of early Restoration comedy (Dobrée, *Comedy* 22). Hume (*Development* 60) even regards the sex comedy of the 1670s as a new sub-genre. But despite the mid-seventies boom of the full-blown comedy of sex and cuckoldry, a good part of the audience was shocked by these plays and raised objections against them.¹³⁵ The shift in values from social to moral was already imminent. While courtship remained central to the plot, the lovers were more sympathetic, sophisticated, and praised for their witty repartee. The rake was the main casualty of this change; rakish behaviour was more talked about, having happened in the past, than being actually represented. Libertine values were replaced by social virtues and the conversion to moral values became central to the plot. The rake’s superiority manifested itself no longer only in exchanges of wit but also in his moral qualities. This emphasis on good nature and benevolence resulted in duller but much more human and real characters, characters the audience could identify with.¹³⁶

Already at the end of the seventies there was a collapse of the boom in sex comedy and an “astonishing failure of a series of sex comedies by major writers” (Owen 131). According to Hume (*Development* 376), “[b]y the later seventies, both heroic drama and sex comedy were dying a natural death.” While serious drama was becoming increasingly affective and pathetic, comic drama was slowly turning into a new, purer type. However, social sex comedy

¹³⁴ Cf. Palmer 42

¹³⁵ Cf. Hume, *Development* 18, 90

¹³⁶ Cf. Corman 65

was not simply replaced but rather rivalled by the new mode of exemplary comedy. As many plays fashionable in the 1670s were suffering rejection during the 1680s, new types of drama were tentatively tried. Numerous more moderate and more acceptable sex comedies kept flourishing throughout the 1690s.¹³⁷ Obviously, “[c]omedy with a healthy dose of sex was far from dead” (Hume, *Development* 378).

By the end of the eighties, social comedy appears in two varieties: “hard” and “humane comedy.”¹³⁸ Only very slightly moderated “old” hard comedy continues to be satirical, sceptic, ironic, and even bitter. “New” humane comedy, a hybrid of old hard and new sentimental-exemplary comedy, takes a much more sympathetic and moralistic view and establishes a basic human goodness in its characters. It is more tolerant, less critical, and rather “easily extended into the overtly exemplary,” but still remains airy, brisk, and amusing though also fairly moral (Hume, *Development* 382). This quasi-exemplary comedy has its roots in the tragicomedies and Spanish romances of the sixties and often features intrigue.

During the early nineties both types of comedy manage to compete on a more or less equal footing. While an unmistakable trend toward exemplary morals becomes apparent, the great box-office hits are still all hard comedies. But before the turn of the century, old comedy finally perishes.¹³⁹

Apart from D’Urfey and Farquhar, quite a few women writers like the “Female Wits” Catherine Trotter, Mary Pix, and Delarivière Manley as well as Susanna Centlivre tried their hands at humane comedy, but they most often met with meagre success.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Hume names *The Lucky Chance* (1686) and *Bellamira* (1687) as examples of older social sex comedies and contrasts them with the new *The London Cuckolds* (1682) and *The Atheist* (1683). Cf. Hume, *Development* 377f

¹³⁸ Cf. Kenny “Humane Comedy”

¹³⁹ Cf. Hume, *Development* 378f, 382, 396

¹⁴⁰ *The Female Wits* (1696) was an anti-feminist satire targeting Mary Pix, Delarivière Manley and Catherine Trotter, three significant women dramatists of the time.

5.5.2. Augustan comedy and the time of transgression: humane comedy and reform comedy¹⁴¹

As already mentioned when approaching the problem of periodisation, Hume calls the new drama emerging between 1697 and 1710 Augustan drama and states that it was dominant in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.¹⁴² He subdivides this period into three phases: the phase of the struggle for survival of the companies (up to 1702), the phase of establishing a new equilibrium (up to 1707), and the theatrical situation circa 1710.¹⁴³

At the turn of the century both patent houses were in a desolate situation, desperately struggling for survival, suffering from mismanagement and the attacks of moral reformers, Jeremy Collier and his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) leading the way. The legal harassment from the zealots resulted in a considerable tightening up of licensing procedures. Music, singers, French dancing-masters and ballerinas, jugglers, animal acts, and double bills were all tried in the hope of drawing a crowd. Plays were produced in a “circus atmosphere” and as medleys (Hume, *Development* 461). The sword of Damocles of an outright shutdown hung above the theatres and there was even talk of Lincoln’s Inn Fields being turned back into a tennis court.¹⁴⁴ On New Year’s Eve of 1707 the Lord Chamberlain finally issued an order for the union of the two companies, restricting plays to Drury Lane and operas to the newly built Haymarket theatre; performers were to be redistributed.¹⁴⁵

During the second phase, established trends like Spanish intrigue comedies, farces, humane comedy, and reform comedy continued. Farquhar is the most successful writer of humane comedy of these years. Steele is the great exponent of reform comedy, closely followed by Cibber¹⁴⁶ and Centlivre. Centlivre’s striking success with *The Gamester* (1705) is suggestive of an

¹⁴¹ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this chapter is taken from Hume, *Development* 378f, 382, 396, 432f, 458f, 462, 464, 468ff, 480f

¹⁴² Cf. 2.5. The problem of periodisation. Cf. Hume, *Development* 432

¹⁴³ Cf. Hume, *Development* 433, 459, 481

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Hume, *Development* 433f, 458f; Krutch 178

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Hume, *Development* 480f

¹⁴⁶ *The Careless Husband* (1704), Cibber’s best play, owes its huge success to the famous “Steinkirk” scene: Lady Easy finds her husband asleep with the maid and places her scarf or steinkirk on his head so he won’t catch cold. When her chronically unfaithful husband wakes and notices the steinkirk on his head, he suddenly realises how wonderful his wife is.

audience ready for well-managed didactic drama. The reform pattern was the playwrights' answer to Collier's and the moral reformers' attacks and catered to the audience's taste for didacticism, without degenerating into the sterility of exemplary comedy.¹⁴⁷

According to Hume (*Development* 485), Centlivre's *The Busie Body* (1709) is *the* representative of the mainstream of Augustan comedy. It possesses the form but not the spirit of Carolean comedy and its plot and humours are substantial. Augustan comedy consists mostly of routine, formulaic plays written by "cautious professionals" like Cibber, Centlivre, and Johnson, who are "traumatized by theatrical disintegration" and "fear failure more than they hope for success" (Hume, *Development* 486). In this regard Augustan drama is simply cautious drama, not especially sentimental and rarely truly exemplary, but trying hard to be unobjectionable and inoffensive. The negative moral examples of the humours characters, once maliciously laughed at, were now redefined. The new generation of playwrights treated them with gentleness, tolerance, and sympathy, without sacrificing laughter, physical comedy, love, or sex.¹⁴⁸ Many writers of Augustan comedy took an increased interest in what happens after marriage, broaching the issue of marital discord in very popular plays like *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1671), *The Provok'd Wife* (1697), and *The Careless Husband* (1704).

In addition to the prominent "Whig drama" of Cibber, Centlivre, Steele, and Addison the new drama also encompassed some "Tory stalwarts" (Hume, *Development* 432).

5.5.3. Spanish intrigue comedy or Spanish romance¹⁴⁹

One of the first new foreign influences after the Restoration of the monarchy and the reopening of the playhouses was the Spanish "comedia de capa y espada" (comedy of cape and sword), especially the works of Calderón ("Spanish intrigue comedy."). English playwrights adapted the sources so heavily to the tastes of their audiences, that the resulting plays can by no

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Hume, *Development* 462, 464, 468ff

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Corman 69

¹⁴⁹ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from "Spanish intrigue comedy."

means be mistaken for Spanish comedies. Like in English tragedy, conflicts of love and honour are at the centre of these plays. Even though rigid patriarchs (heavy fathers, brothers, and guardians) try to force their young relatives into unwanted marriages, the vivacious young heroines actively set out to determine their own fates, eventually gaining the right to love and marry whom they please. Plays of this variety are dominated by exemplary characters, busy intrigue plots, duels, mistaken identities, and concealment. Tuke's *The Adventures of Five Hours* (1663) is regarded the first play of this new sub-genre.

The Spanish intrigue comedy usually centres on an imprisoned girl who is denied but eventually gains the right to love and marry whom she pleases, often eloquently articulating women facing confinement, injustice, and oppression.¹⁵⁰ These proto-feminist issues made this type of comedy especially popular with women playwrights like Behn, Centlivre, and Pix. The Spanish influence on English drama continued throughout the period, contributing elements like fast pace, action-filled plots, and Spanish settings to many highly successful plays.¹⁵¹

5.6. The canon: “major” comic playwrights¹⁵²

Even though comedy was regarded as less prestigious than tragedy, it was by far the preferred theatrical genre. The higher likelihood of long runs and financial rewards encouraged the best playwrights of the period to try their luck at comedy. Traditionally, Congreve, Etherege, Farquhar, Vanbrugh, and Wycherley are called the “Big Five” of Restoration comedy (Ford 158).

Brian Corman provides a relatively complete overview of the major Restoration writers of comedy, dividing them into two groups: those born before and those who were born after the Restoration. In the first group, whose plays flourished in the 1660s and 70s, he names Aphra Behn, the Earl of Buckingham, Thomas Crowne, John Dryden, Thomas D’Urfey, George Etherege, Robert Howard, Thomas Otway, Thomas Shadwell, and William Wycherley; of these Behn,

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Pearson 207

¹⁵¹ Cf. Corman 55f

¹⁵² Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Corman 55ff

Etherege, Shadwell, and Wycherley were no longer frequently performed by the early eighteenth century. According to Corman, the most successful comic playwrights born after the Restoration are Susanna Centlivre, Colley Cibber, William Congreve, George Farquhar, Delarivière Manley, Mary Pix, Thomas Southerne, Richard Steele and John Vanbrugh. Their heyday started during the mid-90s and according to Corman (57), all men of this group except for Southerne remained popular for the next one hundred years.

Corman is one of the few critics to include as many as four women in his list of nineteen playwrights. In *Restoration Comedy Burns* (v-vi) also comments on Wycherley, Shadwell, Crowne, Otway, Behn, Dryden, Etherege, Southerne, Cibber, Vanbrugh, Congreve, Farquhar, Centlivre, Steele, and Gay. In his chapter on the Restoration comedy of manners in *British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan*, Nettleton writes about the above-mentioned “Big Five” and adds Cibber and Steele in his chapter on early eighteenth-century drama, totally neglecting female dramatists. In *An Introduction to Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1780* the one and only woman writer mentioned in Boas’ list of the twenty-six most prominent dramatists of the period is Centlivre (Boas ix-x). Although a multitude of secondary literature has been written about early women writers who flourished after 1660, many modern critics, if they mention women writers at all, tend to include only Behn and Centlivre. Brown and Harris do not even once refer to Centlivre in *Restoration Theatre*.

It is interesting as well as disquieting that so many modern critics show remarkable disregard for the female playwrights and their literary achievements. This is especially regrettable as women writers made their entrance into the literary world in this particular period. The method of looking only at a handful of ‘representative’ writers or ‘major’ works, which is thoroughly criticised by Hume, cannot lead to a full picture about a given period or genre; to complete this picture it is necessary to resort to studies which include women writers or, studies which treat only women writers, bearing in mind that these can also only depict part of the picture.

Apparently contemporary critics and authors held their female fellow writers in higher estimate than many modern critics do.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ As documented by Gill and Young.

5.7. A short history of female writers of Restoration comedy¹⁵⁴

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the literary world of the seventeenth century saw a revolution when women entered literature for almost the first time.¹⁵⁵ Young (20) identifies a “so-called new woman of the seventeenth century” who is depicted in the social comedies of Restoration drama and was a reflection of an aspiration felt in the contemporary society itself.¹⁵⁶

The introduction of actresses to the Restoration stage opened the way to a new professional career for women, even though many (male) spectators regarded this profession as little better than prostitution. In order to render the often unmarried actresses more respectable, the title “Mrs” was commonly put before their names. Actresses like Nell Gwyn, Moll Davis, and Elizabeth Barry were nearly as famous for their roles on stage as for their private lives.¹⁵⁷ Being poor and paid significantly less than their male counterparts, female performers sometimes turned to wealthy gentlemen in the audience for keeping and even for marriage.¹⁵⁸ As there was no other occupation for women which provided the same level of recognition and praise as that of the stage performer, their achievements for their sex went unchallenged. The first actresses made the English audiences familiar with women working in the theatre and thus cleared the way for the first female playwrights.

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle¹⁵⁹ (1623-73) and stepmother to Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley, was the first woman ever to publish her collected dramatic works. She was a ‘learned lady’ who wrote poems, plays, letters, scientific and philosophical treatises, and a vivid biography of her husband as well as her own autobiography. The contemporary reception of her achievements and work is indicated by her nickname ‘Mad Madge.’ In his

¹⁵⁴ I am going to include Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips, Dorothy Osborne, and Francis Boothby, who made considerable contributions to the establishment of female playwrights, even though they did not generate comedies.

¹⁵⁵ There were already some women playwrights in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, mostly aristocratic ladies who wrote closet drama for private performance e.g. the sisters Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley. Cf. Rubik 15

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ram Chandra Sharma (66) *Themes and Conventions in the Comedy of Manners*

¹⁵⁷ Both Davis and Gwyn were mistresses of Charles II. Cf. Young 21

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Young 21

¹⁵⁹ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from “Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish, duchess of.”; Rubik 22ff

famous diary, Pepys¹⁶⁰ dismissed Cavendish as “mad, conceited and ridiculous” (“Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish, duchess of.”). Her plays focus on the situation of women and agitate for equal rights and self-determination. In genre they belong to affective tragedy and eighteenth-century sentimental drama. Like many of her female contemporaries, Cavendish remains equivocal in her attitude. Her later plays suggest a more traditional concept of a woman’s proper place. These contradictions are typical of women writers of her time who are torn between subversion and conformity.

Katherine Philips¹⁶¹ (1631-64) or “the matchless Orinda” was the daughter of a London merchant. She lived a privileged life and was married to a supportive husband. This second ‘learned lady’ was a poet, translator, and the first woman to have a play staged professionally in London; it was a great success.¹⁶² Part of her poetry was politically biased, advocating her Royalist convictions.¹⁶³ Her strategy to cope with the prejudices against women writers was outright modesty and humility, e.g. translating an acclaimed work instead of writing an original play and here again opting for an esteemed and prestigious tragedy, as was suitable for a woman. She even made a public show of trying to suppress a pirated publication of her poetry, because she feared the ensuing social scandal might offend her modesty as a lady. Philips was regarded as “the epitome of chaste femininity” for over a century and thus often contrasted with Behn, who was associated with lewdness and scandal (Rubik 26). She was supposedly more often praised for her beauty and youth (unfortunately she died an early death) than for her literary achievements. Nevertheless, with her immaculate reputation, she served as a model for many women writers to follow.

Young (18) also mentions another ‘learned lady,’ **Dorothy Osborne**, an aristocratic woman, who in her candid and straightforward (private) letters¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Pepys wrote a famous *Diary* from 1660-1669 which serves as a valuable source of information about the theatre of this period. Cf. “Pepys, Samuel.”

¹⁶¹ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from “Philips, Katherine.”; Rubik 26ff

¹⁶² *Pompey* (1663), a translation of Corneille’s tragedy *Le mort de Pompée*, which was travestied by Davenant in *The Playhouse to Be Let* (1663) Cf. “Philips, Katherine.”; Rubik 28

¹⁶³ Cf. “Katherine Philips.”

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *The Letters of Dorothy Osborne*

expresses an individual personality and spirit, lacking the common ornamentations of style of the period. She records her rejection of an arranged marriage in favour of a marriage for love. She married Sir William Temple against the wishes of his father and her brother, who was a typical aristocratic marriage broker of the period. Osborne is one of the rare and exceptional women who display the arising scepticism and reluctance concerning purely mercenary marriage arrangements.¹⁶⁵

The first original play written by a woman and performed on the British public stage was **Francis Boothby's** tragicomedy *Marcellia, or The Treacherous Friend* (1669). **Elizabeth Polwhele** was the first female dramatist to write a comedy, *The Frolicks, or The Lawyer Cheated* (1671), a "realistic and bawdy sex comedy set among London low life" which remained unperformed (Rubik 30). Even though it is highly unlikely that it directly influenced other writers, it can be regarded as a forerunner of later comedies by female dramatists. Polwhele employs a typical witty Restoration heroine who takes her fate into her own hands, a character who will become part of the stock characters of later comedies. Like many of her female fellow writers, Polwhele granted her heroine more independence, influence, and prominence than most of her male colleagues did.¹⁶⁶

Aphra Behn¹⁶⁷ (1640-89) is probably the best-known female professional playwright of the Restoration period. Most of her early life has remained a mystery and she possibly worked as a spy for Charles II in Antwerp in the Dutch war. Not having been paid by the King, she is said to have been forced to go to debtor's prison. In contrast to many other women writers, Behn wrote for a living and depended on this source of income. When she entered the direct competition with her male colleagues, she achieved an initial success with her tragedy *The Forc'd Marriage* (1670), but was immediately attacked by critics and fellow playwrights. They took the sexually prejudiced view that women were simply not equipped with the necessary talent to write a good play. This view

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Young 18f, 23, 234

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Rubik 28-31

¹⁶⁷ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from "Behn, Mrs Afra.;" Rubik 32, 34, 42, 44, 56; Staves 61, 63

had its basis in the innate inferiority of women and their general exclusion from language and literature at a time when silence was regarded as an ornament of women.¹⁶⁸

Behn was regarded as a pioneer entering a hostile environment, trying to sustain herself by writing, she was not averse to the fame which accompanies a box-office hit. Her aspirations greatly differed from those of Philips, Boothby, and Polwhele, as she was overtly striving for fame and immortality. She was often accused of plagiarism and of passing off the work of a man as hers. The reason for this was that she simply adopted the style of her male rivals and wrote like a man.¹⁶⁹ She quite successfully pursued this strategy of coping with the gender prejudice of many critics and fellow playwrights who simply could not believe that the work of a woman could be any good.

Behn excelled in comedy. Her best works include *The Rover* in two parts (1677; 1681), *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), *The Feign'd Courtesans* (1679), *The City Heiress* (1682), and *The Lucky Chance* (1686). Like Polwhele, Behn grants her comic heroines more presence and influence on the action. *The Rover* even starts out with an all-women scene, thus opting for their perspective as the point of view of the play. This was almost a revolution in Restoration drama.¹⁷⁰

Oroonoko, or The History of the Royal Slave (1688) was one of the earliest English novels and is a combination of romance, heroic tragedy, and colonial travel and adventure narrative.¹⁷¹

Behn's commercial success as a playwright, and a female one, was unprecedented. She cleared the way into literature – a sphere hitherto considered exclusively male – for other women writers and challenged the male hegemony over writing for the public theatre and for publication. Behn was the living proof that women were as talented and brilliant as men and that they could be as successful as male dramatists. As Young (22) concludes, “the

¹⁶⁸ Cf. the following conduct books: *The English Gentleman* (1631) Cf. Braithwaite, 38f; *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591) and *A Godlie Forme of Household Government* (1598) both qtd. in Pearson 4

¹⁶⁹ Susan Glover comments on the problem of authorial dispossession eighteenth-century women writers faced concerning their intellectual work and its estimation as their “real” property. Cf. Glover 96

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Rubik 44; Pearson 146

¹⁷¹ Cf. Staves 79

impact of her pioneering effort as the first of her sex to write professionally for the theatre was substantial.”

She Ventures and He Wins (1695), a “reformed” comedy written by the anonymous “**Ariadne**,”¹⁷² was performed at the opening of Betterton’s new Lincoln’s Inn Fields theatre. It turned out a failure, but it was one of the first plays by a woman which used the reversal of gender roles, allowing women to test their suitors in every conceivable way. A device which “turned out to be extremely popular with female dramatists and was imitated and varied throughout the century” (Rubik 59).

Delarivière Manley¹⁷³ (1663-1724) wrote the aforementioned politically satirical roman à clef *The New Atlantis* (1709), four plays, and political pamphlets.¹⁷⁴ In 1711 she succeeded Swift as the editor of the *Examiner*. She wrote only one comedy that we know of, *The Lost Lover, or The Jealous Husband* (1696). In contrast to her fairly feminist tragedies and except for her sympathetic treatment of a cast-off mistress, it is a rather misogynist intrigue comedy. In part of the dialogue, Manley criticises the hypocrisy of respectable people who do not practise what they preach.

Catherine Trotter¹⁷⁵ (1679-1749) was quite successful with her heavily moralising affective tragedies and wrote only one comedy, *Love at a Loss, or Most Votes Carry It* (1700), which was unsuccessful. Trotter employs several motifs (e.g. a heroine hiding her female friend in a closet) and characters (e.g. a foolishly interfering busybody) Centlivre was to borrow later on.

Mary Pix¹⁷⁶ (1666-1709), the most prolific of the “Female Wits,” was a merchant’s wife, which is conspicuous in two ways; firstly because most women writers were unmarried, and secondly, because she came from a lower social class than the other two “Female Wits.” Although Pix wrote some fine comedies

¹⁷² Cf. Rubik 59

¹⁷³ Cf. “Manley, Mrs Delarivière.”; Rubik 60; Staves 111

¹⁷⁴ Cf. 3.2.7. Political involvement (of women)

¹⁷⁵ Cf. “Trotter, Catherine.”; Rubik 72f

¹⁷⁶ Cf. “Pix, Mary.”; Rubik 75, 79, 81; Staves 114f, 117

– most often employing the pattern of bustling multi-plot intrigue comedy – she felt a vocation to write tragedy, for which she was considerably less gifted. Her best or most successful comedies include *The Spanish Wives* (1696), *The Innocent Mistress* (1697), *The Deceiver Deceived* (1697), *The Beau Defeated* (1700), and *The Adventures in Madrid* (1706). In *The Beau Defeated* Pix interestingly applies Ariadne's motif of a woman testing her suitor. For Pix, a rake is an unacceptable partner for her heroine, a young widow. Instead of letting the rake repent abruptly and unconvincingly at the end of the play, she chooses to portray a consistently virtuous hero who has a reputation for modesty and chastity, thus employing an interesting role reversal. The play's ending praises British merchants and can thus be regarded as an early forerunner of Whig plays re-appraising the role of the middle class e.g. Lillo's *The London Merchant*. Pix's sympathetic female characters and typical reversal of the gendering of comic stock plots became the model for many other female dramatists, especially for her friend and protégée Susanna Centlivre.

Eliza Haywood¹⁷⁷ (1693?-1756) was an actress and a prolific writer of several plays and novels. Her achievement as the editor of *The Female Spectator* (1744-6) was much bigger than as a dramatist. *A Wife to be Lett* (1724) is a full-blown sentimental comedy and excessively didactic and moralising. While Haywood's plays only display covert feminist views, her novels reveal very different images of courageous, strong, and resolute women.

Penelope Aubin¹⁷⁸ (1679-1731), a novelist and translator, became a prolific professional writer in the 1720s, turning out seven novels in seven years. She wrote only one play, the fairly conventional comedy *The Humours of the Masqueraders* (1730), in which she uses a moderated variant of the old cuckolding motif of sex comedy. This play is fairly licentious, which is not only surprising for the time when it was first performed, but also regarding her novels, which are of a didactic and religious nature.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. "Haywood, Eliza."; Rubik131f

¹⁷⁸ Cf. "Aubin, Penelope."; Rubik 124f

Elizabeth Cooper¹⁷⁹ (fl. 1730) also uses dominant female characters in her rather conventional comedy *The Rival Widows* (1735). Her flirtatious but rational and constantly intriguing heroine has a lot in common with the 'old' Restoration heroine. By 1730 this sprightly character is, most regrettably, already threatened by extinction and keeps vanishing as the century wears on.

The acknowledgement attained by these early women dramatists, ranging from deep admiration to cruel, misogynist ridicule, eventually yielded the utterly positive result of greater attention for intellectually gifted women.¹⁸⁰ Especially after 1715 women's most common accounts of the nature and role of women are no longer to be found in the drama, but rather in non-dramatic literary forms.¹⁸¹

5.8. Susanna Centlivre¹⁸² (1669?-1723)¹⁸³ – a major female playwright

Susanna Centlivre¹⁸⁴ is one of the most outstanding and savvy dramatists of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Starting out as a strolling actress, she emerged as a highly successful and prolific playwright, poet, and essayist. Many of her comedies were performed throughout the eighteenth century and some of them even survived until the end of the nineteenth century e.g. *The Busie Body* (1709), *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714), and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718).

Centlivre's descent and early life is shrouded in legend. She was either a gentlewoman, daughter of a Mr Freeman of Holbeach, Lincolnshire, dissenter and Parliamentarian who lost his estate and fled to Ireland at the Restoration;¹⁸⁵ or her maiden name was Rawkins and her birth was mean.¹⁸⁶ There exists a myth involving her parents' early deaths and a wicked stepmother. Centlivre is

¹⁷⁹ Cf. "Cooper, Elizabeth."; Rubik 122ff

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Young 23

¹⁸¹ Cf. Pearson 232

¹⁸² Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Cotton 123; Lock 21; Pearson 205; "Centlivre, Susanna." *Augustan Literature*

¹⁸³ Some sources give 1667 as her year of birth.

¹⁸⁴ née Susanna Freeman sometimes also called Susanna Carroll or Rawkins; also spelt Susannah; Cf. "Centlivre, Susanna." *A Dictionary of Writers and their Works*; Cotton 123

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Giles Jacob's *Poetical Register* (1719) qtd. in Sutherland, "Progress" 168

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Abel Boyer's *Political State of Great Britain* (1723) qtd. in Sutherland, "Progress" 169

said to have run away from home at the age of fourteen, joining a company of strolling players. Alternatively, there exists an anecdote of her lover Anthony Hammond disguising her as a boy and taking her with him to Cambridge.¹⁸⁷ Either way, Centlivre apparently had an adventurous but rather improper youth.

She seems to have married a nephew of Sir Stephen Fox, but was widowed after only one year. Soon after, she supposedly married an army officer by the name of Carroll, who was killed in a duel after eighteen months of marriage. Little of this information has been proved or disproved. When Centlivre posed in breeches as an actress at the court of Queen Anne, she won the heart of Joseph Centlivre, who was “yeoman of the mouth” i.e. master cook to the Queen, and married him in 1707.¹⁸⁸ Quite unusually, her marriage did not put an end to her literary endeavours.

After 1700, Centlivre started out as a writer of epistolary fiction and poetry. By then she was already a member of a wide literary circle of friends, writers, and actors and especially well-acquainted with fellow women writers. Many of her Grub Street colleagues contributed pro- and epilogues to her nineteen plays.

Centlivre was a staunch Whig and wrote politically motivated drama. A rumour about the “notorious whiggish Epilogue” (Preface) of *The Perplex'd Lovers* (1712) and the ensuing problem of getting a license for it resulted in the play being performed without a proper epilogue on the first night. Her ardent support for the Whig party was explicitly expressed in the farce *A Gotham Election* (published in 1715), which was refused license by the Lord Chamberlain.¹⁸⁹

Apart from expressing her political views in some of her works, Centlivre was writing to please the town and can be called a “pragmatic dramatist”¹⁹⁰ (Lock 31). Critic and biographer John Wilson Bowyer (250) also contends that “she wished to enjoy audience applause” and Frushell (16) similarly remarks that Centlivre was “a playwright mostly interested in stage fame for her works.” While Bateson (64) states that her six comedies *The Gamester*, *The Basset-Table*, *Love at a Venture*, *The Busie Body*, *The Wonder*, and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* “all have a certain vitality and technical *finesse*, and are as good

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Cotton 123

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Cotton 123; Pearson 205; “Centlivre, Susanna.” *Augustan Literature*

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Lock 21

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Lock’s second chapter “Writing to Please the Town” (31-46)

examples as one can hope to find of the work of the professional dramatist of the eighteenth century,” he contends that they have “no intellectual or literary significance” as the writing is not distinguished, and the characterisation “with the single exception of Marplot in *The Busie Body*, is conventional and superficial.” However, Bateson (64) finally admits that Centlivre managed to fulfil the purpose for which she wrote, namely to amuse and distract the mind, and at least appreciates her comedies as being “the railway reading of Georgian England.”

Centlivre’s literary conviction and intention was closely related to that of Horace; in an epistle of 1700 she wrote: “I think the main design of Comedy is to make us laugh” (qtd. in Boyer 362). Most of her plays please *and* instruct, but she considered the principle of delight of higher priority. The natural consequence of this was responding to the changes in public taste; if these changes were also in tune with her personal inclinations we cannot tell.

Susanna Centlivre died on 1 December 1723 and was buried at the actor's church at St. Paul's Church, in Covent Garden.

5.8.1. *The Busie Body*¹⁹¹ (1709)

Centlivre’s masterpiece, *The Busie Body*, was staged 475 times in the London theatres from its premiere at Drury Lane on 12 May 1709 until its final eighteenth-century performance at Covent Garden, on 7 June 1800.¹⁹²

It was the first play she wrote after her marriage and had her name attached to its title page and the dedication for the first time, too.¹⁹³ Lock’s general characterisation of Centlivre’s plays is definitely true for *The Busie Body*, “‘Plot, Humour, Business’ is a good characterization of the main sources of her comedy,” and of course the plot is to involve love intrigues (Lock 27).¹⁹⁴ However, though the play was extremely successful with the audience well into the nineteenth century, Hume states that the result of Centlivre’s

¹⁹¹ For parts of the plot cf. Lock 64; Rubik 101f

¹⁹² Cf. Frushell xxvii, xxxii

¹⁹³ Cf. Frushell xxxix

¹⁹⁴ Lock’s source of these three characteristics is William Bond’s prologue (27) for *The Artifice*.

interweavement of several sources¹⁹⁵ is “an effective vehicle for a theatrical romp, but no one has ever found much literary value in it” (Hume, *Development* 116). Dobrée (*English Literature* 236) goes even further, reviewing the play as an “empty comedy of intrigue, without any reality of emotion whatsoever,” which is an extremely harsh judgement. Bateson (70) finds at least the character of Marplot highly engaging and Nicoll (167) even regards the play as “one of the masterpieces [of the] comedy of intrigue.” While many critics like Bowyer (171) call it “an excellent light comedy,” Pearson (226) favours the play and emphasises that “it is more than this.”

The Busie Body is a comedy of intrigue which is quite typically set in Lisbon. It features a vivid hero paired with a vivacious heroine (Sir George Airy and Miranda) and a quiet heroine paired with a more serious hero (Isabinda and Charles Gripe). Sir George Airy wants to marry Miranda but her guardian, Sir Francis Gripe, intends her for himself. Sir Francis’s son Charles, a friend of Sir George’s, wants to marry Isabinda but her father, Sir Jealous Traffick, plans to marry her to a Spanish merchant. The business of the play is to outwit father and guardian. The characters are very much contrasted; Sir George being rich but in doubt about Miranda’s love for him, while Charles is poor but assured of Isabinda’s love. Miranda is financially dependent on her guardian but enjoys personal liberty and freedom of movement, while Isabinda is virtually imprisoned by her father. Miranda is an active and independent heroine who is pursued by Sir George, whereas Isabinda is timid and amenable, hoping to be rescued by Charles.

Marplot, another of Sir Francis’s wards, tries his best to help the young lovers, but being the “busybody” of the title, his bungling but well-meant interference even adds complications instead of smoothing them out. The two couples are also helped by their servants, Patch (maid to Isabinda) and Whisper (Charles’s servant).

In order to gain control of her estate, Miranda pretends to be in love with her guardian, Sir Francis. At the same time she turns Sir George’s head, flirting with him in disguise and later refusing to speak a word with him in a one-hour-interview he paid her guardian for. Later, Marplot delivers her coded message

¹⁹⁵ i.e. Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* and either Molière’s *L’Étourdi* or its Newcastle-Dryden adaptation *Sir Martin Mar-All*.

to Sir George, which the latter correctly interprets as an invitation to a rendezvous. However, Sir Francis's unexpected return calls off their date, Marplot almost busting them in the funny and very popular "monkey scene." Miranda finally succeeds in making her guardian believe that she will marry him and cons the deeds for her estates out of him on their supposed wedding day. She actually marries on this day, but her bridegroom is Sir George and not Sir Francis.

In the second plotline, Isabinda is more or less locked up by her father Sir Jealous, a merchant who spent some time in Spain and adopted some typical Spanish customs, especially regarding the treatment of daughters before marriage. He has arranged for her to marry a Spanish merchant. Charles and Isabinda also try to meet secretly and are helped by Isabinda's inventive maid Patch, but their plans are spoiled both by Marplot's meddling and by Sir Jealous's vigilance. In the end, Charles disguises as the Spaniard and, aided by the other couple, eventually succeeds in marrying Isabinda, again nearly being busted by Marplot. While Sir Jealous finally accepts the trick marriage and is reconciled with the couple, Sir Francis refuses to give Miranda and Sir George his blessing; however this does not cast the tiniest cloud on the wedded pair's future happiness.

5.8.2. *A Gotham Election*¹⁹⁶ (written in 1715)

As mentioned above, due to its outspoken political message *A Gotham Election* was not staged. The farce satirises electioneering practices which obviously actually prevailed in the period.¹⁹⁷ The Whig candidates Sir John Worthy and Sir Roger Trusty are both local landowners, their speaking names hinting at their superiority over Tickup. The Tory candidate Tickup, pro-French and having Jacobite sympathies, flatters as well as bribes tradesmen and their wives and makes unfulfillable election promises. He is a swindler from London and his reason for standing for election is that he hopes to gain parliamentary immunity from arrest for debt. Tickup is supported by the mayor of Gotham, himself a Jacobite, and Lady Worthy, a high church Tory who wants to score off her

¹⁹⁶ For parts of the plot cf. Lock 101ff

¹⁹⁷ Cf. 10. Party politics and female involvement in *A Gotham Election*

husband because of a squabble they had over the local parson. Centlivre's bias in favour of the Whigs is evident.

In the sub-plot Friendly visits Gotham as Sir Roger's agent, and determines to marry the wealthy mayor's daughter. But the mayor plans to have his daughter Lucy, who is a Whig to the bone, educated in France and wants her to become a nun, thus getting hold of her fortune. Friendly disguises himself as a delegate of the Pretender and offers the mayor to take his daughter back to France with him. After Friendly's revelation of her father's principles and plot, Lucy puts herself under Friendly's protection and marries him.

Meanwhile, Tickup and Lady Worthy are hunting for votes, agreeing to exorbitant pre-election promises, for example pledging the carpenter Mallet important positions in the government for himself and all his relatives in return for his vote. In the course of their undertaking, Tickup endures every kind of humiliation, even kissing the cobbler and finally emerging with his suit ruined by the miller, but with no vote gained. The absolute low point is when the cobbler pertly remarks that he could never vote for anyone who would "stoop so low" in order to bribe and buy his support (54). Back on the hunt, Tickup attends the christening of Mallet's grandson and again makes ridiculous and irresponsible promises. Interestingly, Centlivre chose a Quaker, Scruple, to be the mouthpiece of common sense in this situation.

Another sub-plot features a lengthy, theatrically unsuccessful debate between Sir Roger and Alderman Credulous, the mayor, which functions as a political allegory. Credulous is of the opinion that wives and children, just like subjects to the monarch, should be passive-obedient, as their fathers, just like the monarch, know what is best for them. Sir Roger, however, does not share this view.

The election ends in a riot, the Whigs emerging victorious. The Jacobite mayor's daughter chooses Friendly as her guardian and delivers herself into his hands, the political allegory implying that England prefers a guardian like George I to the Pretender.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ "England has chosen freely to be ruled by the constitutional monarchs of the House of Hanover rather than by the descendants of James II" (Pearson 225).

5.9. Mary Davys¹⁹⁹ (1674-1732) – a minor female playwright

Mary Davys was a playwright, one of the first female novelists, and an occasional poet. According to the *DNB*, she was “almost certainly born in Ireland,” where she married Reverend Peter Davys²⁰⁰, master of the free school of St. Patrick’s in Dublin. Her private life was overshadowed by many losses. After the death of her daughter Ann in 1695, her husband Peter deceased in 1698. Her second daughter Mary did not survive the first year and died in 1699. After these severe setbacks, Davys emigrated to London in 1700 and moved to York four years later.

Her first works of fiction were *The False Friend, or The Treacherous Portugueze*, later published as *The Cousins* in her *Works*, and *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe*, published in 1704 and revised as *The Lady’s Tale* for her *Works*.

Davys dedicated *The Fugitive* (1705; revised for *Works* as *The Merry Wanderer*), an autobiographic travel anecdote, to Esther Johnson, who came to be known as Jonathan Swift’s “Stella.”²⁰¹ Swift had been a friend of Peter Davys’, but he did not think well of Mary Davys, who is known to have occasionally begged him for money in her widowed days. Swift was angered by her pleas, as is visible in his correspondence and his *Journal*.²⁰² Davys probably did not know Esther Johnson in person and only dedicated *The Fugitive* to her to flatter her and Swift, hoping to gain their financial support.²⁰³

The Reform’d Coquet (1724), a novella, was quite popular and went through seven editions by 1760.²⁰⁴ Its success led to the later publication of Davys’

¹⁹⁹ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from “Davys, Mary.” (*Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*; *DNB*)

²⁰⁰ Mann gives Patrick as his first name, but it might have been by mistake, confusing Peter and St. Patrick’s school. Cf. Mann 102

²⁰¹ Cf. Swift’s *Journal to Stella*

²⁰² Cf. McBurney 348

On 12 February 1713 Swift relates that he has been writing a Lettr to Mrs Davis at York, she took care to have a Lettr delivred for me at Ld Tr’s, for I would not own one she sent by Postt: She reproaches me for not writing to her these 4 Years; & I have honestly told her, it was my way never to write to those whom I never am likely to see, unless I can serve them, wch I cannot her, &c. Davis the Schoolmastr’s Widow. (*Journal to Stella*, 625)

²⁰³ “Mrs. Davys, however, admitted that she was “almost a Stranger” to Stella and that she had only recently heard of her departure for Ireland (four years earlier, in Sept. 1701)” (McBurney 353).

²⁰⁴ Cf. Backscheider 251

Works. Its subscription list carries the names of John Gay, Alexander Pope and some London actors. It relates the lively adventures of a young lady and is brimming with comic scenes and popular character types. The *DNB* calls it “the true paradigm of the central female tradition in the eighteenth-century novel,”²⁰⁵ containing the key character type of “the mistaken heroine who reforms’ and learns to appreciate a worthy, if sober man” (“Davys, Mary.” *DNB*).

The two-volume collection *The Works of Mrs. Mary Davys* (1725) consists of eighteen texts, including the hitherto unpublished epistolary novel *Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady*, *The Modern Poet* (poetry) and the comedy *The Self-Rival*. Her final novel *The Accomplish'd Rake* (1727) is a satirical account of a fine gentleman from the fashionable London leisure class.

William McBurney highly esteems Mrs Davys as a “forerunner of Fielding.”²⁰⁶ Susan Glover similarly refers to her as a member of a special category of women writers anticipating their (male) successors, who then implement the “genuine or legitimate literary production” (Glover 78). She further considers Davys’ “witty, self-reflexive narrative personae [...], who comment knowledgeably on both the fictional characters and the performance of the writing and reading process” as anticipating Henry Fielding’s characters (Glover 78). Quoting Margaret Doody (134f), Glover (86) claims that Samuel Richardson profitably pursued Davys’ fictional direction of the character of the heroine. Jean Kern (38) calls Davys a “novelist of manners,” because she introduced the independent and witty heroine of Restoration comedy to the novel.²⁰⁷ The *DNB* groups Davys with novelists such as Defoe, Haywood, and Aubin, who gave an impetus to the development of the English novel.

Davys was poor all through her widowed life and in her final years scraped a living by writing and running a coffee house in Cambridge. Her coffee house, which she ran until her death in 1732, must have been at the centre of Cambridge student life, supplied with newspapers and periodicals, and filled

²⁰⁵ Instead of Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*.

²⁰⁶ Cf. McBurney 348

²⁰⁷ Cf. Kern 38

with the conversation of literary professionals²⁰⁸ – the kind of male conversation usually denied to women.

Her “unblemished reputation,” which was quite unusual for a woman writer of the period, was important to Davys, which is indicated by her referring to herself as the widow Davys or “the Relict of a Clergy-man” (*Works I* vii). In the preface to her *Works* she justifies her writing as being done purely out of financial necessity, as she was “a Woman left to her own Endeavours for Twenty-Seven Years together,” but as a matter of fact she was quite aware of her abilities, stating “I was never so vain, as to think they derserv’d a Place in the first Rank, or so humble, as to resign them to the last” (*Works I* vii-viii).

5.9.1. *The Northern Heiress*²⁰⁹ (1715)²¹⁰

Davys’ first play was *The Northern Heiress* (1715) and was staged in London. From the performance’s proceeds Davys bought the Cambridge coffee house.

There are several most interesting aspects about the play. Firstly, it is original and not derived from other sources like the great part of Centlivre’s work; secondly, instead of fashionable London Davys chose rural York as its setting and provides an insight into the lives of the “humours” of York and the local customs, focusing on the lives of tradeswomen.²¹¹ Pearson (233) considers the comedy as belonging to “woman-centred” or “profeminine” drama, which firmly concentrates on the dilemmas of women. As is typical especially of the female-written drama of the period, the play does without bawdiness, but still manages to retain “the liveliness, wit and unsentimentality of the Restoration comedy of manners” (Rubik 121).

Gamont, a young gallant, fell out of favour with his father, who has fallen in love with his chambermaid. As Gamont and his sister Louisa disapproved of their father’s proceedings, they had to leave his house. Now Gamont owns only a small fortune his uncle left him. Consequently he and Louisa moved to York,

²⁰⁸ Cf. Glover 86; Davys comments on these “worthy Gentlemen of *Cambridge*” in her preface to *The Reform'd Coquet* (5)

²⁰⁹ For parts of the plot cf. Rubik 120f; Staves 204f

²¹⁰ *The Poetical Register* (286) gives 1715 as the year of the first performance, when it was staged in York, all other sources agree on 1716, when it was first performed in London and printed.

²¹¹ Cf. Rubik 120

which is not as expensive as London. Louisa has inherited some money of her own from her grandmother, with which she supports herself as well as her brother. Welby, a wealthy friend of Gamont's, has just returned from his travels abroad. Having grown tired of his rambles, he now wants to settle down, marry, and have children. Isabella is a strong-minded and wealthy heiress who is wooed by a number of gallants and fops, Gamont being one of them. She is in love with Gamont, but wants to test his love for her with "a Tryal or two" before she is willing to reveal her true feelings to him (36).

Lady Greasy, a chandler's widow, runs her late husband's business and lets lodgings. She is a devout and busy business woman and very much interested in providing her daughter Dolly with a wealthy husband. Impoverished Captain Tinsel courting Dolly upsets her so much as to turn her into a proper termagant. She is loud, smelly, and coarse, and even belches when invited to genteel Lady Ample's breakfast table.²¹² This scene portrays her best, when engaged in a conversation about business and local elections with Lady Swish and Lady Cordivant, relishing a breakfast of "hot Ale and Ginger, Butter, Rolls, a huge *Cheshire* Cheese, and a Plate of drunk Toast," (23) which she prefers to "flip flap Tea" (21).

Bareface is a wealthy would-be rake and a fop who is constantly criticised by Lady Greasy for squandering the money his late parents had to toil for all their lives. He is such a booby that he even forgets which girl he is in love with. Liddy is Isabella's clever maid, who wants to obtain a husband and in the end succeeds in tricking Bareface into marrying her.

Some other rural Yorkshire butts of humour are the country booby Sir Loobily Joddrel, who is a foolish horseman, Lady Swish, a brewer's wife, Lady Cordivant, a glover's wife, and Sir Jeffrey Heavey, a country knight.

²¹² Cf. *The Northern Heiress* 21, 25

5.9.2. *The Self-Rival*²¹³ (published 1725)

The Self-Rival is labelled “As it should have been Acted at the Theatre-Royal In Drury Lane” but was eventually not staged and only published in Davys’ *Works* (*Works I* 1). Susan Staves (182) states that it was written between 1716 and 1718. In comparison to *The Northern Heiress*, it is weaker in characterisation and humour, and more conventionally set in London.

The play relates the story of a young soldier, Colonel Bellamont, who woos his sweetheart Maria Purchase. In order to trick Maria’s tyrannical father, Sir Ephraim, into giving him his daughter’s hand in marriage, Bellamont impersonates his own uncle, Lord Pastall. Of course, Maria immediately sees through his deception, secretly agreeing to his plan, but outwardly mocking the elderly “uncle” wooing her. Her pretence of not recognising Bellamont through his disguise forces him to be his own rival, courting her as himself and in disguise. In the sub-plot Sir Ephraim is tricked a second time. Kitty, Maria’s maid, disguised a fortune teller, wants him to let her marry his son Frederick. She turns out to be a second self-rival, and in the end is revealed to be Emilia, a gentlewoman and not a maid at all. The two witty heroines control both their gallants and also manage to trick Sir Ephraim.

Another more comical sub-plot involves two contrasting old maids, one negatively (Lady Camphire Lovebane) and one positively (Mrs Fallow) portrayed, who are farcially quarrelling with the cynical and misogynist bachelor Verjuice. Mrs Fallow is one of the few positively depicted old maids of Restoration comedy. She is cheerful, good-natured and has a sense of humour; as is conceived suitable for her age, the widow prefers to remain single.

Barnaby, the colonel’s servant is quite an original character. In contrast to his master, who just drank his way through his university terms in taverns instead of attending to his studies, he is not only witty but also learned and well-read.

²¹³ Cf. Rubik 121f

5.10. Minor vs. major female playwright

When comparing Mary Davys and Susanna Centlivre, many similarities but also many disparities become apparent. Both were respectable women and widows; one of them married again. Centlivre, being married to the Queen's cook and thus connected with the court, did not have to write to earn a living. Davys, who was the widow of a clergyman and chose to remain single, however, had to sustain herself and heavily relied on her writing as a substantial source of income.

While Centlivre was hugely successful and very popular with the theatre audience for many decades, early twentieth-century critics including Lock, Bowyer, Bateson, and Frushell all regard Centlivre's desire and primary aim, "to entertain her contemporaries," as her main flaw (Lock 132).

Davys' only performed comedy just managed to go through three nights and together with its author completely vanished into oblivion till the early twentieth century.²¹⁴ The *Dublin University Magazine* of 1855 published a brief though erroneous summary of her career which closes with what Bowden (*Mary Davys* 31) calls Davys' "literary epitaph": "She appears to have enjoyed some literary reputation in her day although now totally forgotten."²¹⁵ Bowden (*Mary Davys* 35) aptly notes that between the eighteenth-century reprints of *The Reform'd Coquet* and *The Accomplish'd Rake* and the 1950s, Davys was "a mere footnote in Swift's works."

Both, Centlivre and Davys, wrote imaginative and funny comedies. Centlivre was a most prolific writer of drama and a master of resourcefully borrowing and interweaving given plots. She has often been referred to as a pragmatic or mainstream dramatist, who was writing to please the town. Centlivre's plays have often been criticised as quite trivial and conventional. Bateson, however, praises Centlivre's ability to write to the taste of her audience, suggesting that her plays were commercially rather than artistically successful.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ According to Polly S. Fields' annotated bibliography of Mary Davys in *Eighteenth-Century Anglo-American Women Novelists*, Davys was first mentioned in 1911 by Charlotte Morgan in *The Rise of the Novel of Manner*.

²¹⁵ *Dublin University Magazine*, 1855 (January/ June) 45. Cf. Bowden *Mary Davys* 33

²¹⁶ Cf. Bateson 61-77

Davys, by contrast, was more interested in writing fiction, especially novellas, epistolary novels, and autobiographical narratives. She creatively invented original plots, was more innovative and self-confident in breaking new ground and certainly left her mark in the development of the novel. Davys has been much acclaimed by those few modern critics who know her, being considered a forerunner of Fielding and Richardson, and has been praised for standing out against the popular drama of the time, introducing a positive rural setting and rural characters with their funny accents, in a time when the London setting, which her plays depict as negative, was still the measure of all things.

Although Centlivre's contribution to English drama is quite appreciable, Davys' early novels seem to be of even higher literary value and importance, if one is to compare literary works in terms of what they are 'worth.' Bearing all these similarities and all the more the disparities in mind, it is quite astonishing and even paradoxical that Centlivre is generally called a or even *the* mayor female playwright of the early eighteenth century, while Davys is still frequently forgotten and excluded from secondary literature, or, if she is mentioned at all, grouped among several minor female playwrights.

5.11. General differences in plays by male and female dramatists and the issue of the female playwrights' ambivalence

Even though women writers in the Restoration tended to 'write like men,' in order to be as successful as their male counterparts, there are some features in their works which in a way betray but also distinguish their writings as the works of women. Plays by women writers are much more likely to employ woman-only scenes and female characters who open and close the play, thus implementing a female perspective. According to Pearson, no full-length play by a female author lacks woman-only scenes.²¹⁷ Especially ending a play and summing up its significance for the audience in the last lines provides female characters with a certain authority rarely found in plays by male writers.²¹⁸ Female characters in plays by men are more likely to open than to end plays, and, in contrast to their

²¹⁷ She examined 100 plays by men and 100 plays by women. Cf. Pearson 269n5

²¹⁸ Two exceptional examples are "Congreve's least passive heroine, Angelica in *Love for Love* and Wycherley's Hippolyta in *The Gentleman Dancing Master*" (Pearson 64).

gallants, they are frequently not on stage when the curtain rises, but introduced later.²¹⁹ This postponement of the heroine's appearance establishes a male perspective and a certain male dominance right from the beginning of a play; as a result the audience is much more likely to see the world through the gallant's eyes than through the heroine's. Women writers also grant female characters more prominence in the sense of spoken lines, sometimes even allowing them to speak more than half the lines, e.g. in Davys' *The Northern Heiress*.²²⁰ Generally, women are allowed to speak more lines in comedy than in other genres, but the heroine will almost certainly speak fewer lines than the gallant.²²¹

Douglas Young (23) holds the opinion that the aspirations of the "new woman" of Restoration for a new independence and status in the real world are best exemplified in the play-world of the Restoration social comedies. He believes the female characters created by Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve optimally reflect these women and their aspirations and values. It is quite remarkable that Young only examines plays by male playwrights in his book on the *feminist* voices in Restoration comedy, thus presuming that the only writers of the period who committed feminist ideas to paper were men. He might implicitly argue that women writers of the period suffered so much from prejudice that they did not dare to voice their feminist views in their dramatic works and that male dramatists could afford to take more liberties as their works were less vulnerable to public criticism than their female colleagues'; but that would be a considerable distortion of the truth.

In contrast to Young, Pearson (55) concedes that Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve accepted the double sexual standard, even if they created powerful, strong-minded, and brilliant heroines, because most often the heroine's dominance was confined to mere words. As actions speak louder than words,

²¹⁹ According to Pearson, no Congreve comic heroine appears in the first act and Harriet in *The Man of Mode* does not appear until the third act. Cf. Pearson 64

²²⁰ Cf. Pearson 269

²²¹ In 27 plays by Cavendish and Brackley, Cavendish, Trotter, Pix, Centlivre, Wiseman, Davys and Cooper, female characters are allowed to speak half the lines or more; only in two tragedies by men women are allowed to speak more than half the lines i.e. Banks' *The Unhappy Favourite* and Dryden's *Secret Love*; both centre on queens whose power as rulers is symbolised by control of language in contrast to heroines who as "ordinary" women should avoid talkativeness. Cf. Pearson 65

this implies that their heroines in fact did not have any control over the action.²²² They gained power “without moving too disturbingly outside the convention” (Pearson 52). Pearson argues that this presentation of “witty, sparkling heroines has little to do with real female emancipation” (56). This attitude is also clearly portrayed in Pearson’s calling Angellica “Congreve’s *least passive* [emphasis added] heroine,” (64) thus indicating that she was an improvement in contrast to Congreve’s other heroines, but still not a representative of what Pearson would define as an unconventional woman.

One of the great differences between works by male and female Restoration dramatists is their increased tolerance and sympathy towards their characters. In contrast to female writers, male writers were much harsher and vicious in their portrayal of humour-butts, old maids, or fallen women.

According to the double standard, most male dramatists treat the fallen woman in a cruel and unforgiving manner. Hardly any rake in a play by a man condescends to marry a woman whose chastity he has ruined himself. In those instances in which she is redeemed, the fallen woman most often has to marry a humour-butt. Only some women writers dared to attack the double standard in their plays, allowing their heroines as well as their fallen women to protest at the status quo. Behn’s *The City Heiress* provides a striking case of a fallen woman, a mistress, climbing up the social ladder by marrying a wealthy knight. Centlivre’s *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* employs an unconventional woman, a clever kept mistress, who is used to being insulted by men who are her intellectual inferiors. The whore with the heart of gold, featured by Sedley in *Bellamira, or The Mistress* (1687), is really a scarcity.²²³

Female writers often take a much more tolerant and sympathetic view, which is not to be confused with the utterly sentimental treatment typical of moralising and truly sentimental drama. As members of a social group which was regarded as innately inferior to their male counterparts, women writers surely were more tolerant and sensitive in their treatment of socially oppressed minorities, which is clearly reflected in their portrayal of social outsiders and especially of female outsiders such as old maids and widows. Female dramatists of the Restoration period have often been reproached with their ambivalence. But who can blame

²²² E.g. Millamant in *The Way of the World* Cf. Pearson 55

²²³ Cf. Pearson 93

them? It is simply a matter of 'I wish I could, but I cannot.' Even though writers like Centlivre and Davys were exceptional for the period, they also had their limits. Their position as pioneers for other women writers was a precarious one. They could not risk too much, because they had much to lose, both having a reputation they cherished and did not want to risk. This stands in stark contrast to writers like Behn or Cavendish, whose reputations were already blemished and who were not as preoccupied with what others thought of them.

Centlivre was a respectable married woman with relations to the court. In contrast to many other female dramatists, she kept writing while married to Joseph Centlivre and even flourished during these years, although her ironic, autobiographical poem *A Woman's Case* indicates that her husband was not always entirely happy with her vocation.²²⁴ Thus it is hardly surprising that Centlivre took care of her reputation, only at times transgressing her pragmatic boundaries and venturing into politically motivated drama, which was surely less risky for a woman than propagating feminist ideas.

Davys was a widow who had to sustain herself. Her later works, i.e. her later novels, have also been upbraided for being more conventional and less rebellious and innovative than her early works.²²⁵ Mary Anne Schofield (89) indicates that Davys was unable to maintain the rebelliousness of her early pieces (e.g. *The Lady's Tale* and *The Familiar Letters*), in which she is "challenging enough initially to make statements about the value of female life" but, as her career continues, finds herself "trapped and hedged in by [the romantic mode's] conventions." Schofield concludes her essay by saying that Davys did not manage to live up to the promise displayed in her earlier pieces,

²²⁴ *A Woman's Case* (written in 1714 Cf. "Centlivre, Susanna." *DNB*)

To GEORGE of WALES I dedicated,
 Tho' then at Court I knew him hated.
 Dick Steele was then in Reputation
 With all true Lovers of my Nation:
 Yet spright of Steel's Advice I did it
 Nay, tho' my Husband's place forbid it.

²²⁵ E.g. in Schofield's essay "Mary Davys" in *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind: Davys' The Merry Wanderer* (1725) [...] encapsulates and underscores the ambivalent position of the novelist herself. When the novel first existed as *The Fugitive*, it was a rebellious text; it displayed Davys' uncertainty about the future, her exile and isolation in Britain as an Irish person, and her general discontent with her position as a female author. This tone of dislocation and disenfranchisement is greatly altered with the revision as *The Merry Wanderer*. (Schofield 81)

but ultimately had to capitulate to “the controlling and all-powerful male world” (90).

Bowden (*Silences*, 146) also comments on the problematic conventionality of Davys’ novels in the face of her own life, which she describes as “a case-book study in the way in which patriarchal society fails women and how one woman survived in spite of it.” She takes a much more sympathetic view than Schofield, concluding that Davys’

survival through thirty-four years of widowhood [...] would surely have made a more compelling novel than the story of a girl who is reformed into a conventionally submissive wife by the man who wishes to marry her.²²⁶ (Bowden *Silences*, 146)

Immediately three reasons for Davys’ conversion come to mind: First, she would not be the first writer whose early works are more daring and groundbreaking than her later works, which could perfectly well be due to her advanced age and maturity.²²⁷ Secondly, her financial situation is known to have been precarious, so it is hardly startling that she adopts a more conventional course in order to appeal to a wider readership. Bowden’s final statement on one of Davys’ last works, *The Reform’d Coquet*, also reinforces these assumptions:

But I suspect she realized that her own story was one that her society was not ready to hear, and as a result it is lost to us as well, eager as we may be to know it. (Bowden *Silences* 146)

Thirdly, the eighteenth century saw an alteration in the social perception of women, which was also reflected in the period’s literature, moving towards a distinctly sentimental image of women as ‘virtue in distress,’ who had to be kept at home and cut off from the cruel world outside, for which they were simply not fit.

The dramatic works of Centlivre and Davys have a distinct charm and distinguish themselves from the works of men. Their humour is not as scathing and bitter as that of male dramatists, and not always at the expense of weak characters. Weak and foolish characters generally receive a much more sympathetic treatment from women writers, who present them as multifaceted

²²⁶ i.e. *The Reform’d Coquet*

²²⁷ Approximately twenty years lie between *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe*, published in 1704, and the publication of her *Works* (1725) and *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727).

and more complex versions of the old stock characters, thus paving the way for a three-dimensional character portrayal.

II. WHAT'S IN THE PLAYS

6. Stock plots and stock characters

Restoration comic plots are extremely formulaic; there are only a handful of objectives which are to be achieved in the course of a play. Few plays are original compositions, most often they are adaptations from foreign or older English sources, sometimes drawing on more than one play to accomplish the fullness considered proper. Instead of achieving variety, as is the norm in the modern conception of literary originality, a playwright would borrow and interweave plots and characters from several older or foreign plays.²²⁸ Susanna Centlivre was a master of this skill of adaptation and fusion, whereas Mary Davys' original plays, although they use stock plots and stock characters, were quite exceptional for her time.²²⁹

Farquhar (82) explains in his preface to *The Twin Rivals* (1703) that a "play without a beau, cully, cuckold, or coquette is as poor an entertainment to some palates, as their Sunday's dinner would be without beef and pudding." This means that these stock types are the basic ingredients for any good play; to reinvent them and weave them into entertaining plots is a high art and exhibits the playwright's skill and accomplishment.

Restoration comedy relies as heavily on stock characters, as it does on stock plots. These stock figures, which have their roots in the humours characters, are supposed to represent Restoration society. They almost always carry speaking names hinting at their attitudes, character traits, professions, or even their age, for example "Worthy," "Trusty," "Friendly," "Scoredouble," and "Mallet" in *A Gotham Election*, "Marplot," "Jealous," or "Gripe" in *The Busie Body*, "Greasy," in *The Northern Heiress* or "Verjuice," "Purchase," or "Pastall" in *The Self-Rival* just to name a few. There is also an abundance of onomatopoeic names, especially for fops, like "Sir Loobily Joddrel" (*The Northern Heiress*) or "Sir Fopling Flutter" (*The Man of Mode*). "Airy" (*The Busie Body*), however, is not a characteristic name of gallant; Centlivre's ironic use of it implies that Sir

²²⁸ Cf. Hume, *Development* 134f

²²⁹ As already mentioned, *The Busie Body* draws on Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* and either Molière's *L'Étourdi* or its Newcastle-Dryden adaptation *Sir Martin Mar-All*, or both; possibly also on Trotter's *Love at a Loss* or Pix's *The Spanish Wives*; *A Gotham Election* might draw on Steele's unfinished *The Election of Gotham*. Cf. Hume, *Development* 116; Rubik 102; Lock 100

George Airy's head is full of vapours. He is not the typical self-assured rake but always in doubt about Miranda's true feelings for him.

The plots and sub-plots of three of the four plays discussed in this thesis are centred on the most prominent and popular pattern of late Restoration or Augustan comedy: marriage.

The commonest and simplest object is that of one or more couples of lovers outwitting blocking figures on their way to wedded bliss and often overcoming financial problems – either the gallant is poor, or the impoverished father or guardian wants to enrich himself by keeping his daughter's or ward's money or (only in the case of the guardian) by marrying his ward; as already mentioned, fortune is often won en passant (e.g. *The Busie Body*). There are two variants to accomplish this aim, either the man has to conquer the woman, or the woman has to reform and tame the man.

The couple of the main plot is often the truly gay couple, while couples in sub-plots – of course not necessarily – tend to be more serious or more prudish, probably in order not to rob the gay couple of its prominence. An example of this is exhibited in *The Busie Body*: Sir George Airy and Miranda are the gay couple, and Charles and Isabinda are the couple of the sub-plot. *The Self-Rival* also features a strong gay couple, Maria and Colonel Bellamont, and an atypical sub-plot couple consisting of Kitty/ Emilia, a scheming maid/ virtuous heroine who successfully pursues a weak and womanish gallant, Frederick. Gamont and Isabella in *The Northern Heiress* form a peculiar gay couple. Cynical Isabella cannot stop testing Gamont's sincerity and true love for her and Gamont's love runs actually not "so high as she expects," as her maid Liddy wisely puts it (38). He is shifty, indecisive, and at least as interested in her estate as he is in her person, which might, however, be partly due to his own precarious financial situation.

7. Male characters in Restoration comedy²³⁰

7.1. The rake or gallant²³¹

On the whole, the life of a rake is dedicated purely to romance and pleasure, love and gallantry, eloquence and wit, as well as pranks and buffoonery. Even though the rake of Restoration comedy is a stock character, he is not at all a unified type; quite on the contrary, he appears displaying numerous different facets. Playwrights devised rakes ranging from entirely admirable to utterly contemptible: young gentlemen of wit and breeding as well as debauchees passing their time wenching and whoring. These extremes and their gradations can be traced back to the social class they belong to. Usually those rakes who come from the highest social class possess intelligence, refined manners, and wit, while those stemming from a lower class are less sophisticated and stylish.²³²

7.1.1. The libertine rake

Robert Jordan (73) calls this sub-category the “extravagant rake” and characterises this type as promiscuous, impulsive, cheeky, frivolous, vain, and devastatingly self-assured. He considers him a “comic fool,” because he takes nothing and nobody seriously, not even himself (73). The libertine rake is often described as mad, wild, extravagant, or brisk, or airy by other protagonists in the plays.²³³ This type is characteristic of the first Restoration comedies (e.g. Behn’s *The Rover*) and vanishes towards the end of the century.

²³⁰ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Hume, *Development* 130f

²³¹ This section only provides general information about rakes in Restoration comedy. The rakes and gallants of the four plays will only be discussed as regards their relationships to the women in the plays, who are the focus of this thesis.

²³² Cf. Hume, *Rakish Stage*, 154f

²³³ Cf. Jordan 78, 90; Centlivre’s Sir George Airy (*The Busie Body*) carries one of these attributes in his name, but he is definitely no extravagant rake.

7.1.2. The old rake

Rakes are usually associated with youth and good looks, but Restoration comedy also features some lecherous old rakes (e.g. Alderman Gripe in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*). Sometimes they are already fathers of grown children, but still lusting for young things, and even planning to beget more heirs in order to disinherit their elder children. Mary Davys depicts two such examples in *The Northern Heiress* and *The Self-Rival*:

In *The Northern Heiress*, Gamont complains about his father's doubly inappropriate infatuation with his chambermaid, "the old Gentleman doats, and is fall'n in Love, as he calls it" (14). First of all, a man of his age is not supposed to fall in love, as rakish behaviour is the privilege of youth, and secondly, a chambermaid is plainly beneath him – a social gradation the audience would have accepted.

In *The Self-Rival*, Sir Ephraim is also in love with or lusting after a servant, his daughter's maid Kitty, having found "something in [her] Person and Temper which gives [him] the greatest Satisfaction" (12), which makes him believe that he should marry her. But he is quite aware of his folly, asking himself: "Is the Devil in me, to think of marrying a Chamber-Maid?" (12). When Kitty politely but wittily refuses his proposal, he is furious, "Death! Do I live to get slighted by a Chamber-Maid!" (13). Even though he finds out that Kitty is in fact Emilia, no maid but his son's sweetheart, and "in no way inferior to [his] Son, either in Quality or Fortune" (63), he tries to bribe her into marrying him at the end of the play:

Lookye, Madam, this Fellow has not a Groat; but if you will have me, you shall eat Ambrosia, drink Nectar, wear Pearls and Diamonds, have a fine Coach and Equipage, go to Court, play at Cards, keep a Monkey: Gadsbud, you shall do every thing you have a mind to, but cuckold me, Child!
(63)

Emilia politely thanks him for his kind offers, but tells him that she prefers his son, choosing love over money. Sir Ephraim is finally reformed by his children and their respective lovers, forgives them their intrigues, and provides both his children with more money than he originally intended to.

7.1.3. The reformed rake²³⁴

As already mentioned in chapter on the development of Restoration comedy (cf. 5.5.1. The development of Restoration comedy), the rake-hero was one of the major casualties of the comedy of reform and had to give way to the man of sense or the reformed rake, typical of the comedies of the last decade of the seventeenth century and after 1700. In his essay “The Penitent Rake in Restoration Comedy,” David Berkeley (223) characterises the reformed rake as repenting of “sexual irregularities and, usually, of railing at constant love” as well as “drunkenness, wasting of money, and riotous living.” His example for this behaviour is Cibber's *Loveless (Love's Last Shift)* and his seven-year pursuit of wine, women, and song. All reformed rakes have one thing in common: they deliver a set speech promising amendment of life; what distinguishes different reformed rakes is the heaviness or lightness of tone of this speech.²³⁵ The rake's conversion usually occurs somewhere in the fifth act, the corresponding speech is commonly delivered by the rake kneeling in front of his father, wife, or mistress, shedding a solemn tear or two.²³⁶

As already mentioned in the chapter on women (cf. 3.2.1. Social situation and education), Restoration society and its drama supported an image of the virtuous woman who has within herself a “charm” – usually located in her eyes²³⁷ – which enables her to “elevate men from their brutish state,” forgive them their darkest sins, and reclaim them to virtue (Berkeley 226). This connection is also by Bellamont in *The Self-Rival*. When Maria asks Bellamont: “Lard, what wou'd you have?” Bellamont answers: “Your Eyes and Ears a while, my Charmer” (8). Another example of this is to be found in the epilogue to Susannah Centlivre's *Love at a Venture* (1706), which was originally spoken by Miss Jacobella Power:

Well – but consider, We are tender Things,
That Innocence, and sprightly Beauty brings.
Soft Accents, broken Words, and yielding Air,
Are all Weapons that attend the Fair.
And can you long resist, the sweet Temptation,

²³⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Berkeley 223-233

²³⁵ Sometimes dramatists use elevated blank verse for these speeches, which is reminiscent of romantic comedy and heroic tragedy. Cf. Berkeley 224

²³⁶ Cf. Berkeley 225f

²³⁷ E.g. in *The Scowlers*: The most compendious way of being wise/ Is to be Convert to a Ladies Eyes. (Shadwell, *Works* V 148)

Give us at least a Bill of Reformation.
 That the succeeding Age may say of you,
 You dare be Civil, tho' you can't be true.
 But if at last no Charms have Power to win ye,
 You're past Repentance – or the Devil's in ye. (Epilogue)

This notion is verging on the deification of woman, who is blessed with the natural gift of transforming sinners into angels. The idea of ladies who conquer and convert vicious men was obviously making its way from the pens of poets and dramatists into the thought of ordinary people.²³⁸ As the female part of the early eighteenth-century audience somehow gained increased influence on comedy, hitherto a male preserve, dramatists sought to please “The Ladies,” who were delighted to see this exceedingly complimentary image of the virtuous woman on the stage.²³⁹

Quite often the recently reformed rake sententiously enumerates edifying maxims like “the pleasures of virtue, the joys of married bliss, the power of women to uplift and purify, and the senseless fopperies of the town” during his short stay on the stage (Berkeley 225). This sudden taming of the rather incredible character of the penitent rake at the end of a play and without previous warning most often comes across as extremely artificial and unnatural. However, the great number of conversions like this in Restoration comedy, especially in reformed comedy, and all the more in Restoration tragedy testifies to the popularity of this motif on the contemporary stage.

Towards the end of the Restoration period, gallants appear already reformed right from the beginning of the plays and their rakish past is only alluded to in

²³⁸ This is also illustrated by a writer for the *Female Tatler* (No. 62, 1709) who comments on [...] the superiour Influence of the Sexes Charms over the Vices and failings of Men when they are touch'd with the sensible Passion of Love, which commands them, and rather which makes them as it were by Compulsion or Necessity to obey the very Motions of our Eyes. For no Spaniel is so suppliant a Creature as Man, under the Power of Beauty, which makes him change his very Nature, and study by all Arts possible to become what he imagines pleases or takes with her. Thus the roughest Sea-Monster living, will soften his Stern look, and smooth his furrow'd Brow, at the very sight of a fair Captive, that he soon admits his Conqueror: As if a Smile from Beauty can do so much, how much more powerful must Woman be, assisted with all the Artillery of Flattery and gentle Love. (qtd. in Berkeley 228)

²³⁹ John H. Smith defines them “the respectable female patrons of the theater in the period” (24) who “had more to do with the shaping of comedy in the period than has hitherto been supposed” (27). They are known to have protested against and boycotted bawdy plays (e.g. Wycherley's *The Country-Wife*, Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* and *The Lucky Chance*, and Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds*). Cf. J.H. Smith 24, 27f; Sutherland, *English Literature* 152. For a more detailed examination of “The Ladies” and their influence on the changing of comedy also cf. David Roberts' *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700*.

conversations. They declare that they have grown tired of their amours and now want to settle down, marry, and beget heirs. Welby in *The Northern Heiress* is a fine example of such a reformed or, as Berkeley (224) likes to put it, “domesticated” rake. After his return from his travels abroad, he relates to his friend Gamont, “I am heartily tir’d with Rambling, and am resolv’d [...] to bid adieu to Gallantry, retire to my Country-Seat in *Nottinghamshire*, [...] marry, and get Heirs” (14).

7.1.4. Soldiers

Not all gallants and rakes in Restoration comedy were men about town. As a consequence of the rule of primogeniture and the custom of entail (cf. 3.1.2. The upper classes: nobility and gentry), the total fortune and estate of an upper class family went to the first son, while second sons did not inherit anything. The army and the church offered them respectable occupations. The military rank of a Colonel was usually purchased and could only be afforded by the son of an aristocratic family. Colonel Bellamont, the hero of *The Self-Rival*, is an example of a second son who joined the army. His financial situation as his motivation for acting as his own rival is explained by Bellamont to old Verjuice:

I am a younger Brother, and have not much more than my Commission to trust to; and how soon I may be reduced to Half-Pay, I know not; for which reason, I would secure *Maria* and her twenty thousand Pounds, which will be a comfortable Recruit whenever t’other happens. (24)

He adds that there is a slight chance that he really one day inherits part of the real Lord Pastall’s estate. Sir Ephraim “hates a Soldier” (10), so Bellamont has to contrive a plot in order to gain his consent to marry Maria and secure her fortune in spite of this. His design is quite clever, because

if she likes an old Man with an Estate and a Title, better than a young one with neither, she’ll close with her Father’s Proposals, and marry me as much; if she likes the other better, ‘tis but letting her into the secret at the last pinch; and she will then be pleased it is no worse. (25)

Thus, Bellamont can kill two birds with one stone. He is a self-confident young fellow and is completely convinced that one of these two possibilities will work out. He does not once doubt his victory over Maria or Sir Ephraim; to his mind his success is sure as death. This is exactly what on the one hand attracts

Maria to him, but on the other hand drives her up the wall. One of her revenge strategies is her affected coquettish coldness towards him, for example teasing Bellamont about his profession, "I know 'tis an unspeakable Pleasure to you to pursue a flying Enemy" (7). When Bellamont is about to propose to her, she acidly remarks, "an honest Truth out of the Mouth of a Soldier, 'tis so great a Rarity it must be worth hearing" (8). Later in the play, Maria tries anything to prompt a passionate or at least emotional reaction from Bellamont, again patronising him for his occupation to the face of Bellamont/ Lord Pastall:

O Lud! how could you have any apprehensions of that Wretch [Colonel Bellamont]! Sure your Lordship could not think me so lost to all Ambition as to marry a Soldier. [...] To follow one's husband from Town to Town on a Pacing-Horse and a red Side-Saddle, with one dirty Maid, and a couple of clumsy Granadiers, instead of two spruce Footmen. (52)

Even though Bellamont is annoyed with her, he keeps calm and manages not to betray himself. When the marriage is finally agreed upon and the gay couple makes peace, Bellamont says to Maria,

make your own Conditions after Surrender [...] march out with Drums beating, Colours flying [...] command as before, so I may but have the Name of your superior Officer. (58)

When Bellamont/ Lord Pastall has asked Sir Ephraim for Maria's hand, he gleefully soliloquises: "Ha! ha! ha! If this does not mortify Maria, and bring her to a better Opinion of her young Lover, the Devil's in her Taste, I think" (30). But Maria, not yet having recognised Bellamont in his guise, saucily tells Bellamont/ Lord Pastall how he can please her, "make me a very good Jointure, and marry me to-night, then kick up your heels and die tomorrow Morning" (31). So, she manages to vanquish Bellamont even before she recognises his voice and then starts her plot, deceiving the deceiver.

While Mrs Fallow expresses her positive opinion about Colonel Bellamont, calling him "a good Soldier," (13) – even though she cannot fully reconcile herself to the concept of marriage – Lady Camphire, how could it be otherwise, voices her contempt for Maria marrying him:

Oh base and degenerate Girl! Stain to our noble Family! I always saw with Grief your Cogitations were set upon filthy Man; but to marry without a Title – a Soldier too! Oh! I had rather have been defil'd and married him myself. (65)

But Maria proudly retorts,

I am much obliged to you, Madam, 'tis better as it is; but I wonder to hear you speak so contemptibly of one of the finest Callings upon Earth: Why, all Kings are Soldiers, or shou'd be so, and they are generally speaking Men of Bravery, Gallantry and Honour. (66)

This speech in honour of the gallant finally conveys Davys' sympathy and respect for soldiers. She deliberately chose to employ a second son as the hero of *The Self-Rival* and his portrayal is entirely positive throughout the play. Even though he gained Sir Ephraim's consent to marry Maria by use of a trick, he is man enough to honestly and courteously beg his father-in-law's pardon on his knees. In spite of his lack of estate and meagre income, Colonel Bellamont is certainly portrayed as an intelligent, fine specimen of a man.

Captain Tinsel in *The Northern Heiress* is also a soldier, but his portrayal is not as positive as Colonel Bellamont's. He is courting Lady Greasy's daughter Dolly against her mother's wishes. Dolly has also fallen in love with Tinsel, but just like Maria in *The Self-Rival*, feigns obedience to her mother. When Lady Swish, one of the York tradeswomen, expresses her contempt for soldiers at Lady Ample's breakfast table, "her Husband was but a paultry Officer, a Colonel, or some such Thing" (25) Isabella again voices her disdain of prejudice:

Ladies, you speak with too much Contempt. There are a great many fine Gentlemen in the Army, that behave themselves with as much good Manners and Gallantry at Home, as Bravery and Honour Abroad. (25)

When asked for her opinion of Captain Tinsel, Isabella voices her strong dislike of prejudice once more and answers,

I don't know much of him; but allowing him to be a Man of no Worth, would condemn a whole Society, because they happen to have one Scoundrel among 'em. (26)

Later in the play, when Dolly is punished by her mother who has found Captain Tinsel's love-letter, Isabella again contributes to Tinsel's positive portrayal: "'Tis a Pity the Captain does not know the Distress of his Damosel; he would certainly come with Fire and Sword to her Rescue" (40). When she tells Tinsel of Dolly's misfortune, he admits his passion for Dolly: "There's no resisting Destiny, or I should be asham'd, that a Person of my Birth and Quality could ever be enslav'd by the Daughter of a Mechanick" (47). Funnily it is Gamont

who sentimentally replies: "Oh, Captain, you're not the first great Man that has been in Love; and that you know makes all People equal" (47). Bareface helps Tinsel and contrives a plot, inebriating Dolly's chaperones, and abducting her from the races, whereupon Dolly and Tinsel get married instantly. Captain Tinsel is full of thanks for Bareface, "thou'st done more for me than ever my own Father did; for he gave me only Life; but you, Dear Rogue, Life, Love, and Liberty" (50f). However in an aside he admits, "if I had not got her as I did, my next Lodging had been in a Jail" (50).

When Dolly has to go home to her mother, her newly wed husband Tinsel does not accompany her, not yet revealing his reasons. In a soliloquy, however, he discloses his plan to secure Dolly's money and that this alone was his true reason for marrying her.

As already described in the chapter on Lady Greasy (cf. 8.5. The female humour-butt), all hell breaks loose when Lady Greasy discovers that Dolly and Tinsel are now a married couple. Tinsel prefers to meet his new mother-in-law in front of all the others, as he thinks this is safer for him. Lady Greasy is shocked by Dolly marrying "a Fellow not worth a Groat" (69), and, not at all impressed by Tinsel's great family and his making her daughter a gentlewoman. She is so enraged that she cannot contain herself and flies at Tinsel's throat. Finally and with the help of the whole company, she is made to hear reason and tells Tinsel to "throw off that tawdry Red Coat, put on an Apron, and I'll [you] take into the Business with my self" (70). Tinsel, however, having bragged about his noble blood and ancestors earlier, is much too proud to work in her trade: "What, is it fit that one that has had a Commission in the Army, shou'd submit to so servile an Employment. Intolerable!" (70). Lady Greasy in the end fully gives up her resistance and decides to throw by her trade in order to become a gentlewoman, together with her daughter.

Tinsel, a minor character in the play, is helped by the other characters who believe in his sincerity and his honourable intentions towards Dolly. Only with their help does he manage to win the battle against his bitter opponent Lady Greasy. However, he does not really deserve it. His motives are completely dishonest, as he only pretended to love Dolly in order to lay his hands on her estate. In this respect, the ending of this sub-plot does not only portray a victory

over the blocking figure Lady Greasy, but also reflects the hollowness of this victory, as this marriage is prone to fail.

7.2. The rake's or gallant's friend²⁴⁰

The gallant's best friend can vary from an equal personage who goes through parallel courtship to a distinctly secondary figure, contrasting the main protagonist. Often both young gallants end up married (e.g. Sir George Airy and Charles in *The Busie Body*, Gamont and Welby in *The Northern Heiress*, or Bellamont and Frederick in *The Self-Rival*), but sometimes only one of them marries (e.g. *Love for Love*; *The Country-Wife*). Usually the heroine's friend or confidante is matched with the rake's best friend.

7.3. The fop

The fop is the comic fool of Restoration comedy, a ridiculous character who is overly assured of himself and virtually narcissistic. In his essay on fops, Robert Heilman calls the fop "the butterfly, the dandy, the fashion plate, the affected man of taste, the social-vanguard exhibitionist, the embodiment of *vanitas vanitatum*" (Heilman, 363). Sometimes the fop is also referred to as an 'entertaining puppy' which indicates another trait of his character, namely that, even if he may be unpleasant, nerve-racking or nasty, he is not dangerous, vicious, or evil.

Trying to appear sophisticated and stylish, the fop is constantly aping his betters, but he fails in the rules of his superiors. He exaggeratedly displays supposedly gentlemanly or fine French manners and overdresses, so that the audience can recognize him at first sight. He often undergoes physical humiliation, e.g. being beaten. Those who humiliate him are frequently women and his social inferiors, e.g. servants, maids, or prostitutes.

There are various realisations of the fop. Sir Fopling Flutter in *The Man of Mode* is the typical would-be wit and at the centre of much of the broad humour of the

²⁴⁰ This section only provides general information about the gallant's friend in Restoration comedy. The sub-plot gallants of the plays will only be discussed as regards their relationships to the women in the plays, who are the focus of this thesis.

play. He carries fashionable behaviour to an extreme, ridiculously aping French fashions and deliberately dropping pretentious French expressions into every sentence.

7.3.1. Bareface (*The Northern Heiress*)

Sometimes the fop is a rival of the gallant, like Bareface in *The Northern Heiress*, who combines the fop and the country booby in his character. When Gamont introduces Bareface to his friend Welby, Bareface's reaction is formulated in artificial and exaggeratedly courteous language. This mirrors his excessive respect for his social superior.

Oh! Lord, Sir, I am your most oblig'd, most devoted, and most humble
Servant, Sir: I am most superabundantly rejoyc'd, that so compleat a
Gentleman has determin'd with himself to make me so happy. (17)

When he states that he is resolved to have Isabella, Welby ridicules him:

No Doubt, Sir, when once she knows your Mind, the Symetry of your
Shape, and the Delicacy of your Complexion, will rob her of all Power to
resist. (17)

As is typical of the fop, Bareface does not get the joke but takes Welby's words at face value and even thanks him. Welby keeps mocking him, asking him whether he is a great reader and Bareface again falls for it. Bragging about his misconceived conception of a fine gentleman he proudly answers:

Ha, Sir, it is a Sign that you are a Stranger to me. Read! No, no, I never
read a Book in my Life, but what I was forc'd to at School; [...] No,
Reading's too laborious for a Gentleman. (17)

Bareface's vanity is also expressed in his remarks that "lying a-Bed spoils the Complexion" (17) and his detailed description of his morning routine:

[...] as soon as I slip out of Bed into my Night-Gown, I make my self
nicely clean, by washing my Hands, Arms, Face, and Neck; then I clean
my Teeth, comb my Eye-brows, fill my Snuff-Box, and perfume my
Handkerchief. (18)

The use of perfume and of a perfumed handkerchief was considered to be typically French and thus generally scorned by the English. Bareface uses perfume to set himself apart from "the Vulgar" (18), like Lady Greasy. Due to her profession, she has a certain smell about her, but Bareface "for Fear of

such Misfortunes,” carries his perfumed handkerchief as an “Antidote” about him and claps it to his nose if need be (19).

Gamont alludes to Bareface’s exaggerated opinion of himself when he describes him to Welby as “an extravagant Lover of himself [who] fancies every Body else is so” (17). This is also displayed when Bareface, talking to Liddy, flatters himself, “I suppose you are not ignorant of what all the Town knows, that I have a good Estate [which is] extraordinary, added to my Person” (31). Such a swanky remark is quite characteristic of a fop who chronically over-estimates himself.

It is quite common that characters superior to the fop ridicule and humiliate him. However, Bareface is not only mocked by gentlemen he looks up to, like Gamont and Welby, but also by his social inferiors, a tradeswoman and a maid. Lady Greasy, herself a humour-butt, criticises Bareface throughout the play. She is appalled by Bareface’s extravagance and permanently picks on him, deploring “Alderman Bareface [Bareface’s father], was a fine saving Man, got Money and a good Estate for this Jackanapes to squander away” (19). In contrast to his eager father, Bareface threw in his business and rambled to fashionable London. Lady Greasy also laments that Bareface already wasted his father’s money in his lifetime:

Aye, that’s all you care; [...] you wanted Money for your Extravagancies. [...] Mercy, God, what a Periwig has he got on! Why, I’ll warrant [...] it did not cost less than twenty Shillings. [...] Why, it covers all his Shoulders like a Nightrail. (20)

Apart from depicting Lady Greasy’s incessant nagging at Bareface, this scene again displays Bareface’s vanity and fondness of showy apparel. The height of his “Fopperies and Fooleries” (19), as Lady Greasy calls them, is when Bareface confuses Isabella and Louisa, saying about Louisa, “[f]aith, she’s a fine Woman, and I am really in Love with her,” (18) when earlier he told Gamont and Welby that he will have Isabella. Gamont, of course, is quick to expose Bareface’s mistake, “[d]id you not say you were dying for the Heiress?” and Bareface, the paragon of a fop, foolishly admits: “Zounds! I forgot that!” (18).

7.3.2. Marplot (*The Busie Body*)

The fop might also be a would-be friend. The best-known example, of course, is *The Busie Body's* eponymous anti-hero Marplot. Bateson (70) calls him “the real, if unconscious, hero of *The Busie Body*” and quotes Hazlitt, who referred to Marplot as “a standing memorial of unmeaning vivacity and assiduous impertinence.” In the list of *dramatis personae*, Centlivre describes Marplot as “a sort of a silly fellow, cowardly, but very inquisitive to know everybody’s business, generally spoils all he undertakes, but without design.” Bateson resolutely adds unlimited good-nature to these characteristics. His perception of the character as an “unconscious hero,” or perhaps a sort of anti-hero, is surely influenced by Marplot’s monopolising the audience’s but also the other characters’ attention (Bateson 70). Marplot’s curiosity and bungling behaviour make him the centre of almost all the farcial action and his inherent theatricality as well as his functioning as a catalyst of the play’s dynamics even challenge the gallant’s hegemonic territory as the focus of attention.

One of his stereotypical characteristics is that of the snobbish fop. Marplot is dying to be introduced to a fine gentleman, “a man of wit” (297), like Sir George and thinks that it is “a vast addition to a man’s fortune [...] to be seen in the company of leading men” (298). He assures Sir George, “a bow from the side-box, or to be seen in your chariot, binds me ever yours” (299). However, his snobbery is merely one of Marplot’s minor foibles. Another foppish feature which is supposed to arouse humour is his being physically humiliated i.e. beaten. When he first appears in the play, he enters “*with a patch across his face*” and relates a story of a Scotsman who broke his face (297). Waiting for Charles outside Sir Jealous’s house, he is again beaten, even though he thought that he could easily overpower an old man like Sir Jealous. In the last act he is again beaten by Sir Jealous, helplessly pleading, “[w]hy, what do you beat me for? I han’t married your daughter” (360). At the end of the play, he pities himself, still blissfully unaware that he has only himself to thank for his misfortunes: “So here’s everybody happy, I find, but poor Pilgarlick. I wonder what satisfaction I shall have, for being cuffed, kicked, and beaten in your service” (362). But when Sir Jealous apologises, he willingly forgives him.

Charles provides Sir George with a fairly positive and sympathetic description of Marplot, finding

a thousand conveniences in him; he'll lend me his money when he has any, run of my errands and be proud on't; in short, he'll pimp for me, lie for me, drink for me, do any thing but fight for me. (297)

After Sir George has been introduced to Marplot, he also calls him a “pleasant fellow” (299). Charles reluctantly agrees, explaining:

The dog is diverting sometimes, or there would be no enduring his impertinence. He is pressing to be employed and willing to execute, but some ill-fate generally attends all he undertakes, and he oftener spoils an intrigue than helps it. (299)

Charles perfectly describes Marplot as a good-natured but foolish would-be friend who tries his best to help the gallant, but often jeopardises the latter's intrigues with his meddling and his curiosity.

The character of Marplot is multifaceted, he is much more than an ordinary humour-butt. Even though he is essentially employed in the capacity usually filled by fools, he is almost perceived as a second friend to Sir George. A figure of humour, Marplot has a ruling passion and great flaw: his obsessive curiosity, which dominates his entire life. This becomes evident when Charles sends his man on “a little earnest business” (300). Marplot is immediately overcome with curiosity and tries to figure out what this “business” could be:

Business, and I do not know it! Egad, I'll watch him. [...] What can his business be [...]? Now would I give all the world to know it? Why the devil should not one know every man's concern! [...] I shall go stark mad, if I'm not let into this secret.” (300)

But when Charles excuses himself because he is engaged, Marplot's curiosity instantly switches to the new mystery: “Engaged! Egad I'll engage my life, I'll know what your engagement is” (300). Marplot nearly bursts with curiosity, it is like a demon that possesses him; he renders the best description of his greatest flaw himself: “Lord, lord, how little curiosity some people have! Now my chief pleasure lies in knowing everybody's business” (320). This weakness often makes him a burden to his friends, because, trying to help them, he unintentionally delivers himself into the hands of their enemies.

His inquisitiveness is not only characteristic of the stock figure of the fop and humour-butt, but also regarded as womanish. Marplot is often described as an

embodiment and parody of the stereotypical perception of women, who are conventionally curious. Another womanish weakness which is related to his exaggerated inquisitiveness is his fondness of gossiping chatting. He is a master of always letting out a secret at the most inconvenient moment to the most inconvenient person. When Charles again excuses himself, Marplot tries to find out the reason for his leaving: "What, is't a mistress then? – Mum! – You know I can be silent upon occasion" (321). Marplot then decides to secretly follow Charles to Sir Jealous' house against Charles's wish:

Well Charles, in spite of your endeavour to keep me out of the secret, I may save your life, for ought I know. At that corner I'll plant my self, there I shall see whoever goes in, or comes out. 'Gad, I love discoveries. (322)

However, waiting at the corner of the house, Marplot accidentally lets it slip to the unknowing but suspecting Sir Jealous that Charles is within the house, "for the Gentleman you threaten is a very honest Gentleman. Look to't, for if he comes not as safe out of your House, as he went in" (324). Marplot's curiosity and his disregard for Charles's wish are punished when he is beaten by Sir Jealous – all this because he simply cannot hold his tongue.

Another of Marplot's womanish weakness is evident from Charles's afore quoted description: Marplot will do anything but fight for him. The cowardly and timid figure of Marplot reverses the stereotypes of strong man and weak woman and again exposes him as unmanly and effeminate. Marplot is afraid of fighting, when he is attacked by a Scotsman in a gambling club, he does not draw his sword but tries to get away quickly: "Draw, sir! Why, I did but lay my hand upon my sword to make a swift retreat" (298). Later Marplot sheepishly explains, "I avoid fighting, purely to be serviceable to my friends, you know" (299).

In addition to his obsessive curiosity, his tendency to spill the beans to the wrong person, and his cowardice, Marplot possesses a fourth stereotypical female quality, the love of small animals. This is most funnily portrayed in the famous 'monkey scene,' when Marplot is searching high and low for a nonexistent monkey which was only invented as a diversionary tactic. Pearson's assumption (211) that in the person of the inept Marplot, Centlivre "pokes fun at men and points out how far the insulting stereotypes of female behaviour diverge from the truth about the play's dignified and clever women" obviously has some truth in it.

All in all, Marplot is a thoroughly good-natured and honest character who always does the exact opposite of what he wishes to do, namely accidentally marring Sir George's and Charles's intrigues instead of helping them in a manly way. Marplot may be foolish, impertinent, or absurd, but never contemptible. Even though he gets everything wrong and spoils every plot, his friends try to be patient with him. In the end, Charles forgives Marplot his many blunders, and Sir George promises to put in a good word for him, "I'll take care that Sir Francis makes you master of your estate" (363). Marplots thankful last words are: "That will make me as happy as any of you" (363).

Marplot thus is one of the most tolerantly and sympathetically treated fools of Restoration drama, and, according to Bateson (70) "one of the most attractive of literature's simpletons." It is typical of a female playwright to emphasise his good intentions and willingness to help his friends, instead of viciously picking on his follies, as many a male playwright would have done.²⁴¹

7.4. The male humour-butt²⁴²

The humour-butt is a more moderate dupe figure, who is humorously ridiculed, but, as he is not taken seriously, not harshly satirised. Sir Loobily Joddrel in *The Northern Heiress* is a good example of this stock character. The country bumpkin's apparel, "a Piss-burnt Periwig, a great Riding Coat, and dirty Linen" (45), is shabby. Like Gamont and Bareface he also courts Isabella, but foolishly states, "I love my Horses, that's true; but I love Mrs. *Isbel* too; and after I had seen them rubb'd down, and taken Care of, I came to look after her" (45). Sir Loobily is so stupid as to openly tell the others that his horses are dearer to him than Isabella. When Isabella emphasises that she is even better than a horse, as she can take care of herself, he replies, "[a]ds'bud, and so you can, or you have spent your Time ill; for I believe you're at Age" (45), further offending her. At the climax of his folly, he proposes to her, "[c]ome [...] we shall live mains happily. I can't but think how lovingly we shall smoke our Pipes together, drink a Pot of Ale, and play at Put in a Winter-Evening" (46). Of course all these things are not really ladylike and surely not what Isabella expects of a husband. When

²⁴¹ Or, to put it more precisely, as Dryden did with Marplot's model, Sir Martin Mar-All. Cf. Bateson 71

²⁴² For a detailed discussion of the character Marplot in *The Busie Body* cf. 7.3.2. Marplot

Isabella tells him, that she is “a perfect Stranger to all those Things” (46), Sir Loobily is completely bewildered, because according to his experience “all Women in our Country smoke Tobacco” (47).

7.5. The male blocking figure

Male blocking figures are most often heavy fathers, brothers, or guardians who are single, i.e. unmarried or widowed. They are usually opposed to the heroine’s choice of a mate, either because they have already planned to whom she should be married, or because they do not want to pay for her dowry. Generally the main plot consists of the gay couple’s successfully outwitting the blocking figure, who then often reforms in the last act after the marriage has been contracted. Sir Jealous (*The Busie Body*) is a typical representative of the type. He virtually imprisons his daughter and has arranged to marry her off to a Spaniard. But when he is outwitted and the couple is already married, he accepts the trick marriage and gives the newly-weds his blessing. But sometimes, as Sir Francis in the *The Busie Body*, the male blocking figure does not change his attitude.

In *The Self-Rival*, Sir Ephraim combines the blocking figure with the old rake who makes a mercenary marital arrangement for his daughter Maria. When Maria’s gallant, Bellamont, points out that Maria will surely have to give her consent to the marriage, Sir Ephraim replies, “[h]er Consent, ha ha ha! if I can’t order my own Children, I have liv’d too long in the World” (11). Soon after he utters the following soliloquy:

Well, if I can but get this Girl married to my mind, the greatest Trouble of my Life will be over; I’ll try to bring her to it by fair means; but if that won’t do, the Authority of a Parent shall. (11)

Sir Ephraim is willing to force Maria to marry an old Lord, denying her any choice in the match, even though he himself is not able to control his feelings for Kitty, Maria’s maid:

This Girl too is another of my Plagues; and tho’ I am ashamed to own it, even to myself, am forced to love her against all Resistance. What a troublesome thing is Old-Age, when the Follies of Youth pursue it? (11)

Thus, Sir Ephraim does not concede to Maria what he wants for himself. Even worse, he is willing to force her to marry the elderly Lord Pastall, whom he has chosen for her, but whom he only considers eligible because of his social standing. It is quite striking that even cynical and grumpy old Verjuice expresses his doubts as to whether Maria will like Lord Pastall, “[f]or, he’s pretty old” (29). But Sir Ephraim does not care; he likes Lord Pastall, or at least his title and estate, and this will have to suffice. However, at the end of the play, Sir Ephraim reforms and as a compensation promises to raise his daughter’s marriage-portion.

7.6. Some minor male characters²⁴³

There are many more characters which often appear but do not really constitute a category of their own. For example the trickster, sometimes helping the gallant in the marriage plot, but sometimes also being only interested in achieving a personal advantage, like Tickup²⁴⁴ in *A Gotham Election*; the foolish servant (often a French valet); the clever servant (e.g. Barnaby²⁴⁵ in *The Self-Rival*; Whisper²⁴⁶ in *The Busie Body*; Jeremy in *Love for Love*; Warner in *Sir Martin Mar-All*); the country boor/ booby/ bumpkin; professional men like lawyers, parsons, doctors, and tradesmen; the (puritan) hypocrite, often combined with the heavy father or the humour-butt (e.g. Alderman Gripe in Wycherley’s *Love in a Wood* – a lecherous old puritan who tries to seduce a young thing); the lapsed or discontented husband (e.g. *The Careless Husband*); the old bachelor (Verjuice²⁴⁷ in *The Self-Rival*); or the bully, just to name a few.

²⁴³ For a more detailed discussion of lower-class characters and professional men cf. 9. Portrayal and power of characters from the lower and lower middle classes

²⁴⁴ Tickup will only be discussed in relation with the lower-class characters in *A Gotham Election* cf. 9.3. Portrayal of tradesmen and -women

²⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Barnaby cf. 9.2.2. A clever servant

²⁴⁶ Whisper will briefly be referred to in the introduction to 9. Portrayal and power of characters from the lower and lower middle classes. Furthermore, he will be contrasted with Patch cf. 9.2.1. Scheming maids.

²⁴⁷ Verjuice will be discussed in the section on Mrs Fallow cf. 8.4. “Good-natur’d old Maid” vs. “Affected Old Maid.”

8. Female characters in Restoration comedy

8.1. The virtuous heroine or coquette²⁴⁸

Margaret MacDonald (1) starts her study *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* by stating that “the saucy, independent young woman of Restoration comedy” must be included in any consideration of comic heroines in the annals of English drama. Writing about “witty fair ones who brighten the urbane, sophisticated comedies of that half century from the restoration of Charles II to the reign of Queen Anne” (1), she has the heroines of Congreve, Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley, and Crown as well as the young women dominating the comedies of Southerne, Vanbrugh, and Cibber in mind. While MacDonald emphasises the “flowering of a long tradition of young, intelligent, articulate women who rebel against male-dominated society” (1) in Restoration comedy, she also laments that this “new woman” (6) has not held spotlight in any full-length study of Restoration comedy, as the focus was always on the beau-rake. It is quite curious that in her enumeration she does not mention a single female playwright, not even Behn or Centlivre. Viewed in this light, she is just another critic who walks right into ‘Hume’s trap’ of only looking at the representative or popular i.e. male playwrights.

According to MacDonald (7), the virtuous heroine in her fullest development is “possessed of a sparkling wit and keen intelligence, an aggressive will to power and a heightened awareness of her own precarious position in a libertine world.” Prior to the Restoration comedy of manners there exists no complex female character in drama who possesses these three dynamic qualities. Unfortunately, this liberated, independent, and self-determined young woman shimmers only briefly and ephemerally on the Restoration stage. Her sad fate is to disappear in the dismal sentimental drama, which takes control of the English stage in the eighteenth century and holds out for nearly two-hundred years.²⁴⁹ Most regrettably, she is ousted by the figure of ‘virtue in distress’ of Restoration heroic drama who is “metamorphosed into the sentimental comic heroine in the weepy domestic comedies of the eighteenth century” (MacDonald 21).

²⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion of each of the plays’ heroines cf. 8.2 Active heroines in the plays

²⁴⁹ Cf. MacDonald 7

Considering the poor quality of the moralising reform drama of the later eighteenth century, George Meredith's statement, made in a lecture as early as 1877²⁵⁰, has a considerable proportion of truth in it,

where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty – in what they have won for themselves, and what has been granted them by a fair civilization – there, and only waiting to be transplanted from life to the stage, or the novel, or the poem, pure Comedy flourishes. (61)

This implies that high comedy rises and falls with the portrayal and further development of an independent and witty woman, an individual who is loved for her intelligence as well as for her physical attractiveness. Although playwrights of the period generally use stereotypical characters, some of their independent heroines rise above this level, displaying a bewildering variety of character traits.²⁵¹ Employing aggressive and strong-willed complex female characters is unique to Restoration comedy; no other period of English drama produced such an abundance of delightful heroines. Before and after this period women received a very different treatment in English drama.

Many of the virtuous heroine's character traits have already been discussed above. Like in the case of the rake, there are again several variants of this type. What they all have in common is a varying degree of wit, beauty, and an estate. The coquette is usually a woman who gains power over others by use of manipulative language and is portrayed as prominent and active. While these strong characteristics can also be possessed by a virtuous heroine, the term virtuous heroine is also applied to a female character who is less manipulative, prominent, and powerful. The virtuous heroine may be sprightly and flirtatious, or a serious moralist. Generally, she is an example of a right way of life, often in contrast to the rake, on whom the libertine society imposes less rules.

No matter how liberated the virtuous heroine is, though, she has to retain her chastity in order to remain a proper heroine. In contrast to a man, who seeks to seduce the woman, the woman can only tempt the man while remaining chaste. Social conventions of the period impose the characteristic display of virtue on her. Her only weapons are her witty and manipulative language and playing hard to get, not showing her true feelings, but putting on an air of aversion,

²⁵⁰ Cf. Zimbardo 373

²⁵¹ Cf. MacDonald 225

coldness, and nonchalance instead. She can only be superior to a man, if she feigns untouchability and inviolability to male charm. The heroine cannot allow her heart and her emotions to guide her actions – she has to keep a cool head. This coldness of disposition is often interpreted as deliberate cruelty by the gallant, who reproaches her with enjoying his undeserved suffering. This attitude and behaviour is illustrated by almost all active heroines in the plays – Miranda (*The Busie Body*), Maria (*The Self-Rival*), and Isabella and Louisa (*The Northern Heiress*) – and commented on in the following chapter.

Even though the virtuous heroine has to be chaste, she sometimes manipulates men, using a language of easy virtue and double entendres. But of course this sexual innuendo is only performed verbally, not physically, because “[t]he most radical alternative open to the heroine is simply to choose the husband she wants” (Pearson 51). As the heroine tends to opt for a rake or a gallant whom she has to reform first, instead of choosing a virtuous man right from the start, the future of the marriage she chooses is prone to be problematic. Restoration comedies usually end in the ‘victory’ of the heroine who finally succeeds in reforming and domesticating the gallant, but this victory might be hollow, as depicted in the many plays centring on unhappy marriages.²⁵²

8.2. Active heroines in the plays

8.2.1. Miranda (*The Busie Body*)

Miranda is best described by her former maid Patch as “endow’d with beauty, wit and fortune” (350). She is an active heroine who is really in love with Sir George, but pretends to be so with her guardian, Sir Francis Gripe. Throughout the play, she pulls the strings, powerfully influencing the action of the main plot and controlling her gallant as well as her guardian; as Sir George correctly puts it, “you command and I obey” (305). Miranda’s self-confidence becomes evident when, talking to Patch, she compares herself to Isabinda:

No, I have liberty, wench; that she wants. What would she give now to be in this déshabillé in the open air; nay more, in pursuit of the young fellow she likes; for that’s my case, I assure you. (302)

²⁵² Cf. Pearson 52

These few lines tell the audience that Miranda is a self-confident young woman, actively pursuing the man she loves in disguise, thus reversing the gender roles. When talking to Sir George as the “incognita,” she acts as a coquette, expressing her low opinion of marriage:

Matrimony! Ha, ha, ha! What crimes have you committed against the god of love that he should revenge ‘em so severely to stamp husband upon your forehead? (304)

Disguised as the incognita, Miranda is much more coquettish than when her true identity is revealed. The disguise of women, a device which was already used by Shakespeare, always functions as a means of attaining goals, personal fulfilment, and a higher measure of freedom. Miranda thus tries to figure out Sir George’s true feelings for her and, flirting with him as the incognita, successfully tests his love. When Sir George recognises her voice and grasps that his incognita and Miranda are one and the same woman, she still adopts a business-like, almost manly attitude towards marriage. Making fun of Sir George’s “heroics” she unromantically proposes to him:

Prithee no more of these flights, for our time’s but short, and we must fall to business. Do you think we can agree on that same terrible bugbear, Matrimony, without heartily repenting on both sides! (343)

When he accepts, “[i]t has been my wish since first my longing eyes beheld ye,” she dryly answers, “[a]nd your happy ears drank in the pleasing news, I had thirty thousand pounds” (344). Here Miranda again reverses the gender stereotypes, acting in a calculating and disillusioned manner, while Sir George’s answer is sentimental and impassioned.

Miranda also adopts a masculine role when it comes to legal writings and knowledge, which is revolutionary, regarding the legal status of women of her period, which has already been described in the chapter on the legal situation of women (cf. 3.2.2. Legal situation). Written documents like letters and other papers are repeatedly used in the play. Even though they traditionally symbolise men’s (legal) power over women, Miranda takes advantage of them in order to gain control. She pretends to be in love with her “old rogue” of a guardian and lulls him into a false sense of security, making him believe that she will marry him as she esteems him much higher than any other man, “methinks there’s nobody handsomer than you: so neat, so clean, so good-humoured and so

loving" (305). While flattering her "guardie" (326) with affectionate names and lavishly praising him, she tries to screw a promise out of him – he shall make her the mistress of her estate:

You know my father's will runs, that I am not to possess my estate without your consent, till I'm five-and-twenty; you shall abate the odd seven years, and make me mistress of my estate today, and I'll make you master of my person tomorrow. (307f)

The language she uses to paraphrase that she will marry him tomorrow, if he fulfils her wish, conveys an entirely realistic picture of what marriage meant for a woman in the Restoration period, namely that her husband became master of her in all things. However, Sir Francis does not think her plan safe and only agrees to settle her estate upon her as "pin-money" (308), bribing her with her own money, as Miranda correctly notices. Later in the play, having contrived a new plan, Miranda once more tries to shake off the ties of her father's will. She pretends that she wants to "have everything according to form" when she marries Sir Francis, and wants him to sign "an authentic paper, drawn up by an able lawyer" (327), giving her leave to marry. If he should sign it, she will be his the next day. Again Sir Francis is not easily convinced, but clever Miranda already has an explanation for this procedure, stating that she only wants to save his reputation as "the malicious world will be apt to say you tricked me into a marriage, and so take the merit from my choice," while her intention is "to let the idle fops see how much I prefer a man loaded with years and wisdom" (327). When Sir Francis once again rejects her wish, she tries to soften him, innocently lamenting that she suspects he does not truly love her if he refuses her "this formality" (327). This time her trick works and Sir Francis agrees. She has finally managed to manipulate Sir Francis not by means of rational explanation, but by faking to be a weak woman who is in doubt about his love.

Miranda used the powerful strategy of gaining strength through feigned weakness. She goes on pretending to be "so eager to have this business concluded" and tells him that a lawyer at the Temple has already settled matters, adding that "with your leave, [I will] put my writing into his hands" (328). Miranda has thus managed to gain control over her estate by using her writings and her legal knowledge to outwit Sir Francis. She intruded into a conventionally wholly male sphere and, what is even more, beat a man on his

own territory with his own weapons. Later in the play, she even offers her help to Charles, assuring Sir George: “If his uncle’s estate ought to be in his possession, which I shrewdly suspect, I may do him a singular piece of service” (344f). It is really extraordinary that Miranda, who acts the part of a female amateur lawyer, employs her legal knowledge to help Charles. She again reverses the stereotyped gender roles and, just like Patch, comes to Charles’s rescue: “There sir, is the writings of your uncle’s estate, which has been your due these three years” (362). When she symbolically hands him over the papers, she actually presents him with his estate, and thus his (financial) independence. In contrast to men like Sir Francis, who try to control other people, i.e. Miranda and Charles, by keeping the writings which establish their ownership to their estates, Miranda, a woman, gains control of the same writings and papers and uses them to set Charles free.

In addition to her rather unfeminine, business-like side, Miranda also has a truly coquettish side, which is marked by her affected coldness towards Sir George, refusing to be treated as a commodity, as well as by her dry sense of humour. Her talent as an actress is put to an acid test in the famous “dumb-show” (308). Sir George, who has not yet detected that Miranda in fact is the incognita, purchases a one-hour interview with her for one hundred guineas. Sir Francis concludes the bargain, on condition that he remains in the same room with them. This poses a twofold problem for Miranda, first she does not want Sir George to recognize her voice i.e. the voice of his incognita, and secondly she is outraged at being bought and sold like an animal. She decides not to “answer him a word, but be dumb to all he says” (308). Of course, Sir Francis is delighted with her plan. When Sir George arrives and starts his wooing, she merely once encourages him by giving him her hand, but does not utter a single word. At Sir George’s most passionate, he embraces her in ecstasy, making it very hard for Miranda to contain herself. Having finally figured out what is going on, but holding Sir Francis responsible for the plot, Sir George cleverly comes up with a counter-plot and tells Miranda to nod her approval, shake her head in denial, and sigh when in doubt. At this stage she gains most power over her gallant, shining in the role of the coquette. She nods when Sir George asks her whether “it is possible that [she] can love [Sir Francis]” (313) and merely sighs when he inquires, “may I not hope to supplant him in you [*sic*] esteem?” and

“[y]ou’ll not consent to marry him then?” (314). Ironically, and quite in contrast to the conventional witty heroine who conquers the gallant with her language and witty repartee, as she has done in the guise of the incognita, Miranda has managed to gain most power over Sir George through *not* speaking. This scene was a huge success with the audience, especially when Sir George starts to impersonate Miranda in a double-conférence. At the end of the dumb scene Miranda rejects a letter from Sir George, once more displaying her superiority over him.

Her coldness towards Sir George, another typical trait of the coquette, is also exhibited by her dry sense of humour. When Marplot asks her if “she does not think in her soul Sir George Airy is not a fine gentleman?” she just retorts, “[h]e dresses well” (329). Miranda also acts as a coquette in the presence of Sir Francis, reminding him that she “refused three northern lords, two British Peers, and half-a-score knights” (328).

Miranda really is a striking, witty heroine, scheming and plotting her way through the play, coming up with every kind of intrigue to attain her aims. Her realistic views on marriage and married life are certainly her most astonishing feature. Negotiating the terms of their marriage with Sir George, instead of running into his arms, she expresses a down-to-earth perception of the ultimate goal of love-stricken virtuous heroines, married bliss:

Well, if you have such love and tenderness (since our wooing has been short), pray reserve it for our future days, to let the world see we are lovers after wedlock; ‘twill be a novelty. (244)

When pondering over her decision to marry Sir George, Miranda is again overcome with doubts, saying

I have done a strange bold thing; my fate is determined, and expectation is no more. Now to avoid the impertinence and roguery of an old man, I have thrown myself into the extravagance of a young one; if he should despise, slight, or use me ill, there's no remedy from a husband, but the grave; and that's a terrible sanctuary to one of my age and constitution. (350)

Miranda thus accurately expresses the doubts and fears of women of her time. She is fully aware of the dangers that lie in submitting oneself to a man in marriage. This speech of hers displays what MacDonald regards as one of the three main characteristics of a truly liberated and self-determined virtuous

heroine, namely her awareness of her own precarious position in a libertine, male-dominated world.

During the whole play Miranda only directs a single, rather irrelevant sentence at Marplot – one of the minor characters – in which she displays the ambivalence typical of female writers and their heroines, thus undermining her own perception of women as equal to men, “you converse little with our sex, when you can’t reconcile contradictions” (347). It depends on the reading of this sentence, but considering Miranda’s self-awareness and her dry sense of humour, it could perfectly well be interpreted as pure self-mockery, being uttered with a twinkle. Anyway, Miranda is certainly one of the most emancipated, self-aware, and least ambivalent heroines of Restoration comedy.

8.2.2. Maria (*The Self-Rival*)

Maria is a typical coquette who, together with Colonel Bellamont forms a truly gay couple. Throughout the play she mimes the good daughter, feigning passive obedience to her father. Even when he plans to marry her off to an aged Lord, she pretends to submit to his will, “I shall always prefer my Duty to my Inclinations: and if you command, I’ll obey. [...] Sir, I am yours, and you may dispose of me as you please” (33).

In order to test Colonel Bellamont she turns into an entirely cold and dismissive coquette. As befits Bellamont’s profession, he, Maria and also some other characters employ war language all through the play, for example when Maria ponders over her feelings for Bellamont:

[T]his Colonel runs strangely in my head; if he attacks again, I fear I shall give ground: for the most potent Adversary we Women can meet with, is an eloquent Tongue, and a plausible Temper. (5)

In the face of her “enemy” she coquettishly outdoes herself, telling him “I’ll swear you are one of the most troublesome Men upon Earth. [...] If I were to be confin’d to one Man, I should think my Charms were withering, and stand Knee-deep in Water all day to keep ‘em fresh” (8). Playing hard to get, she adds that she will at the earliest marry at thirty, “and then he that holds out longest shall have me” (8). Bellamont’s swift reply is: “Till Thirty! why a Man might take *Troy* in less time. Egad Child, your Lovers had need to be Soldiers, and used to long

Sieges" (8). So the gay couple banter on and on. In contrast to many other gallants, Bellamont is not at all impressed by Maria's affected coldness, which makes her act even more aloof, "the Man has Wit enough; but I hate him because I can give him no pain: the Wretch is so very insolent, he makes me no manner of sport" (13).

In the presence of Mrs Fallow, whom she admires and wants to please, she feigns coldness, stating that she believes she shall resolve to live single just like Mrs Fallow, for the "Thoughts of a Husband sets [*sic*] me a quaking like an Ague-Fit" (6).

Maria has no sympathy for her weak and whining brother's broken heart, mocking him by asking: "is this the Logick and Ethicks [...] you have been studying all this while? O Ged! how I could laugh at you now!" (17). She is another woman who reverses the gender roles, acting the manly part and exposing her sentimental brother as womanish.

When Colonel Bellamont disguises himself as his own uncle, aged Lord Pastall, in order to ask Sir Ephraim for Maria's hand in marriage, Maria immediately sees through his disguise. Deceiving the deceiver, she decides to play along with his plot: "but if I don't play him Trick for his Trick, may I never marry a younger Husband than he represents" (31). Taking revenge, she sets Bellamont/ Lord Pastall a task, trying to tempt him by posing as a weak woman:

[Y]our Offers are very powerful, almost too strong for a weak Woman to resist; but I have made a firm Resolution never to marry any Man, who will not first promise me to chastise the Insolence of a young saucy Lover I have. [...] I believe he's but a Coward, tho' he's a Field-Officer [...] he's no *Almanzor*, but plain Colonel *Bellamont*.²⁵³ (31)

When Bellamont/ Lord Pastall hesitates to comply, protesting that Bellamont is his own nephew, Maria convinces him by asking: "do you desire to marry a young Woman? I think you ought to sacrifice every thing to my Inclination" (32). Quite enigmatically she adds, "tho' he's your Nephew, use him like your *Rival* [emphasis added]; and believe his ill Treatment gives you a *title* [emphasis added] to the best in my power" (32). Now Bellamont/ Lord Pastall finally complies. These last lines are ambiguous, as Davys uses them to hint at the explanation of the title. Colonel Bellamont has to act like the rival of Lord Pastall

²⁵³ Almanzor is the impulsive hero of Dryden's heroic tragedy *The Conquest of Spain* (1670).

and thus is his own self-rival. In this scene Maria is at her most dominant, first gaining strength through feigning weakness, and then displaying her strong will and determination, using virtually every trick to reach her ultimate goal, “for now I can mortify him as a young Man, and marry him as an old one; can oblige a resolute Father, and please myself too” (32).

Throughout the play Maria tries her best to prompt emotions from Bellamont by humiliating him, making him jealous, affecting coldness, displaying contempt for his occupation, or even chasing him away, but he is clever enough not to blunder into her traps, which completely exasperates her, “O Ged! How it vexes me to see with what Indifference the Fellow bears all this? I think ‘tis impossible to mortify him” (45). However, when she tells Bellamont that she will marry neither him nor Lord Pastall, Bellamont’s aloof and smart retort “[t]hen there’s a happy third Man you love better” (43) finally drives her up the wall and she explodes:

Lard you are so impertinent, I’ll marry no body; here I am, a fine young Lady, have a good Fortune, and admired and address’d by every body, and you wou’d have me such a Fool as to leave all this Pleasure to be a Wife forsooth, to spend my Evenings at home with my Maids, making Patch-Work or mending my Husband’s Night-Caps, whose coming I must patiently expect till Midnight; and if he comes then, perhaps so fuddled, that I shou’d have but little Comfort in his Company. (44)

Again, Bellamont keeps calm and assures her of his love, but Maria is not satisfied. When Sir Ephraim and Frederick enter, she is so angry that she uses her power and reveals that Bellamont still courts her and is Lord Pastall’s rival. Bellamont, however, is quick to explain to Sir Ephraim, “Sir, I wou’d rival my ownself rather than lose the Woman I love” (45), again making reference to the play’s title.

When Bellamont/ Lord Pastall eventually wants to let her into his plot, Maria uses the last bit of power she has over him and refuses to hear his secrets. Before he can discover his secret to her, she again deceives the deceiver, telling her newly wed husband, Bellamont/ Lord Pastall, “I have a Concession to make as well as you, I hope you won’t be angry with me, but I have made a Promise [...] that the first Night I lie with a different Sex from my own, it shall certainly be with Colonel *Bellamont*” as “he is the only Man upon Earth, I ever did or ever shall love” (57). She has finally achieved to amaze Bellamont and

reveals *her* secret, “Lard, Colonel that you shou’d think me so short-sighted, as not to see thro’ your Disguise all this while!” (58). They finally conclude peace and join forces to bring Sir Ephraim in for one of their allies.

Maria again tries to reach this aim by feigning weakness, telling her father that she did not know anything about Bellamont’s intrigue and that she has behaved like a truly obedient daughter by marrying Lord Pastall according to her father’s wish and has thus earned his blessing. In the end, Sir Ephraim surrenders to both young women and promises both couples to provide for them.

Maria’s independence and strong will are best portrayed in her last lines of the first act: “*And Woman’s Will can never bear the Rein/ I’ll have my Freedom, or I’ll break my Chain*” (15). She is a stubborn young lady and surely one of the most determined and strong-minded heroines of Restoration comedy, always finding a way to attain the end she has in view. Maria is matched with an equal, as Bellamont proves to be a tough nut to crack. This gay couple’s witty banter, which often humorously employs war language, also symbolises that love can be a hard battle to be fought, but as is known, all is fair in love and war.

8.2.3. Kitty/ Emilia (*The Self-Rival*)

Kitty cannot be classified as a scheming maid, because she acts as an active heroine and actually is a gentlewoman who only disguises as a servant in order to conquer the man she loves. In the first act she only briefly appears, ridiculing Lady Camphire together with her mistress Maria and later, when Sir Ephraim, whose head she has unintentionally turned, chases her. The old man, struggling with his passion, starts wooing her, proposes to her, and bribes her with his money:

I know there is some Disparity in our Years, but you must balance that with your Family and want of Fortune: I shall very soon dispose of your Mistress; my Son, who will be here presently, intends to travel; and for my own Person, I design to bestow it upon you. (12)

Kitty cleverly beats him with his own weapon, reminding him of how he recently lectured his daughter that happiness does “not consist in the present Gratification of our Passions, but in a thoughtful Reflection upon Futurity” adding, “if she [Maria] at Eighteen must not indulge those Passions, sure you,

who are in your grand Climacterick, should find it no hard matter to subdue 'em" (13). Thus she successfully extricates herself from this awkward situation.

The reason why Emilia disguises herself as Kitty the maid is that she has fallen for Frederick. But her brother, a friend of Frederick's, opposed the match and made Frederick believe that she was already married. Apparently the only way to win Frederick back and marry him is to disguise herself and work for his sister Maria, pretending to come with a recommendation from Emilia. As soon as she hears that Frederick has come back from Cambridge, she vanishes for some time without explanation, as he knows her face and must not see her until her plot comes off. Much later in the play, she reappears disguised as a gypsy, manipulating Sir Ephraim into sending his son away: "if you don't make haste and send away your Son there, he will prove a dangerous Rival, and rob you of your Mistress" (34). Interestingly, there is a surprisingly high amount of truth in her threat. Next, also having seen through Colonel Bellamont's disguise, she gives Maria the fright of her life:

[H]ere's a Lord and a Soldier, whose Interests are so interwoven, that it is not possible for the Stars themselves to tell which they are most inclin'd to; you will marry both, yet have but one Husband, and with him be very happy. (35)

Davy's use of cryptic language and enigmatic but entirely truthful messages delivered by the mysterious gypsy is really bewitching.

Kitty in the guise of a gypsy employs one more trick: pulling out a snuff-box, she lets Frederick take one pinch of her snuff, and then reveals her i.e. Emilia's picture to him. This scene is fairly sentimental, with effeminate Frederick indulging in lovesickness.

Though lovely Likeness of a most beautiful Face to a more beauteous Mind! thou shalt along with me; and while *Emilia* lies incircled in a happy Husband's Arms, (Oh Death to my Repose!) I'll lay thee to my broken Heart, a senseless Witness of my Sighs and Tears! (36)

This is almost too much for the clever gypsy, who "*turns, and wipes her Eyes,*" but having regained her composure, she tells Frederick, "*Emilia* is not married" and exposes Emilia's brother's deceit to him (36). Frederick once more proves his unmanliness, moaning, "[h]ad she the least intention to make me happy, she would doubtless e'er now have found some way to let me know" (36). This scene employs a total reversal of gender roles with the emancipated and self-

determined Emilia scheming in order to conquer the passive, effeminate, wailing and whining Frederick.

Having again vanished, Kitty/ Emilia returns in the last act, once more disguised as a gypsy, pretending to come on an errand from Kitty. She wants Sir Ephraim, who longs for Kitty, to “grant her a small Request” (61), telling him that if he denied her, he would never see Kitty again. Again reversing the gender roles, she asks Sir Ephraim, “will you bestow your Son upon me?” and explains that “the worst Design I have upon him is to marry him” (61). When Sir Ephraim perplexedly inquires, “[m]arry him! to whom I beseech you?” she cheekily answers, “[t]o myself, Sir, I never court for nobody else” (61). Here Kitty/ Emilia herself indicates her reversal gender stereotypes. When Sir Ephraim agrees and calls Frederick, Kitty pulls off her disguise and Frederick exclaims, “*Emilia* here! Amazement strikes me dumb” (62). Emilia then finally submits herself, “*Frederick*, I am yours” (63). Sir Ephraim, the old rake, tries to bribe her into marrying him for the last time, but Emilia politely refuses him, as already discussed in the section on old rakes (cf. 7.1.2. The old rake).

Even though Kitty/ Emilia occupies less space in the play than most other characters, she wholly dominates the scenes in which she is present, manipulating Sir Ephraim to act according to her will. Her double disguise is symbolic of her ingenuity and wit. Unlike many other deceivers, her intrigue comes off completely and she is not even once knocked off her course. She is also the only active heroine who *does not* act as a coquette, which has its reasons in the effeminate, weak, and wholly passive personality of the man of her heart, Frederick, “a perfect *Oroondates*”²⁵⁴ (63), who stands in stark contrast to this self-determined and active woman. In spite of her scarce presence on the stage, Kitty/ Emilia is surely one of the most powerful and dominant sub-plot heroines.

²⁵⁴ *Oroondates*, a character in La Calprenède’s ten-volume novel-cycle *Cassandra* (1644-50), is a prince of Scythia whose desired bride is snatched away by an elderly king; the novels were adapted by John Banks in the tragedy *The Rival Kings, or The Loves of Oroondates and Statira* (1677). Cf. Todd *Behn*, 61

8.2.4. Isabella and Louisa (*The Northern Heiress*)

Right from their introduction, when Isabella and Louisa enter laughing, they are portrayed as equal coquettes, bantering about the question to whom the gallantry of a young man was designed. Their roles as independent heroines are also hinted at by Gamont's question, "where have you been so early, spreading your Nets, that you have met with Game already?" (10). Gamont reverses the gender stereotypes by addressing them in typically male hunting language. He also indicates right from the start that the two coquettes are in pursuit of gallants, and in contrast to passive, weak women, who hope to be saved by men, are the architects of their own fortunes. Louisa, who is financially independent, contributes to this image, by stating: "I shall provide for my self, and save you from Disappointment" (10).

Isabella and Louisa are both coquettes, though their coquettishness adopts different gradations. As typical of a coquette, Isabella affects aversion and coldness towards Gamont, which is described in his lamenting:

Yes Madam, that Method you are perfectly Mistress of; for tho' you seem to reproach me with your civil Usage, the only Mark of your Favour I ever receiv'd, was a Box in the Ear, and a Week's Banishment, for only offering to snatch a Kiss. (11)

Louisa, however, expresses her reproach for Isabella's "starving poor *Gamont's* generous Love" (35), displaying the anxiety of a sister as well as her position as the weaker coquette, who is more liable to sentimentality. There are only few instances in the play when Isabella reveals her true feelings for Gamont, throwing off her coquettish mask and dropping all pretence,

'Tis true, I do love her Brother [Gamont] more than Life; but he shall never know his own Power, 'till I have made a Tryal or two of his Love, and the I'll use him as he deserves.
For if I find values nought but Coin,
I'll tear him from my Breast, and he shall ne'er be mine. (36)

Isabella here displays her anxiety that she is loved more for her money than for her true self, which is her reason for testing the genuineness and authenticity of Gamont's love again and again. As Gamont correctly observes, she displays the typical coquettish "Cruelty of [her] Sex" when she "seems to doubt [his] Sincerity" (41). She actually enjoys the power of being his financial superior, but also fears that if his father should die and bequeath his fortune to Gamont, "he

will be imperious as he is now submissive" (37). Even when Gamont passes her first test and proposes to her despite her loss of fortune, Isabella, not knowing that her deception has been uncovered by him, is still not satisfied and cruelly refuses him.

Another instance of Isabella's coquettish behaviour towards Gamont is depicted in his complaint about her, as she "seems to delight in giving me new Torments" even though he knows "the more I submit, the more she'll insult" (61). Gamont finally closes the fourth act by exposing the coquette's fondness for power and her affected coldness and the supposed recipe against this: to appear uninterested.

*Fond of their Pow'r, and pleas'd to give us Pain,
If with Respect we woo, then they disdain.
Seem but indifferent, she strait complies,
Afraid to lose the Conquest of her Eyes.
Thus Women, by Contraries always tost,
Are most complying, when you slight'em most. (61)*

Isabella really is a mistress of this game. When Louisa tells her that Gamont is about to leave town in order to detach himself from her, Isabella goes as far as to perty reply, "I shall be glad to see him, and wish him a good Journey," shocking Louisa into muttering "[s]o cold" (66) in an aside. However, Louisa herself also poses as a strategic coquette when Welby confesses to her "I wish you would give me your Heart with your Hand" and replies, "[s]hould I give it away so soon, you would hardly think it worth Acceptance" (49), closing the third act by stating: "*A Conquest easy gain'd you all despise/ We please you best, when most we tyrannize*" (49).

Though Louisa does not approve of Isabella's coquettish and cruel treatment of Gamont, she affects nearly the same coldness towards Welby, taking Isabella's earlier advice: "The best Way to prevent a Misapplication of our Favours, is, to shew non at all" (11).

The more powerful coquette Isabella also distinguishes herself by being more strong-willed and self-determined than Louisa, which becomes apparent when they talk about which type of man they prefer. Isabella says,

I rather chuse to use him [a gallant] as he expects, than as he deserves;
for one had better have a Lover that makes himself too sure of one's

Favours, than one that can never be persuaded he receives any at all.
(11)

So she prefers a strong and heroic man who enjoys his power over her to a weak man. Louisa, however, replies, “there you and I differ. I should rather chuse a desponding Lover, than a presuming one; because it is an easier Matter to cure one by good Usage, than t’other by ill” (11). It is quite striking that Louisa starts out from the assumption that either way, she will have to change and reform her future husband.

Isabella is a very proud young woman who pretends to prefer a man who loves her but whom she does not love, to loving a man who does not love her. She is not only a feignedly cold but also a self-determined coquette who is intent on getting her own way, “as I am resolv’d to love the Man I marry, so I am resolv’d to marry the Man I love” (30). Isabella is quite aware of her exposed situation as a wealthy heiress, as if she knew Gamont’s words to his friend Welby, “I am in Love with an Angelick Woman; but there is 20000 l. to add to the Charm” (16). Realizing that her suitors might value her estate even more highly than her person, she tells Louisa, “I never had Vanity enough to think any Thing, but my Money, could secure a Heart” (35). Isabella is thus another example of MacDonald’s concept of a truly virtuous heroine, who is conscious of her precarious position as a wealthy woman in a male- and money-dominated world.

Her power is not only displayed by her coquettish and witty repartee with Gamont, which is typical of the gay couple, but also by her self-confidence and high expectations of a husband: “It will be very hard if my Person and Fortune can command nothing better than an old Country Knight [Sir Jeffrey]” (30). When Lady Ample tries to persuade Isabella to at least consider Sir Loobily Joddrel as a husband, “a Man young and handsome, rich and—” Isabella is quick to ironically interrupt her, “I suppose the next Thing would have been his Wit” (30). Lady Ample then defends him, “if he be not so very quick in his Understanding, as your Favourite *Gamont*, he has an Estate and Title to make amends for” (31). But Isabella is not willing to give up her firm conviction, criticising mercenary marriages and the prevailing business of match-making:

What an Unhappiness it is, that our Relations never consult any Thing but the Pleasure of Wealth? Methinks, Madam, you that have a Taste for Wit, should never prefer a Fool to a Man of Sense. (31)

At the high point of Isabella's display of her determination and power, once more reversing gender roles, she explains to Gamont that she now and purely by her own wish will accept his earlier proposals:

Mr. *Gamont*, you have no Doubt wonder'd at my late Behaviour to you, and not without Cause; but I was resolv'd to be satisfy'd of your Sincerity, which now I am; and if you have any Inclinations or Wishes left for me, I am here both willing and ready to crown them. (68)

Gamont surrenders to her dominance and "with humble Thanks, [receives] the Blessing" (68). Turning to her aunt, Lady Ample, Isabella saucily and self-consciously adds,

Madam, I desire you will please to pardon me, for disposing of my self without your Consent; it was what I knew you would never give, so would not make you uneasy by asking it. (68)

When Louisa finally falls for Welby, she displays that she is a distinctly weaker heroine than Isabella, not able to control her feelings, but only listening to her heart: If Welby's "Estate and Humour prove of a Piece with his Wit and Person, Heaven of it's Mercy defend my Heart; for I am sure I shall never be able to do it my self" (34). Louisa thus takes Welby's wealth into account when talking about her love for him, which stands in stark contrast to Isabella's convictions.

Louisa is not only portrayed as an independent and strong-willed coquette, but also as a loyal sister, as Gamont explains to Welby:

As to her Beauty, I shall leave you to be judge of it [...] but for her good Humour, I can give no better Proof of it, than to tell you, she denies herself the Pleasures of the Town, to live with me here, that by Supplies from her Estate, I may be enabled to keep up that Figure I have always made in the World. (15)

Also reversing the gender roles, Louisa pays for her brother's keep with her own money, which she interestingly inherited from "an old Grand-mother" (15). This passing on of money as a symbol of power which is transferred from one woman to another is remarkable. It is also striking that Gamont here adopts the fully dependent role that has been described in the chapter on spinsters, who

have to be provided for by their brothers.²⁵⁵ In contrast to many a brother who sent his spinster sister away on his marriage, Louisa places her brother's well-being above her own, and even manages to cleverly use his financial dependence on her in order to put Welby off. She puts her gallant to the test, telling him that she cannot marry him because she is resolved to marry only after her father has died or her brother has married, i.e. until, either way, Gamont is no longer financially dependent on her. She is thus a financially independent young heroine with a heart of gold, in pursuit of a gallant. Just like Isabella, she is also a proud coquette who knows how to play hard to get, and when Welby asks her to give him her heart with her hand, she wisely rejects, as already examined. When Louisa and Welby are talking to each other on their own they also act as a gay couple. However, their banter is a little bit weaker than Isabella and Gamont's. Louisa, even though she is financially independent, is not as strong-willed and self-determined and active as Isabella, who is also a wealthy heroine but dependent on her guardian.

8.3. The heroine's friend²⁵⁶

The heroine's friend, as the gallant's friend, is sometimes the virtuous heroine's equal and confidante, who goes through parallel courtship e.g. Isabella and Louisa in *The Northern Heiress*, but she can also be a secondary figure, who is juxtaposed to the more powerful and active virtuous heroine e.g. Isabinda in *The Busie Body*. Isabinda is the epitome of 'virtue in distress' and completely dependent on her maid Patch.²⁵⁷ The heroine of the sub-plot is almost always portrayed as more passive, timid, and prudish than the female lead. Usually the heroine's friend or confidante is matched with the rake's best friend and both couples end up married like Miranda and Sir George, and her friend Isabinda and Sir George's friend Charles in *The Busie Body*. Kitty/ Emilia in *The Self-Rival* is a hybrid of scheming maid and heroine of the sub-plot and bears no relation to Maria, her mistress and the play's virtuous heroine.

²⁵⁵ Cf. 3.2.5. Widows and spinsters

²⁵⁶ Each of the active main and sub-plot heroines will later be analysed in detail cf. 8.2. Active heroines in the plays

²⁵⁷ For further treatment of Isabinda cf. 9.2.1. Scheming maids

8.4. “Good-natur’d old Maid” vs. “Affected Old Maid”²⁵⁸

Before 1700, in a time when hardly any woman with the opportunity to marry remained single, old maids (widows and spinsters) were rare in drama, and still not very common after. Even though in real life many women did not manage to catch a husband, as there were more women than men, this likelihood of remaining unmarried is seldom reflected in the contemporary drama. Attitudes to old maids were conventionally hostile, derogatory, and offensive, maybe because they escaped male control and were regarded as eerie social outsiders. Widows and spinsters were often depicted as figures of ridicule, either portrayed as prudish and religious or as amorous and lecherous. Women writers like Margaret Cavendish promoted women who choose to do something else with their lives instead of marrying. Mary Astell, one of the first feminists, also emphasised that unmarried women could make substantial contributions in society, stating that only fools would reproach a single lady with “the dreadful name of Old Maid,” which no “wise Woman” would be afraid of (108).

The most exceptional play written by a man which centres on women who refuse to marry is D’Urfey’s *The Richmond Heiress, or A Woman Once in the Right* (1693). It features an heiress and a learned lady who flirt, but ultimately both choose to remain single. The play remarkably ends without any marriage, thus subverting the values of Restoration society.

In *The Busie Body*, which actually features no old maids at all, Sir Francis expresses his opinion of older women:

Why, there’s no depending upon old women in my country – for they are as wanton at eighty, as a girl of eighteen; and a man may safely trust to Asgill’s translation as to his grandmother’s not marrying again.²⁵⁹ (317)

His hostility reflects English society’s prevailing contempt for older single women of the time. Some examples of amorous older women, who were almost always figures of scathing ridicule and contempt, are Lady Fidget (*The Country-Wife*), Mrs Foresight (*Love for Love*), Lady Cockwood (*She Wou’d If She*

²⁵⁸ As listed under *Dramatis Personae* in *The Self-Rival* 2.

Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section is taken from Pearson 86ff.

²⁵⁹ In 1700 John Asgill wrote an unorthodox tract, claiming that the redeemed may be translated from hence into that eternal life, without passing the through death, altho the humane nature of Christ himself could not be thus translated till he has passed through death. (Finberg 319n26)

Cou'd), Lady Laycock (*The Amorous Widow*) and the ludicrously conceited Lady Fancyfull, who is almost a female fop (*The Provok'd Wife*).²⁶⁰

In *The Self-Rival*, Mary Davys introduces a much more humane and attractive portrayal of a good-natured old maid, whom she contrasts with a less likeable, more conventional affected old maid. Mrs Fallow is a figure who cannot really be classified as a stereotypical stock character. Even though she is an old maid, she is certainly not a humour-butt. Her presence and prominence in the play are remarkable and her plots with Barnaby, a clever servant, are quite unconventional. Mrs Fallow is juxtaposed to Lady Camphire Lovebane, who is the embodiment of the stereotypical prudish old maid, a figure which is ridiculed by Maria, Frederick, and also by Mrs Fallow. The other characters' hostility towards Lady Camphire is explicit right from the start, when Kitty, the alleged maid, says of her that she is "praying [...] for what will never be granted her," namely a husband, as "old Maids never pray for any thing else" (4). Maria, however, counters that "Lady *Camphire* has declaim'd so long against that frightful Creature, Man, that she could not for shame marry now" (4). The figure of Lady Camphire thus evokes laughter and animosity in the two young women. The prevailing hostility against amorous older women, who marry when their best years are already past, is also expressed by Mrs Fallow, who finds fault in some Mrs Fulsome, a

Woman of Fortune [...] whose only Charm is Sixteen Thousand Pounds; for tho' she has a deform'd Body, a Face scarce Human, and a Soul more despicable than either, there's not a Beau at Court, an Officer in the Guards, or a Merchant in the City, who does not constantly pay their Devoirs at her Levee.²⁶¹ (6)

Mrs Fallow thus shares the common view that an older woman should no longer marry when she is past a certain age,

a Woman who is once turn'd of Forty, and then puts herself under Covert Baron, in my opinion forfeits all Pretensions to Discretion; for if she marries a young Man, she's in the Decline of her Years, before he comes to the Prime of his; and what Comfort there is in an old one, daily Experience will tell us. (6)

²⁶⁰ Cf. Hume, *Development* 132

²⁶¹ i.e. who does not wait on her in her afternoon receptions

Maria totally agrees with Mrs Fallow that “an old Woman married to a young Man is a most ridiculous Sight” (7) and paints a cruel picture of an old coquette who

appears in publick dress'd in blush-colour'd Satin, and as airy as one of Sixteen, tho' her Head noddles like a piece of *German* Clock-Work, and her feeble Legs will scarce bear the Weight of her tottering Body. (7)

However, Mrs Fallow, who throughout the play displays a fairly ambivalent attitude towards marriage, seems to regret never having married herself, telling Maria,

when I was as young as you are, I had the very same Fancies, which you, and all young Ladies of Fortune have; was fond of my Power, and thought Submission a very strange thing, till Time stole on me unawares, and now 'tis too late. (6)

These lines again illustrate the prevailing perception of marriage as the total submission of a woman to a man and also emphasise its necessity for women who have no fortune at their disposal. According to Mrs Fallow only “Ladies of Fortune” (6) have the power to choose whether they want to marry. However, as has already been shown, this is a considerable distortion of reality and does not at all correspond to historical facts of the period. Actually, it does not really become explicit whether Mrs Fallow is disillusioned and therefore ridicules the whole concept of marriage as well as some married couples she knows, or if she simply disdains it, but tries to remain on secure ground, not daring to openly voice her socially unacceptable opinion. This could be an explanation for her stating that she “always [speaks] well of Matrimony” as she does not want to appear peevish, whereas Lady Camphire “pretends to hate the very name on't” (19). Mrs Fallow speaks from experience, when she tells Maria that if she intends to marry, she should do so while she is still young, in order to “avoid the odious Name of old Maid, which you see me labour under” (7). She does not necessarily agree with Mary Astell's (108) notion that no wise woman would be afraid of the dreadful name of old maid. However, having lived to see what life is like for an old maid, Mrs Fallow also takes some pride in her choice of staying single.

Maria conveys an entirely positive image of the old maid:

Where I sure to behave myself as well under that Denomination as you do, I would live single on purpose, for I have often thought you have

brought a *new Character on the Stage* [emphasis added] of Life, and you are *certainly the first good-natur'd old Maid* [emphasis added] I ever saw. (7)

This is the play's most interesting passage concerning the character of the good-natured old maid. Davys here explicitly indicates that her intention actually is to introduce this new variant of the character to the English stage. A widow herself, she also lived to see what life was like for single women. By employing a new, entirely positive figure like Mrs Fallow, juxtaposed to a stereotypical prudish old maid, Davys lends her play much more realism and credence, giving voice to her dissatisfaction and frustration not only with the portrayal of old maids in the drama of the period, but also with their social status and public treatment in real life.

Throughout the play, Mrs Fallow acts like a reasonable, trustworthy, and honest woman, who in contrast to Lady Camphire does not at all display "Affectation and Ill-Nature," the "Qualities [which are] the constant Attendants of [...] old Maids" (19). Even though the two women must be of more or less the same age, Mrs Fallow has a youthful temper, while old-fashioned and withered Lady Camphire holds only completely outdated views. Mrs Fallow is an integrated part of Maria's and Frederick's lives and joins forces with them in vexing their prudish old aunt, who cannot understand how Maria can "desire a Man's Company upon any Terms?" (20). Regarding this topic of conversation as "so filthy a Subject," she adds, "how sweet Lives did the Amazons lead? a whole Nation of Women, govern'd by their own Laws! Oh happy People! that there were such a state now!" (20). Lady Camphire then goes on to voice her utterly unromantic and sober estimation of love-making as a pure performance of duty, "since Nature has been so improvident, as to provide no other way of propagating out Species, 'tis a Duty incumbent to us all" (20). Like Lady Greasy in *The Northern Heiress*, Lady Camphire is also a hybrid of the old maid and the young coquette, boasting, "[h]ow many Men of Quality have I had at my feet, whom I did not regard!" (21) and "I have refused the best Matches in the Kingdom" (38). Maria, though, under her breath tells Mrs Fallow that according to her mother Lady Camphire "was never ask'd to marry in her Life; but was so fond, that if she had not been strictly watch'd, she had run away with the Butler"

(21). After this brief excursion to her coquettish youth, Lady Camphire immediately regains her own proudly prudish self, ridiculously bragging:

I never spoke to a Man, unless my Father, till I was turn'd of Two-and-twenty: the Gentlemen who used to visit at our House, always call'd me the inaccessible Lady. (21)

She even adds that if she got parliamentary consent, she would “build a Nunnery [herself], and settle [her] whole Fortune upon it” (21). All the other characters of the play regard Lady Camphire with contempt and declare her as “stark mad!” (22) She also pesters others with her lengthy and boring family tales and her moral sermonising.

In one of the sub-plots, Mrs Fallow fights a battle against “the filthy Beast” (5) Verjuice, which in the course of the play shifts from a purely verbal dispute to a more violent conflict. Their argument and Mrs Fallow’s consequent plots of revenge display her humorous, intriguing, and still youthful spirit. Verjuice is a wicked old bachelor who trusts nobody but his only friend, money. Throughout his presence in the play, he is constantly abusing and insulting Lady Camphire, “a Person with no more Charms than a Skeleton” (38) and Mrs Fallow, “I know you can outdo me in scolding; for your Tongue is as nimble as the Fingers of a *German Artists*, and as loud as the new Clock at St. *Paul’s*” (38). But Mrs Fallow is vastly superior to him not only in language, as is shown in the following scene, but also in deeds:

Where there’s neither Wit enough to say things entertaining, or Good-nature enough to keep a Man within the Bounds of good Manners, I think one may venture to despise such a Person. (38)

After Mrs Fallow has successfully beaten Verjuice with his own weapon in a duel of words, he has to admit, “[a] pox o’ your tart Tongue, it has set my Teeth on edge,” and Mrs Fallow victoriously exclaims, “*Victoria! Victoria!*” (39). However, even though she has won the battle, for Mrs Fallow the war is not over yet. With the aid of Colonel Bellamont’s bright servant Barnaby, who owns Verjuice “a Grudge upon [his] own account” (42), she contrives a successful revenge plot.²⁶² Her superiority over Verjuice is again displayed when she overhears his counter-revenge plot: As Verjuice thinks “a Woman’s Tongue shou’d be used like a House on Fire, ply it with Water till the Flames are

²⁶² The plot is further described in the section on Barnaby cf. 9.2.2. A clever servant

quenched,” he tries to bribe Barnaby, into “ducking [Mrs Fallow] for scolding [which] has been a Custom long in Use” (55). While Verjuice is still gloatingly rubbing his hands, “what noble Sport ‘twill be to see her nice Ladyship, dabbling, and like a Statue on a Fountain, throwing the Water on all sides of her. Ha, ha, ha!” (55), Mrs Fallow decides that, “there is some Return due to his Design” as “his Crime shall be his Punishment” (56). Again with Barnaby’s help, she lures Verjuice into a gaming-house, where the greedy scoundrel loses four hundred pounds he was going to put into the bank. Mrs Fallow here employs a device typical of Restoration comedy, namely deceiving the deceiver.

At the end of the play, Mrs Fallow ventures even further by humorously patronising and lecturing Verjuice,

Mr. *Verjuice*, I wou’d fain give you a little good Advice before we part, tho’ you know you don’t deserve it from me; wou’d you avoid all future Misfortunes, lay aside your Cynical Humour, use other People well, and it will be a certain means to make the use you so. (67)

Colonel Bellamont supports her advice, whereas Verjuice reacts in the same obnoxious manner as ever and stamps away cursing: “Damn her Advice, an infernal Fury; may Plague, Pox and Poverty light upon you all, and a double Portion upon her” (67). His inability to reform is symbolical of his low status as a humour-butt. Throughout the play, Mrs Fallow has been superior to him in all things, which is quite remarkable, as her social standing as an old maid is conventionally inferior to his as an old bachelor. In addition to her victory in the battle of the sexes, Mrs Fallow also thoroughly defeats Lady Camphire, introducing an entirely positive version of an outdated, stereotypical stock character. Frederick felicitously puts the stark contrast between the two old maids into a nutshell, “[t]he worst-match’d Pair in Christendom; one all Good-Humour, Ease, and Freedom; t’other all Ill-Nature, Pride, and Affectation” (23).

Davys thus refutes social as well as gender prejudices, raising a traditional female character of contempt and humour above a male character, who has not the slightest chance to match her. She managed to successfully introduce an entirely different view of the unmarried woman by inventing the innovative Mrs Fallow, a good-natured, humane, and attractive old maid.

8.5. The female humour-butts

Lady Greasy in *The Northern Heiress* is a female humour-butts who bears typical character traits as well as unconventional ones, combining prudish, foppish, masculine, and also coquettish features in her person. Although she is a vulgar tradeswoman, she wants to be called a lady. This is ridiculed by Gamont, who considers her one of “the Aldermens Wives, who would be less ridiculous, were they less fond of being call’d Ladies” (16). Lady Greasy thinks highly of herself and the people she surrounds herself with:

Why, here is very good Company, I’ll assure you. Here’s me, and my Daughter, and a Gentleman and his Sister; then here’s a rich Knight came but last Night. (12)

As is typical of the humour-butts, she refers to herself first, which is normally regarded as impolite and rude. A proud country fool, Lady Greasy foppishly boasts that her “Husband was a Lord” though she has to concede “nay, one of the best Sort of Lords, he was a Lord-Mayor” (25).

Lady Greasy’s many malapropisms are also stereotypical of a humour-butts. Trying to sound like a real lady, she often does not manage to find the word she intends to use, but ridiculously and foppishly mixes it up with some other expression, thus betraying her pretence. For example, she uses “*disgenderate*” (19) instead of degenerate when nagging at Bareface’s rakish lavishness and reproaches him speaking “*misdainfully*” (20), instead of disdainfully, of his parents. Later she warns her daughter’s suitor Tinsel “to come no more *salivating* under our Windows” (20) when she actually means *serenading*. In another scene, Lady Greasy complains, rather unladylike, about her aching back, “I have got such a Pain in my Huck-bone, that when I once set, I can’t get up again” and explains that she suffers from a “Certificate” (24). When Lady Ample corrects her and tells her that she rather fancies it is *Sciatica*, her sheepish reply is, “[n]ay, I know not, it’s some hard Word; but whatever they call it, I am sure I feel it” (25) and, as the climax of her unladylike behaviour, belches. There are also some other instances in which Lady Greasy comports herself most unladylike, but in a rather masculine fashion, for example when she discusses political matters with the other “ladies” at Lady Ample’s tea-table, drinking “hot Ale” (24) and “Brandy” (25). Lady Greasy surely provides and

exaggerated version of female autonomy. Like Louisa she is financially independent and not under male control.

Davy's funnily uses homely diction and a Yorkshire accent in *Lady Greasy*, like when she is giving her opinion of rakish people of quality, "I know nought they are good for, but to mak Wark, and get one's Maids with Barn" (19). Together with the specific details of domestic life, i.e. mentioning a "Tea-Kettle," "a clear starch'd Muslin Apron" (26), and "a Rowling Pin" (52), it contributes to Davy's "comic country realism," which was to be extremely popular in her later novels (Cotton 158).

Lady Greasy also bears some character traits of a religious zealot or prude. For example, she thinks that everybody should go to church and complains to *Welby*, "you young Men don't matter any Prayers" (12). Furthermore, she is a hardworking tradeswoman who is much interested in her business and in earning money, "I would have come sooner, but was forc'd to stay to see some Tallow weigh'd; for there's no trusting Servants now-a-days" (19). Puritans and other religious zealots were traditionally described as industrious workers, but the connotation here is not nearly as positive as that of eager beavers and busy bees.

In one scene *Lady Greasy* appears as a former coquette, telling her daughter about her youth:

I remember, when I was young. I kept Men at a Distance, and I had always a power of them at my Heels: For to say the Truth, I was very handsom; oh, I had a Complexion like Strawberries and Cream. (22)

But after some lines she returns to her old prudish self, regarding her daughter's marriage as a business enterprise in a manner typical of male blocking figures:

I shall take Care to provide you a better Husband than he [*Captain Tinsel*]; one that has an Estate, and can make thee a good Festment, keep thee in fine Cloaths, and a gold Chain. (22)

When *Lady Greasy* finds out about *Captain Tinsel's* love letter, she is beside herself with rage and turns into a virtual termagant, physically punishing her daughter *Dolly*, as *Isabella* relates: "She has pull'd the poor Toad about the House, and sous'd her with a Mug of Small Beer that stood on the Dresser, 'till she looks like a Water-Witch" (40). This unreasonable and violent reaction again marks *Lady Greasy* as a prude. Such behaviour is commonly observed in

jealous blocking figures, so Lady Greasy acts like a female blocking figure, trying her best to keep Dolly away from her sweetheart. However, she suffers the fate of most blocking figures, being outwitted by the couple of lovers and, finally, reforms and is reconciled with the couple, even offering Captain Tinsel the chance to work in her business together with her:

Well, since it is gone so far, I have one Disposal to make, and upon no other Terms will I be reconciled. Let him throw off that tawdry Red Coat, put on an Apron, and I'll let him take into the Business with my self. (70)

When proud Captain Tinsel rejects her offer, finding it “intolerable” to “submit to so servile an Employment” (70), she gives in a second time:

Come, Dolly, my Lass, don't cry any more; since thou are so fond of a red Coat and a Sword, prithee take 'em; for my Part, I'll e'ven throw by the Trade, and try if I can turn a Gentlewoman too. (70)

Even if her sudden reform is not fully convincing, Davys' sympathetic change in the portrayal of Lady Greasy from a pure humour-butt, prude, fop, female blocking figure, and man-woman into a loving mother, who finally tries to make her daughter happy, is remarkable. Lady Greasy certainly is one of the most multifaceted female humour-butts in Restoration comedy.

8.6. Mothers and wives

What is most striking about the mothers and wives of Restoration comedy is their prevailing absence. *The Busie Body* contains not a single mother for its four young lovers, neither does *The Self-Rival*. In *A Gotham Election* there is also no mention of any children of Lady Worthy, Goody Gabble or Goody Shallow. *The Northern Heiress* is the only one of the four plays which features a mother, the widow Lady Greasy. Single mothers like her are often employed in sub-plots, as they have a certain potential for being mocked as humour-butts. They might also be coupled with the stock figure of the amorous older woman. There exist some heavy mothers and strict governesses (e.g. Mrs Day in *The Committee, or The Faithful Irishman*, Ruth in *The Squire of Alsatia*, or Mrs Woodwill in *The Man of Mode*), who also often act as female blocking figures. However, the virtuous heroine and the gallants of the main plot frequently have just one male parent or guardian.

Earlier in the period, there also appeared some adulterous wives, but as reform more and more interfered with Restoration comedy, they vanished from the stage. There is also the character of the abused wife reforming her husband, as portrayed in *The Careless Husband*, *Love's Last Shift*, and *The Provok'd Wife*, as well as in many later reform comedies. *The Beaux' Stratagem* features an unhappy wife who despises her husband and is trapped in a loveless marriage.

9. Portrayal and power of characters from the lower and lower middle classes

Surprisingly few plays deal with truly aristocratic society like lords and knights. Knights as well as puritan merchant figures are often only introduced to be ridiculed (e.g. Sir Francis Gripe in *The Busie Body* or Sir Jeffrey in *The Northern Heiress*).

Most lower-class characters in Restoration drama are male and female domestic servants, ranging from long-suffering, stupid, or foolish to clever, witty, or scheming. Patch and Scentwell in *The Busie Body*, Liddy in *The Northern Heiress*, and Kitty (though she only poses as a servant) in *The Self-Rival* are scheming maids. Barnaby in *The Self-Rival* is a clever, actively scheming servant, whereas Whisper in *The Busie Body* is a faithful servant who just carries out his master's orders, but does not hatch plots of his own.

Other professions and trades are few in number and just appear in individual plays. Centlivre's farce *A Gotham Election* features tradesmen and their wives, namely a female tallow-chandler, an innkeeper, a barber, a carpenter, a cobbler, and a miller.

9.1. The development of the servant figure in English drama

Scarcely anything has been written about the portrayal of servants and lower- or working-class characters in Restoration comedy. If these characters come up in secondary literature at all, they are only referred to in one or two sentences. Seemingly irrelevant, unnecessary, and invisible to their superiors, the lower classes nevertheless constituted a substantial part of Restoration society and consequently appear in the background in almost every Restoration play. Due to the lack of secondary literature, it is difficult to establish a general tradition of servant characters in Restoration drama. Their historical development from their Roman roots up to Renaissance drama will be examined very briefly, whereupon a discussion of some individual characters in the plays will follow.

As already mentioned in the sections on the lower classes and working women (cf. 3.1.4. Lower class and 3.2.6. Work), service played a vital part in the English economy and constituted one of the main sources of employment in

early modern England. A substantial proportion of young people of both sexes, usually between ten and thirty years of age and unmarried, worked as servants at some stage in their lives. Mark Burnett (1) states that 29 per cent of all English households employed servants; thus they were perhaps the most distinctive socio-economic feature of English sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society.

In *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture*, Burnett analyses representations of servants in English Renaissance literature and traces back their historical development. He subdivides the dramatic representation of servants into male domestic servants and maidservants.

The male domestic servant in English Renaissance drama has its roots in a long-standing theatrical tradition. Already in the Roman tragedies of Plautus and Terence he is represented in the form of a slave, providing humour and assisting his young master in impersonation and tricky intrigues.²⁶³ Roman playwrights most often referred to him as the “clever trickster” or the “faithful servant” (Burnett 80). These two representations also appear in Renaissance drama. Medieval miracle plays, mystery cycles and early sixteenth century interludes also serve as sources of Renaissance drama, featuring tempting attendants and faithful, worldly-wise servants who corrupt or advise their masters in their romantic plots. Contemporary foreign sources like the Italian novella and comedy, themselves rooted in the Roman models, provided the figure of the servant disguising himself and helping his master to woo.²⁶⁴ The richness of this lineage provides the male domestic servant with a great number of functions. English Renaissance drama portrays the character of the servant as either an inventive, at times completely amoral and manipulative trickster, or as an entirely loyal and faithful servant, or as a hybrid form of both.²⁶⁵

As already mentioned when examining the professional functions of women (cf. 3.2.6. Work), female servants vitally contributed to the contemporary labour

²⁶³ Some features of the Roman slaves described by Duckworth like their mutual “boastfulness and self-glorification, their impudence and insolence, their inquisitiveness, indiscretion, and love of gossip” are very similar to the qualities possessed by the stock figure of the fop in Restoration drama (Duckworth 249).

²⁶⁴ Cf. Burnett 81

²⁶⁵ Cf. Burnett 81ff

force in the Restoration period. They also already did so during the English Renaissance, being collectively referred to as “maidservants.”²⁶⁶ The dramatic representation of women in service is not as easily established as that of their male counterparts. General stereotypical attitudes towards women mixed with the particular expectations about maidservants doubly disadvantaged them in contemporary ideologies. There are two features which dominate the representation of the woman servant. Firstly, they are most often associated with a low social status. Secondly, the maidservant tends to be portrayed in terms of her “all-consuming sexuality,” which takes the form of her desire to enter marriage or to express her libidinal requirements (Burnett 129).²⁶⁷ The maidservant in pursuit of a “good match” (132) is often depicted as “a basic creature of primal physical appetite” (133), who is unable to control her sexual voracity. Her social and economic dependency on marriage renders her sexually needy and therefore virtually easily accessible.²⁶⁸ Younger women servants, who are prepared to catch themselves a husband at any cost, are a favourite with Renaissance playwrights.²⁶⁹ “The older waiting-woman, for whom marriage is a social necessity” was also a popular type (130). A forerunner of the old maid, she already reflected the function and importance of marriage in order to provide her with a more respectable social identity.²⁷⁰

As Burnett aptly concludes,

women servants were objects of loathing and longing at one and the same time, since they were linked to verbal outspokenness, social restlessness and attempts to secure a greater economic advantage. (146)

²⁶⁶ Cf. Burnett 118

²⁶⁷ Cf. Burnett 129f

²⁶⁸ Cf. Burnett 133

²⁶⁹ E.g. in Brome’s *Novella* (1632-3)

²⁷⁰ An example of this stock character is given in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Scornful Lady* (1613-16). Cf. Burnett 130

9.2. Portrayal of individual servants

9.2.1. Scheming maids

The Busie Body features two scheming maids, who stand in stark contrast to each other. Scentwell is the embodiment of the faithful servant, helping her mistress in her plots and intrigues, carrying out Miranda's orders, warning Miranda and helping to hide Sir George at Sir Francis's unexpected early return. However, she is a completely passive character. There is only one instance when she contrives a little plot by herself, throwing Sir Francis a red herring, "my lady will be the best to lure it [i.e. the nonexistent monkey] back" (347). All through the play she is a faithful maid, who in the end, when asked whether she would choose to marry or keep her service, states, "I prefer my lady before a footman" (363).

Patch however, is a much more multifaceted character, combining the faithful and loyal servant with the clever and scheming maid, but also displaying features of the heroine's confidante. This is already visible in the first act in her and Miranda's witty and worldly-wise exchanges on liberty and marriage. Patch is introduced as a seemingly cheeky and scheming servant, when patronisingly talking about her old master:

I have found a way to make Sir Jealous believe I am wholly in his interest, when my real design is to serve her [Isabinda]: he makes me her jailor, and I set her at liberty. (301)

But Miranda's praise of Patch gives a lead to the perception of her as a thoroughly positive character, "I knew thy prolific brain would be of singular service to her [Isabinda]" (301). Throughout the play, Patch is scheming and plotting on and on, instantly absorbing each and every new situation into a new intrigue. While pretending to bond with Sir Jealous, she tries her best to aid her passive and often completely helpless mistress Isabinda, who is locked up by and under constant surveillance of her rigid father. When Charles and Isabinda's secret rendezvous is interrupted by Sir Jealous' unexpected return, they both lose their heads, but Patch keeps calm and provides a suitable plan, "I have thought on it: run to your chamber, madam; and, sir, come you along with me, I'm certain you may easily get down from the balcony" (324). This is not the only situation in which either Charles or Isabinda or even both are

completely helpless and have to be saved by the clever and scheming maid. In one instance Patch even instructs Charles, stating that “[p]olicy is often preferred to open force” (342). Quite remarkably, it is also Patch who contrives the plot of Charles impersonating Isabinda’s expected Spanish suitor, which finally allows the couple to marry with Sir Jealous’ consent. This shift in power from the sub-plot’s couple of lovers to a maid who, as a woman and a servant should be doubly inferior to them in social standing, is really exceptional.

Another unusual personality trait is Patch’s constant encouragement of passive and weak Isabinda, but also of the more active and independent Miranda. After having accomplished Charles’s escape over the balcony, Patch in an aside remarks to her mistress Isabinda, “[t]ake courage, madam, I saw him safe out” (325). When Miranda frets about her choice of mate, Patch also reassures her, “[o]h, fear not, madam, you’ll find your account in Sir George Airy; it is impossible a man of sense should use a woman ill, endow’d with beauty, wit, and fortune” (350).

Patch is clearly a self-confident and proud maid, which becomes visible in the following statements:

Fear not, madam, Don Carlo shall be the man, or I’ll lose the reputation of contrivine; and then what’s a chamber-maid good for? (326). [...] Well, a dextrous chamber-maid is the ladies’ best utensil, I say. (335)

Her promise, concerning Charles’s and Isabinda’s seemingly unattainable wish to marry, proves to be entirely true, “I can solve all this” (342). Patch remains a totally loyal servant to Isabinda, even when Sir Jealous has dismissed her, “I am discharged by my master, but hope to serve my lady still” (348). At the end of the play, Patch takes action for the last time, discreetly reminding Isabinda to re-employ her: “Your humble servant begs leave to remind you madam” (363). Again, she takes initiative and has to do the thinking for Isabinda, who passively and weakly embodies ‘virtue in distress.’

Patch’s superiority over the male servant Whisper is established at the beginning of the fourth act, when Whisper delivers an encoded letter, stating “I can’t think what language the direction is” (335). Clever Patch immediately figures it out, “‘tis no language, but a character which the lovers intend to avert discovery” (335). When Whisper suggests to her, “shall not you and I have a little confabulation, when my master and your lady are engaged?” (318). Patch

pertly retorts, “[a]ye, aye, farewell” (319) again demonstrating her superiority over Whisper. This very short scene is doubly interesting, as on the one hand it displays Patch as a virtuous woman who is not easily seduced by any servant who comes along; on the other hand, by refusing a man, she also acts like a self-confident and self-determined woman. This is not so unusual when done by a heroine, but quite extraordinary for a maid.

On the whole, Patch is a completely positive and atypically complex character, who, acting as a helper and confidante or friend, rises above her social standing. In stark contrast to the rather foolish Whisper and the faithful but wholly one-dimensional Scentwell, Patch is actively scheming throughout the play and enjoys a substantial influence on the plot as well as an astonishing presence and prominence. Her superiority in cleverness and as a “contrivine” (326) over the often weak and helpless couple of the sub-plot as well as over her social equals Scentwell and Whisper raise her above the level of a mere scheming maid, making her almost the heroine’s equal.

Liddy is Isabella’s cleverly scheming maid in *The Northern Heiress*. Isabella highly estimates her maid. Her general unprejudiced attitude and sense of equality are displayed throughout the play, for example when she tells Sir Jeffrey, “for Nature has made no Difference betwixt a Gentlewoman and a Kitchen-Wench” (27). When Liddy helps Isabella forge the letter from her uncle, Isabella praises her:

‘Tis a Pity Nature did not chance thy Sex, and Fortune thy Vocation; thou wouldst have made an admirable Lawyer; for I find, as it is, you can speak for your Fee. [...] I can do nothing without thy Help. (37)

Talking to her servant like this, Isabella again displays an example of her trust in the equality of all people, disregarding their financial and social standing as well as their sex. It is also quite striking, even though not entirely realistic, that Liddy, a maid, is able to write. Throughout the play, Liddy renders her most loyal services as Isabella’s maid, even when her orders conflict with her own wishes, like tricking Gamont with the fake letter. Liddy faithfully complies with Isabella’s wish, even though she fears that Gamont will not live up to Isabella’s high expectations. She is remarkably perceptive of Gamont’s character and her judgement of Isabella’s situation is down-to-earth if not disillusioned. In this

awareness Liddy equals many virtuous heroines who are also aware of their precarious position in a world which is dominated by money and social status. However, she knows that by letting in Gamont on the plot she “would betray my Lady, and Treachery I scorn” (38).

When Gamont turns to Liddy for help and asks her if he stands in Isabella’s fair esteem, he places Liddy in a dilemma. Without betraying her lady, Liddy enigmatically warns him, “your Fate lies wholly in your own Behaviour, which must be manag’d with Circumspection [...] let Love and Honour be your Guide” (39). But her hopes that he will interpret her words correctly and will act accordingly are low. Against her better judgement, Liddy complies with Isabella’s order to test Gamont’s allegiance to her once more. She loyally obeys though she fears that Gamont might not stand the test, which would make Isabella the greatest loser in the whole scheme.

Bareface is a second man who asks Liddy for her aid in courting Isabella. Liddy first misapprehends that his intention is on her, and decides to “humour him a little” (31). In answer to his bragging about his estate she tells him, “[i]ndeed, Sir, as you say, such an Estate with your Qualifications, is infinitely preferable to a much greater, where they are wanting” (31f). Foppishly and narcissistically, Bareface in return praises her as a “Woman of a distinguishing Taste [...] who can set a true Value upon Wit and Beauty,” adding that “there are not many such Women to be met with” (32). When Liddy finds out that he only wants her assistance in order to break the ice between him and Isabella, she takes it calmly and starts contriving a plot to make him marry her. She accepts the well-filled purse he offers her in return for her help, regarding it as “Part of his Wife’s [i.e. her future] Portion” (33).

When Ralph, Gamont’s servant, comes to bring her a letter and tries to kiss her, she firmly repels him: “Stand off, Saucebox, and keep your Distance; I’d have you to know I have better Game in View, and scorn Rooks, while I can catch Woodcocks” (33). Significantly using the same kind of hunter’s jargon Gamont addressed the active heroines Isabella and Louisa with, she also reverses the stereotyped gender roles and acts like a self-determined, proud woman. Ralph reproaches her for her behaviour, “you Chamber-maids are so full of your Ladies Airs, that you don’t know how to be civil to your Equals” (33). Tartly,

Liddy replies, “[a]nd you Valets are so full of your Master’s Vanity, that you think ever Body is your Equal; but I shall put you in a Way of knowing both your self and me” (33). Actually the two servants, who both have a high regard for themselves, quarrel as equals, but Liddy is superior to Ralph in the sense that he desires her and thus cannot deny her anything. So Liddy manages to persuade Ralph to give her the love-letter he should deliver to Isabella from Bareface.

Summing up the money Bareface spent in bribing her and Ralph, she conspiratorially concludes, “since he bids so fair for a Wife, I’ll take Care he shan’t be disappointed” (34).

When Bareface offers Isabella his heart, she contrives a plan to trick him into marrying Liddy. The maid is to impersonate her mistress. Isabella cruelly but at the same time generously tells Louisa that she will dispose of Bareface’s heart as she does of her old clothes, “either change it away for China, or give it my Maid” (66). She also calls Liddy and informs her that she is now willing to part with her and drops a hint at her plan, “I’m going to present you with a Husband and 400 *l.* a Year” (66). Of course, with this plot “Work’s done to [Liddy’s] Hand” (66). When the true identity of his newly wed wife is revealed to Bareface by Isabella stepping out of the closet, he is flabbergasted and exclaims, “*Isabella* there! Why then who the Devil have I got here?” (71). Liddy, turning up her hood, answers, “[y]our true and lawful Wife, *Liddia Bareface*” (72). Bareface is thus exposed and laughed at by everybody else. Liddy, finally clears things up for him:

Come, Mr. *Bareface*, you can’t blame me for making my Fortune; I confess I had a Design upon you, ever since you gave me the Five Shillings Bribe, to speak to my Lady for you, which, since I never did, it is but Reason I shou’d return them. [...] I always thought they would be part of your Wives [*sic*] Portion. [...] Then, Mr. *Bareface*, here’s your Letter you sent to Madam *Louisa*. (72)

Isabella, as always, is at her maid’s side and puts in a good word for Liddy:

I beg you will make a kind Husband to my Maid, for I assure you she is a Gentlewoman born, (and tho’ perhaps you may never find it out) a Woman of very good Sense too. (72)

Bareface, grinning and bearing it, courteously replies, “Madam, the more good Qualities she has, the more I have to thank you for” but in an aside reveals his true feelings, “Pox take you for your Present” (72).

Liddy has thus managed to attain her ultimate aim by tricking Bareface, the wealthy would-be rake, into marrying her with Isabella’s help. She is the only maid in the four plays who corresponds to the old prejudice of the maidservant in pursuit of a good match.²⁷¹

Davy’s ambivalence returns in this last scene of the play, when Isabella reveals that Liddy is actually of gentle birth and thus makes the marriage with the wealthy Bareface more acceptable. Quite interestingly, Davy gave this maidservant an ordinary name, Liddia, instead of a speaking name as was usual for servant figures, thus hinting at her distinction from the lower class right from the start of the play. Liddy’s sudden reversal from a scheming maid to an honest and faithful wife is not fully convincing. However, Davy also included a last joke, again reversing gender and social roles. When Liddy returns Bareface’s bribe to him, she as a maid tips her well-to-do husband, which is again symbolic of Liddy’s superiority over Bareface.

9.2.2. A clever servant

Barnaby is a quite interesting character in *The Self-Rival*. He is more well-read than his own master, Colonel Bellamont. When Bellamont is astonished at Barnaby’s ability to quote poetry, the servant wittily explains:

Aye, Sir, you may please to remember, when we were at *Cambridge* how differently we spent our time; while you were at the *Tuns* over your Bottle, I was in your Study over your Books. (27)

Colonel Bellamont’s reply, “[y]our most humble Servant, Sir! I would have you turn Poet!” then perfects the reversal of social roles (27).

As already mentioned in the discussion of Mrs Fallow, clever Barnaby – after making sure that this does not incriminate his master like a truly faithful servant – aids her in her plots against old Verjuice, remarking: “ad-zucks my Fingers itch already to be at him” (41). He is one of the actively scheming servants, not

²⁷¹ Cf. 9.1. The development of the servant figure in English drama

like Scentwell in *The Busie Body* simply carrying out orders, but like Patch also developing intrigues himself. For example he assures Mrs Fallow,

[I]leave the rest to me, Madam, I shall easily pick a Quarrel with him, and then Discipline's the Word; by Jove I'll give him enough to-day to serve him tomorrow too, unless he loves Beating as well as Mischief of Money.
(42)

After having implemented their plan, he relates to Mrs Fallow what happened: Disguised in a dress of Mrs Fallow's maid, he told Verjuice that he had a money-concern with him and lured him to the summer-house, where he locked the door, "upon which he grew pale, tho' I believe it was rather fear of Ravishment than Chastisement" (49). Barnaby in disguise led Verjuice to believe that "he had got me with Child, and I expected a Maintenance for it and myself" (49). When Verjuice in shock called Barnaby "a thousand hobbling Bitches and two-handed Whores, threatened [him] with the Stocks, Bridewell, and a Cart's Tail," Barnaby returned all this "with the kind Salutes of my Cudgel, till I made him as patient as a suffering Martyr" (49).

In this scene, Verjuice is the typical humour-butt who is physically humiliated and chastised by a servant, i.e. someone who is supposed to be his social inferior. Even adding to the grotesque nature of this scene is the fact that Barnaby mortifies Verjuice in female disguise. In this context, this scene is another highly conspicuous instance of a socially inferior woman outclassing her double superior. While the employment of mistaken identity, masking and disguises is ubiquitous for the period, it is usually women who disguise themselves as men or men who disguise as their male social betters, in order to gain more independence and transgress social and gender boundaries. However, it is extremely unconventional to feature a man disguised as a humble woman and then have this totally grotesque figure thrash the humour-butt. The reversals of social and gender roles in this scene are quite vertiginous. As already mentioned in the chapter on old maids (cf. 8.4. "Good-natur'd old Maid" vs. "Affected Old Maid"), Mrs Fallow and Barnaby, again in the guise of a maid, manage to trick Verjuice a second time.

During the rest of the play, Barnaby acts as a cheeky and witty servant, being once called "a very talkative impertinent Puppy" by Verjuice (55), who is ignorant of the fact that it was Barnaby in disguise who cruelly tricked him twice.

When the old miser Verjuice tries to persuade him to help him duck Mrs Fallow in the horse-pond and offers Barnaby a meagre tip of one shilling, the servant saucily replies: "Oh dear, Sir! 'Tis too much in Reason, if you please I'll give you Change" (55).

One last interesting detail concerning the character of Barnaby as well as that of Mrs Fallow is their treatment of each other as well as how they are treated by the other characters in the play. Barnaby and Mrs Fallow, social and sexual inferiors, plot and scheme as equals. Even though the original stock characters they are derived from are usually subordinate to most of the other characters in a play, they distinguish themselves from the traditional stock figures e.g. Verjuice and Lady Camphire, thus rising above them. Not once are Barnaby and Mrs Fallow figures of fun or contempt, but they are always treated kindly and equally by the other characters, who collaborate with them and involve them in their plots. These two supposedly minor characters take up unusually much space in the play and when scheming together are often alone on the stage in 'all-socially inferior character scenes.' They also prominently contrive plots with other characters, which again contributes to their elevated standing in the play.

9.3. Portrayal of tradesmen and -women

Centlivre's farce *A Gotham Election* is full of humorous lower middle-class characters, especially tradesmen and -women. Scoredouble, the inn-keeper is a chatty fellow who likes to gossip with his friend Washball. In contrast to the henpecked husbands of the "Good Wives," who live under "Petticoat Government," he loves to wear his own breeches (29). Watt Washball, the barber, is a freeholder and obviously not very clever, as he thinks that South Seas refers to "a Shire, Town, Burrough, or Market-Town" (31).

Goody Gabble is one of the good wives who wears the breeches at home and brags, "my Gentleman was soon snub'd, for he knew an he rais'd my Passion once, he wou'd have enough to do to get it down again" (33). Lady Worthy and Tickup bribe her to persuade her husband to vote for Tickup, promising her a position as a nurse and twenty pounds a year, the first of which come directly from Lady Worthy's purse. They also promise Goody Shallow to recommend

her husband, who is a tailor, to some “great Prince” and Gooddy Shallow “shall be dresser to his Queen” (35). As Gooddy Shallow frets about not having any clothes fine enough to go to court, Tickup gives her “Ten Guineas to rig” (37). Tickup even goes as far as to kiss Gooddy Shallow in order to convince her to bring her husband over.

Mallet the carpenter is their next victim and Lady Worthy advises Tickup:

Give him Money, if you can handsomely top it upon him; – there’s a hundred Guineas, when they are gone, you shall have more; – if you can get *Mallet’s* Vote, he’ll bring you twenty at least.” (37)

Tickup tries to convince Mallet to vote for him and also bring his four sons over, offering to stand as godfather for Mallet’s unborn grandchild. Furthermore Mallet’s other sons are to get posts at court, for example “Lord Chancellor,” “Lord Steward” (42), “Groom of the Stole,” and “Treasurer” (43). His daughters should become the “King’s Maids of Honour” (43). Quite funnily, Mallet comes up with more and more distant relations and friends of his, whom he wants Tickup to provide for. His wife shall be “Oyster-Cracker to the Court” (44), an entirely invented position, and his friend Barnaby Bran, the baker, shall be “Master of the Rolls” (45). Centlivre uses a funny pun here, as the position of master of the rolls has nothing to do with bakery but refers to an officer who has charge of the rolls and patents that pass the great seal as well as of the records of chancery. Mallet also quite funnily mishears “Patent” for “Pattins” (45), some sort of overshoes, which he wants the baker’s wife to get. Of course it is crystal-clear that Tickup does not plan to fulfil even one of his many promises. Next he tries to make a cobbler vote for him. The cobbler, however, is not as silly as Mallet, and plays with Tickup. First he humiliates the proud Londoner by making him kiss him, but then tells him that he is “for a free Government [and] none of those that are to be brib’d” (52). He keeps ridiculing Tickup. Knowing that Tickup’s fine clothes will get dirty, he invites him into his stall and reproaches Tickup for being too proud when he hesitates to come in. Soon after the cobbler’s neighbour and a miller join them, the miller staining Tickup’s fine clothes with flour. Together the three tradesmen mock Tickup and tell him to walk up and down before them. Finally the cobbler informs Tickup:

I think that you’d think me a Fool, if I should give you my Vote, now. [...] ha, ha, ha, you that area fine bred Gentlemen, here d’ye see; – yet can

stoop so low, as to kiss, and humour such a dirty Fellow as I am, purely to buy my Vote. (55)

Finding out that he has been derided all along by these “damn’d *Whigs*” (55), Tickup walks off and the tradesmen drink to Sir John Worthy.

At Mallet’s grandchild’s christening, Tickup also tries to canvass. He meets with opposition in the persons of Roger Sly, who openly parades his Whig inclinations and Scruple, the Quaker, who explains to Mallet that he will not vote for Tickup, saying “I do not take him for an honest Man” (65). Enraged, Lady Worthy orders the fiddler to play “*The King shall enjoy hi [sic] own again,*” the most popular Jacobite song of the time, but Sly makes him play “Lillibullera,” a Whig tune which satirises the Jacobites (66). Now the situation escalates and Lady Worthy even strikes Roger and Gooddy Sly in the face, bloodying both their noses. Even though she is the only gentlewoman in the crowd, she surely does not act like a fine lady but turns into a frightening fury, shouting, “I’ll have the Blood, the Blood, the Blood of these confounded Whigish Dogs” and Tickup must summon up all his persuasiveness to calm her down and leave the site (67).

Even though Centlivre’s humorous lower middle-class characters are party-politically tinged and their evaluation cannot be based on their professions, she nevertheless paints honest and loyal, though misogynist, tradesmen, who refuse to vote for any man who completely lacks self-respect. Even though Lady Worthy and Tickup are these tradesmen’s social superiors, they are the butts of the play. Thus Centlivre once more reverses the stereotypical social roles. Mallet the carpenter, however, forms an exception, as he is stupid enough to trust Tickup. He also only knows the names of the state offices, but not what their actual tasks are. This ignorance contributes to the figure’s credulity and realism. Centlivre also renders the lower middle-class characters realistic as well as likeable by giving them names which indicate their occupations and by her skilful use of homely diction and the language and expressions of the common people.

Lady Greasy²⁷², the chandler's widow, Lady Cordivant, a glover's wife, and Lady Swish, a brewer's wife in *The Northern Heiress* are all female humour-butts stemming from the lower middle class. While Lady Greasy is a more prominent character in the play, Lady Cordivant and Lady Swish appear only in the background. Their portrayal is not really positive, as they are most often depicted when enjoying a tippie. When they are invited to Lady Ample's breakfast table they drink alcoholic beverages like "hot Ale" (23) and "Brandy" (25), which they prefer to "flip flap Tea" (21), and talk about politics and bribes they received in exchange for their husbands' votes, thus behaving in a masculine and highly unladylike fashion. They stubbornly adhere to a quite peculiar "Custom of the Town" and Lady Swish even states that she "had as lieve break a Leg or an Arm, as an old Custom" (27). When they intend to leave, Lady Greasy begs Lady Ample: "Pray, my Lady *Ample*, will you call your Maid, that we may know what Bread and Ale we have had; for I must needs be going" (27). Even when Lady Ample asks Lady Greasy to let this treat be hers, the tradeswomen insist on paying for their food and drink, and Lady Greasy even tips the maid. When the ladies are gone, Lady Ample and Sir Jeffrey make fun of this "foolish Custom, of which they [the ladies] are very fond" (28). They ridicule the tradeswomen's exaggerated sociability and gregariousness, and Sir Jeffrey even contemptuously refers to them as "the Gossips of *York*" (29).

Another instance when Lady Swish and Lady Cordivant are having a drink is at the races. Bareface manages to "overcome those Dragons" (48), who are Dolly's chaperones, by inebriating them:

I ply'd them well with Bumpers [...] then tipp'd the Wink upon *Miss* [Dolly] to follow me [...] and while they were toasting one another's Healths, I demolished their Cancas Walls, and thrust her through. [...] The Liquor and their Passion met upon their Tongues, that they could not say at all: So I e'en paid the Reckoning. (50)

Throughout the play, the tradeswomen, who insist on being called ladies, are portrayed as overly sociable, noisy, gossiping, and manly drunkards. These female humour-butts are ridiculed by all the other characters who are their social superiors. Even Bareface, whose father was also a tradesman, a "Soap-

²⁷² As Lady Greasy has already been analysed in detail (cf. 8.5. The female humour-butt), she will now only be dealt with in relation with the other two ladies.

Boyer" (19), and who is a humour-butt himself, outwits them and establishes his superiority over "the Vulgar" (18), as he calls them.

It is interesting that the "humours of York" which are referred to in the title, are only displayed by female figures of folly. Davys did not venture as far as to make fun of the men of York. The only man that we know was born and raised in York, Bareface, though stupid and unrefined, is still superior to the foolish and totally unladylike tradeswomen.

10. Party politics and female involvement in *A Gotham Election*²⁷³

In the seventeenth century women writers were expected to write on religious subjects, works of private meditation, or stories of personal faith – but of course not theological treatises. A lady who wished to write could also turn to works of advice – directed to other women or children, if the authors were mothers –, which were supposed to be most appropriate.²⁷⁴ Eighteenth-century women who wrote about political topics often used the strategy of displaying them refracted through a religious lens (e.g. Mary Wollstonecraft), because Christianity offered a surer place for women’s equality than the everyday social and political realities.²⁷⁵

Some examples of early female playwrights expressing their party-political allegiance in their plays as well as in pro- and epilogues or printed prefaces are Aphra Behn, a royalist Tory, Delarivière Manley, a Tory mocking Whigs in her plays, novellas and scandal narratives, and Mary Pix, a moderate Whig, as is evident in her tragedies *The Czar of Muscovy* (1700) and *The Conquest of Spain* (1705).²⁷⁶ Susanna Centlivre’s plays also often have a political background, as her plots often “reward liberty-loving youngsters, while jealous Tory fathers and guardians are outwitted” (Milling 78).

Although there was not really a category of acceptable political writings on the part of women, pleading for the views or needs of male political allies was tolerated. Criticisms of the political system or of a single political leader obviously were to be avoided. For this reason, Centlivre chose the more secure ground of farce, which was regarded as harmless and innocuous, as it was simply not taken seriously, for the display of her party-political inclinations in her short, unacted farce *A Gotham Election*.

A Gotham Election is one of the most explicit politically motivated Restoration plays written by a woman. At the play’s centre is the treatment of party politics. Centlivre’s intention was to “show their Royal Highnesses the Manner of our

²⁷³ For more details on women and politics in the period cf. 3.2.7. Political involvement (of women). Unless indicated otherwise, part of the information in this section is taken from Pearson 224f

²⁷⁴ Cf. H. Smith 3

²⁷⁵ Cf. H. Smith 6

²⁷⁶ Cf. Milling 78

Elections” (Preface). Quite remarkably, Centlivre’s farcial presentation of canvassing and electoral corruption was a reflection of actual conditions in an election year. According to George Cherry, John Atwell and his agent, Anthony Rowe, were found guilty of bribery by the Commons in the 1690 election at Mitchell. The agent

not only varied the amount of his offers for a promise for support, but he gave gratuities for the wives of the electors. Going into the town with a supply of funds, Atwell offered [different sums of money to different voters], securing in each instance promises of support. The wives of each of these individuals received a gift of a guinea. (Cherry 111)

This implies that in the late seventeenth century, women or at least wives were actually included in the electioneering and canvassing process as a means of securing their husbands’ votes. Another interesting aspect of the play is its potential for a double reading suggested by Jane Milling who states that the play can function

as both an imitation of a polemic within the context of the drama, and as a political polemic within the context of the 1715 election campaign itself, raging outside the theatre’s walls. (83)

While *A Gotham Election* promotes political liberty, condemning the discontented mayor who, at the end of the play threatens to declare Tickup elected despite the popular choice, this political liberty is however not extended to women. The play is male-centred, giving women relatively few lines to speak. According to Pearson, it is the only play by a woman in the period which does not feature a single woman-only scene.²⁷⁷

Even though active female involvement in the local electioneering process is portrayed, Lady Worthy, a woman with Tory convictions, is stabbing her husband, who is one of the Whig candidates, in the back. She is harshly satirized, depicted as a woman who monstrously attempts to reverse the balance of power in society. Centlivre uses this female politician as a “striking image of the disorder threatened by Toryism” (Pearson 224). Like the Jacobite mayor, who expects passive obedience from his daughter, Lady Worthy criticises the “canting Whigs” (32) because they supposedly “hate Obedience even to their lawful Wives” (32). Later she states: “Oh that I had the Jerking

²⁷⁷ Cf. Pearson 224

of'em [the Whigs], I'de teach 'em Passive-Obedience, or make the Devil come out of 'em" (35); her violence marking her as a grotesque figure.

As already commented on in the description of the plot (cf. 5.8.2. *A Gotham Election*), Centlivre uses the sub-plot of Lucy – the mayor's daughter rebelling against her tyrannical father's plans, exercising her rightful freedom of choice by putting herself under the protection of Friendly – as well as the debate between Sir Roger and Alderman as political allegories of national dimension. Her message is that neither subjects to the monarch nor wives and children must be passive-obedient, but should have the right to freedom of choice, whether it concerns their political vote or free the choice of a mate. This is also clearly visible in Centlivre's last words, which traditionally are a sort of statement the playwright wants to send his audience home with: "*This is my Maxim in a married Life/ Who hates his Country, ne'er can love his Wife*" (72).

Centlivre here inverts the rhetoric of the family as model of the state which was previously used by Alderman Credulous, the mayor. Her point is that wise management of the state will serve as a model for the domestic environment and she emphasises that only a good party man can be a good husband and father. Pearson (228) comments on Centlivre's dramatic treatment of the dilemma of women as "the most politicised of her age," giving conventional images such as concealment and imprisonment a "political substance by the addition of Whig ideology." She also confirms that Centlivre persists on the view of women's role in the family as "analogous with the subject's role in the state, and that both had certain rights to liberty and self-domination" (228).

Centlivre has been much criticised for her ambivalence and equivocalness in *A Gotham Election*, being a politically active woman who openly propagates her Whig convictions herself, but portraying an extremely negative example of a woman involved in political scheming and canvassing and treating the "petticoat government" of a female politician and "Wives [who] wear the Britches" (29) with misogynist contempt.²⁷⁸

Although Centlivre holds the figure of a woman meddling with politics up to ridicule, her employment of a politically active woman is still noteworthy. Lady Worthy is for many reasons not the right person to promote female involvement

²⁷⁸ Cf. Rubik 110f

in politics: she is a Tory; she is disloyal to her husband: "I hate a Whig so much, that I'll throw my Husband out of his Election" (32); she cannot control herself behaving roughly and utterly unladylike, striking Roger Sly and his wife in the face and bloodying their noses because he defended the Whigs; and she does not hesitate even a moment to condescend to the use of corruption and bribery.

A Gotham Election once more displays Centlivre's ambivalence and contradictory sentiments regarding political liberty and its extension to women. As is known, Centlivre was a pragmatic playwright who was quite aware of what her audience liked to see and what she had to expect from them. Had she featured a positively portrayed politically active heroine, this would surely have been too much for her spectators. She certainly realized that a task as difficult to undertake as the implementation of female political involvement in the theatre had to be done step by step. By portraying an entirely negative example, she however did *not* rule out the possibility that there can also be a positive example.

11. Conclusion

Susanna Centlivre and Mary Davys were both prolific and successful women writers. They knew the audience's taste and were aware of their precarious position as female dramatists. Their ambiguity and ambivalence concerning the role of women, which is also depicted in their plays, has its roots in exactly this awareness. They knew their metes and bounds and had a reputation to lose, so they stayed within their limits and voiced their feminist views more often covertly than overtly.

In contrast to many of their male counterparts, they efficiently performed the balancing act between reform and comedy, writing funny, vivid, and cheerful quasi-exemplary plays. Their characters generally receive a much more humane and tolerant treatment than those of male writers of the period and thus are more complex and realistic. In contrast to the old-fashioned, one-dimensional stock characters, their unconventional major and minor characters are multifaceted. Especially socially inferior characters, who are usually prone to ridicule and mocking, are treated with more sympathy and little to no malice.

Centlivre's and Davys' active, strong-willed, and independent virtuous heroines assume pivotal roles and articulate their creators' social commentary, which usually has a feminist tinge. Attempting to gain an equal footing in a male-dominated society, they have to be not only equal but even superior in wit and worldly knowledge to men. They are not only supposed to match and beat their gallants in the love-duel, but also to instruct them and make them better members of society. The heroines in *The Busie Body*, *The Northern Heiress*, and *The Self-Rival* reach this goal and take their lives into their own hands, manipulating their lovers, fathers, and guardians before finally marrying the men of their choice and thus again submitting to male dominance.

The image of women painted in the plays, however, stands in stark contrast to the real world of Restoration England, in which women had no status and say regarding the future course of their lives, but were totally dependent first on their fathers and afterwards on their husbands. The rare exceptions in the real world become the rule in the play-worlds. The virtuous heroine of Restoration drama consistently rejects financial arrangements made by her father or guardian as

the basis for her marriage. The prevalent marriage business gave rise to disillusionment and cynicism regarding the institution of marriage, which is also portrayed in the figure of Miranda in *The Busie Body*. A certain tolerance for illicit affairs (of course only on the part of the husband) and the ensuing double sexual standard were the by-products of this disillusionment. The worldly-wise virtuous heroine, who has to comply with this double standard and avoid consummation, is supposed to pose as a positive example, demonstrating that if equality and independence form the basis of a relationship, illicit affairs become undesirable and unnecessary. Such a heroine expresses alternative viewpoints on the question of the status of women in their social and marital relationships. These ideas, pronounced by Restoration actresses on the English stage, ran counter to the practices and traditions of the real world. Their authors were evidently ahead of their time in their social criticisms. As history has shown, the dramatists who pleaded the cause of women were not listened to and had hardly any influence on society. They only managed to raise the status of women in their play-worlds.

However, women enjoyed much more freedom during the Restoration period than later. In the course of the eighteenth century, their social situation and treatment was getting worse, as women came to be considered completely helpless and utterly unfit for the cruel world outside their drawing rooms. This was also reflected by the turn towards reform, sentimentality, and domesticity in the drama as well as in the newly emerging novels. The strong emphasis on 'virtue in distress' in literature mirrored the changing perception of women in real world.

The aim of this thesis has been the examination of similarities and disparities in the four plays, with the main focus of attention on unconventional characters, in order to establish reasons for contemporary critics' evaluation of Centlivre and Davys on unequal levels. The analysis of the plays did not really yield much support for the prevalent treatment of Susanna Centlivre as a major and Mary Davys as a minor dramatist. Of course, Centlivre's social standing was better than Davys' and she was a more prolific dramatist, but her plays and character portrayal are more conventional than Davys'. As quantity is not supposed to oust quality and the audience of the period is known to have favoured variety

and innovation, these cannot be the reasons for Centlivre's supremacy as *the* early eighteenth-century dramatist. Both, Centlivre and Davys, wrote imaginative, funny, and entertaining comedies. No single play emerged as much better or much worse than the others. Their evaluation is thus rather a matter of personal taste than of literary mastery.

The reconsideration of the unevenly distributed esteem in which the two women writers are held can thus only result in a draw. Each, Centlivre as well as Davys, has her strengths and weaknesses, but in the end, they are on an equal footing.

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Abstract

Das England der Stuart-Restauration und des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts war einem stetigen sozialen, kulturellen und politischen Wandel unterworfen. Besonders überwältigend waren hierbei die gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen, wie die Verlagerung von Macht und Reichtum von Aristokratie und Adel zur Oberschicht und die Etablierung der aufstrebenden Bourgeoisie und des Kaufmanns in der Gesellschaftsordnung. Auch verliehen die ersten feministischen AutorInnen ihren Ansichten zum Status der Frau Stimme. Das zeitgenössische englische Drama stellt diesen gesellschaftlichen Wandel zur Schau.

In der Männergesellschaft des späten 17. Jahrhunderts, das die ersten professionellen Dramatikerinnen hervorbrachte, wurden Frauen als sozial und intellektuell unterlegen angesehen. Die ersten professionellen Dramatikerinnen mussten Vorurteilen, Misogynie und schweren Vorwürfen des Plagiarismus trotzen – es war unvorstellbar, dass eine Frau tatsächlich ein gutes Theaterstück schreiben könnte. Die Arbeit neuerdings etablierter Schauspielerinnen wie auch Dramatikerinnen am Theater, die sich quasi „öffentlich machten“, wurde als eine Art von Prostitution angesehen.

Während Susanna Centlivre als bedeutende DramatikerIn der Restauration und des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts gehandelt wird, wird Mary Davys, sofern sie überhaupt Erwähnung findet, zumeist nur als eine von vielen weniger bedeutenden DramatikerInnen genannt. Ihre dramatischen Werke werden kaum behandelt und wurden seit ihrer Erstveröffentlichung nicht neu aufgelegt.

Centlivre wie Davys waren produktive und erfolgreiche Dramatikerinnen, die sich des Geschmacks ihres Publikums sowie ihrer prekären Situation als Frauen in einer Männergesellschaft gewahr waren. Ihre Ambiguität und Ambivalenz bezüglich der Rolle der Frau, die auch in ihren Stücken widergespiegelt wird, ruht in dieser Erkenntnis. In ihren Theaterstücken perfektionieren sie den Balanceakt zwischen Reform und Komödie. Im Gegensatz zu den altmodischen, eindimensionalen Typen sind ihre unkonventionellen Figuren facettenreicher, komplexer und realistischer; Speziell ihre sozial nieder gestellten Figuren, die für gewöhnlich Zielscheiben von Spott

und Hohn sind, werden mit mehr Menschlichkeit und Toleranz und weniger Boshaftigkeit behandelt, als bei vielen männlichen Dramatikern. Dadurch werden die Komödien lebendiger und lebensnaher, wenngleich sie *absolut keine* realistische Darstellung des damaligen wahren Lebens liefern.

Centlivres und Davys' aktive, willensstarke und unabhängige „virtuous heroines“ (i.e. tugendhafte Heldinnen) verkörpern das Frauenbild ihrer Schöpferinnen und nehmen in den Stücken zentrale Rollen ein. Im Versuch, es mit den männlichen Figuren aufzunehmen, müssen sie diesen nicht nur gleichkommen, sondern ihnen in Scharfsinnigkeit und Weltgewandtheit überlegen sein und sie lehren, bessere Mitglieder ihrer Gesellschaft zu werden. Die Heldinnen in *The Busie Body*, *The Northern Heiress* und *The Self-Rival* erreichen dieses Ziel und nehmen ihr Leben in die eigene Hand. Erfolgreich manipulieren sie ihre Verehrer, Väter und Vormünder, bevor sie sich durch die Ehe mit dem Mann ihrer Wahl der männlichen Vorherrschaft erneut beugen. *A Gotham Election* zeigt das politische Engagement einer Frau; Wenngleich diese eine Figur des Spotts und der Verachtung ist, so ist es dennoch bemerkenswert, dass Centlivre es überhaupt wagt, eine politische Aktivistin darzustellen. Denn all diese Frauenbilder stehen in krassem Kontrast zur echten Welt, in der die Frau kein Mitspracherecht bezüglich des Verlaufs ihres Lebens hatte, sondern vollkommen abhängig von ihrem Vater und später von ihrem Ehegatten war. Die raren Ausnahmen der echten Welt wurden in der Welt des Theaters zur Regel. Mit diesen sozialkritischen Vorstellungen waren die DramatikerInnen ihrer Zeit weit voraus, sie vermochten den Status der Frau nur auf der Bühne zu heben, auf das wahre Leben hatten sie jedoch wenig bis gar keinen Einfluss.

Es darf hierbei jedoch nicht unerwähnt bleiben, dass Frauen im England des späten 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhunderts weitaus mehr Freiheiten genossen als in der Zeit danach, in der die Frau zu einem hilflosen, schutzbedürftigen, für die Welt außerhalb ihres „drawing rooms“ (i.e. Salons) völlig ungeeigneten Wesen degradiert wurde. Dieser Trend spiegelt sich in der immer stärkeren Orientierung des Theaters und des aufkommenden Romans an Reform, Sentimentalität und häuslichem Leben sowie dem literarischen Schwerpunkt auf „virtue in distress“ (i.e. Tugend in Not) wider.

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit der Interpretation der Parallelen und Unterschiede in den vier Stücken, mit dem Hauptaugenmerk auf unkonventionellen Charakteren. Zudem werden Gründe für die Wahrnehmung und Bewertung von Centlivre und Davys auf verschiedenen Niveaus eruiert. Die Analyse der Stücke lieferte keine große Unterstützung für die Ungleichbehandlung. Zwar war Centlivres sozialer Status besser als der von Davys, auch war sie eine produktivere Dramatikerin, jedoch sind ihre Stücke und Charaktere weitaus konventioneller als die von Davys. Da Quantität Qualität nicht überlegen sein sollte, und das damalige Publikum Abwechslung und Innovation bekanntermaßen schätzte, können dies nicht die Gründe für Centlivres Vormachtstellung als *die* Dramatikerin des frühen achtzehnten Jahrhunderts sein. Beide Schriftstellerinnen brachten einflussreiche, lustige und unterhaltsame Komödien hervor. Ihre Wertschätzung liegt im Auge des Betrachters und ist wohl eher eine Frage persönlichen Geschmacks als literarischen Könnens.

Lebenslauf

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